



# The Souls of Black Folk (Bedford Series in History and Culture)

By W. E. B. Du Bois, David W. Blight, Robert Gooding-Williams

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One of the most influential and widely read texts in all of African American letters and history, *The Souls of Black Folk* combines some of the most enduring reflections on black identity, the meaning of emancipation, and African American culture. This new edition reprints the original 1903 edition of W.E.B. Du Bois's classic work with the fullest set of annotations of any version yet published, together with two related essays, and numerous letters Du Bois received and wrote concerning his widely read text. The introductory essay combines the sensibilities of a historian and a philosopher to capture the contours of Du Bois's life and writings along with the early-twentieth-century reception to the book. Photographs, a chronology, questions for consideration, a bibliography, and an index are also included.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Amazon.com Review**

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) is the greatest of African American intellectuals--a sociologist, historian, novelist, and activist whose astounding career spanned the nation's history from Reconstruction to the civil rights movement. Born in Massachusetts and educated at Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin, Du Bois penned his epochal masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in 1903. It remains his most studied and popular work; its insights into Negro life at the turn of the 20th century still ring true.

With a dash of the Victorian and Enlightenment influences that peppered his impassioned yet formal prose, the book's largely autobiographical chapters take the reader through the momentous and moody maze of Afro-American life after the Emancipation Proclamation: from poverty, the neoslavery of the sharecropper, illiteracy, miseducation, and lynching, to the heights of humanity reached by the spiritual "sorrow songs" that birthed gospel and the blues. The most memorable passages are contained in "On Booker T. Washington and Others," where Du Bois criticizes his famous contemporary's rejection of higher education and accommodationist stance toward white racism: "Mr. Washington's programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races," he writes, further complaining that Washington's thinking "withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens." The capstone of *The Souls of Black Folk*, though, is Du Bois' haunting, eloquent description of the concept of the black psyche's "double consciousness," which he described as "a peculiar sensation.... One ever feels this twoness--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." Thanks to W.E.B. Du Bois' commitment and foresight--and the intellectual excellence expressed in this timeless literary gem--black Americans can today look in the mirror and rejoice in their beautiful black, brown, and beige reflections. --Eugene Holley Jr.

### **Review**

"This is a thoroughly researched, carefully reasoned, and well-integrated introduction and collection of documents. It is far and away the best scholarly introduction to Du Bois's Souls and frames the book's meaning in new and important ways. The introduction is extremely comprehensive and well organized. The treatment of Du Bois's life is accurate and thorough and appears in a 'voice' that will prepare student readers well for Du Bois's elegant and powerful prose."

### **From the Publisher**

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." Thus speaks W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls Of Black Folk*, one of the most prophetic and influential works in American literature. In this eloquent collection of essays, first published in 1903, Du Bois dares as no one has before to describe the magnitude of American racism and demand an end to it. He draws on his own life for illustration, from his early experiences teaching in the hills of Tennessee to the death of his infant son and his historic break with the conciliatory position of Booker T. Washington.

Far ahead of its time, *The Souls Of Black Folk* both anticipated and inspired much of the black consciousness and activism of the 1960's and is a classic in the literature of civil rights. The elegance of DuBois's prose and the passion of his message are as crucial today as they were upon the book's first publication.

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