

Fall 2020  
Professor Plummer  
bplummer@wisc.edu  
Class meets Tues 3:30-5:25 p.m.  
My office hours are W 11 a.m.; Thurs, 9:30 a.m.

## **HISTORY 600: DU BOIS FOR TODAY**

### **SYLLABUS**

#### **Information and rules during the present COVID-19 Pandemic**

We will not be holding all our sessions in person. (See the course calendar on p. 5 below.) For those that are, there are some rules to follow. While on campus all employees and students are required to wear appropriate and properly fitting face coverings while present in any campus building unless working alone in a laboratory or office space. If any student is unable to wear a face-covering, an accommodation may be provided due to disability, medical condition, or other legitimate reason. If you cannot wear a face covering for such reasons, you should contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center. If you are requesting an accommodation for some other reason, you should contact the Dean of Students Office.

I will not teach unless everyone in the classroom is wearing a face covering and will cancel an in-person meeting if someone in the classroom refuses to immediately comply with this rule.

#### **If you get sick:**

Students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms and get tested for the virus if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. If you get sick or need to isolate or quarantine, contact me to make plans for how I can work with you to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.

W. E. B. Du Bois, African American journalist, activist, historian, sociologist, poet, novelist, and playwright, was a cultural giant whose work is constantly being reevaluated. Du Bois's impact on contemporary intellectual life is extensive. He is valued as a literary figure whose contributions to American letters have yet to be fully probed, as a cultural analyst whose perceptive studies of race relations are still widely consulted by contemporary social scientists, literary critics, and theorists, and as a civil rights and justice advocate. Du Bois's long life, spanning Reconstruction through civil rights protest in the early 1960s, is in many respects a microcosm of the modern period. The 21st century is still harvesting his rich insights. This course will apply a historical lens to Du Bois's life and career and highlight his ongoing pertinence.

**Learning goals and outcomes include:** Enhancing students' understanding of the role race has played in the creation of contemporary U. S. society; strengthening students' ability to critically assess cultural and historical information; augmenting critical reading, writing, speaking and thinking skills through the exercise of writing a capstone paper in support of the baccalaureate in history.

**Course organization:** The University expects students to spend nine hours a week working on seminars. That time includes in-class meeting sessions, time spent reading and writing, online time, and online office hour visits with the professor. The class will mostly follow the seminar format with some commentary by the professor and discussion led by students. Scheduled topics provide broad chronological and thematic continuity and supply background material for students' own research interests.

Each student will sign up to lead one day's discussion of assigned readings. Depending on enrollment, everyone will have one or more opportunities to organize class discussion. After familiarizing yourself with the material you are to talk about, you will write down your talking points on a sheet of paper that you will send to me. This can be a paragraph or two outlining what you got out of the reading and what you want the class to discuss, and/or it can be a precise set of questions for discussion. Discussion leading is graded by evaluating how clearly the discussant presents the reading and remains proactive throughout the session. The ability to identify major points, put the material in context, and develop thoughtful questions is assessed.

The course culminates with a final paper of 15 pages. There are several steps leading up to it: identifying a topic, presenting the topic to the class, consulting with me, handing in a bibliography, and handing in a first draft. See the list of due dates below. I will provide sample topics, but everyone is free to develop a theme of their own.

**Due dates:**

Sept. 29 – E-mail me your choice of topic and why it interests you  
 Oct. 6 – 5-minute presentation of your topic to the class  
 Nov. 10 – Bibliography due  
 Nov. 24 – First draft due  
 Dec. 8 – Final paper due

**Required texts:**

David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009)

On Kanopy: (film database)

“W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices”

On Canvas:

W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

\_\_\_\_\_, “Conservation of Races” American Negro Academy, Occasional Paper #2

\_\_\_\_\_, “The Damnation of Women,” from *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*

Lee D. Baker, “Rethinking Race at the Turn of the Century;” chapter in *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*

Katharine Capshaw Smith, “The Crisis Children’s Page” chapter in Kirschke and Sinitiere, *Protest and Propaganda: W. E. B. Du Bois, the Crisis, and American History*

**Classroom policies.** The more controversial a subject, the more we need to respect one another's viewpoints. Class discussions can be lively and intense, but they must be diplomatic. Thoughtfully criticize an idea; don't attack the person expressing it.

**Attendance requirement:** Because of the pandemic, past rules regarding attendance for this class have been changed. Attendance is required and a record will be kept for each class session. However, absences will not be penalized. An attendance record is needed in the event that someone gets sick and contact tracing needs to be done.

**Students with disabilities.** Students with a disability should contact the professor as soon as possible to arrange for alternative testing accommodations or any other special needs.

**Evaluation.** Grades will be based on the following:

Bibliography

Topic presentation to the class

First draft

Class participation

Final draft

How performance is assessed:

A (93-100) - Papers have a well-defined, logically developed argument that considers possible counter-arguments, and that shows strong evidence of original thinking. "A" papers are soundly structured, skillfully written, lack grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors, and are careful about citations. Attendance is excellent and participation is informed and freely offered.

AB (85-92) - Papers are informative. They indicate solid understanding of the sources used. Such papers are well argued and do not simply mirror the conclusions of others. They are clearly written and identify all sources used and cited but are not outstanding as far as writing style or insights are concerned. ABs have a minimum of grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors. Attendance is good and student makes consistent contribution to discussion.

B (80-84) - Papers show an adequate grasp of the subject but arguments are not strongly supported, and writing is okay but not impressive. Participation is moderate. Sometimes there is slippage about citations and grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors. Oral presentations may lack organizational focus.

BC (77-79) - Oral presentations are loosely organized and may be based on inadequate preparation. Participation is lukewarm. Papers may have serious structural or organizational problems. They may feature weak arguments or adequate arguments that are weakly supported. Not enough attention has been paid to grammatical, punctuation, and spelling issues.

C (70-76) - Oral presentations may be poorly organized and presented. Papers indicate through inaccuracies or lack of material that not enough preparation was done. They may have writing problems serious enough to confuse a reader. "C" papers do not present a real argument or do little to support it. They may contain extensive citation that just fills up space with poor

documentation of the citations. These papers pay little or no attention to grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Participation is marginal.

D (69-65) - Oral presentations show lack of preparation through faulty organization and preparation. Papers do not contain much information and lack a thesis. Extensive difficulties with writing and documentation are apparent. No attention is paid to the paper's appearance, which might contain extensive grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors. Little or no participation.

F (64) - Failure to carry out the minimum requirements of the course as detailed above. Often a product of absence.

**History resource:** The History Lab is a History Department resource center where PhD students will assist you with your history papers. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts—the History Lab staff can help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Sign up for a consultation online: <http://go.wisc.edu/hlab>

**Contact with professor:** My e-mail address is [bplummer@wisc.edu](mailto:bplummer@wisc.edu). I will hold office hours online on Wednesdays at 11 a.m.; Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. There is a class list. You are automatically subscribed to it if you are registered. The list address is [history600-9-f20@g-groups.wisc.edu](mailto:history600-9-f20@g-groups.wisc.edu). Students should also feel free to use it to communicate with one another and share information about the course. E-mail is not a substitute, however, for participation.

**More on participation:** Successfully facilitating a seminar discussion requires attention to several areas:

- \* Being grounded in the reading.
  - \* Presenting the material simply, clearly, and interestingly.
  - \* Knowing how to identify major points and separate them from less relevant
- What do you see as important in the reading?

Suggestions:

- \*Lead into your discussion with a theme that links the reading to a current event or topic of interest.
- \* Place the material in historical context.
- \* Use controversies to stimulate debate.
- \* Develop solid questions.
- \* Time yourself: How many minutes are you going to spend on developing discussion points?

Don't:

- \* Summarize in detail what everyone is supposed to have read. The purpose is not simply to echo the text.
- \* Drop out of the discussion after you have introduced it. You're still responsible for running it.
- \* Lose track of the time while you're talking. Keep your remarks succinct. If you think you might ramble, work from an outline.
- \* Read off your remarks from a piece of paper.

Evaluation criteria:

- Does the presenter grapple with material that might be complex or confusing?
- Does the presenter demonstrate analytical thinking? How effectively the presenter facilitates discussion.

## COURSE CALENDAR 2020

TUESDAY	
<p>Week 1</p> <p>Class doesn't begin until Sept. 8, Week 2 of the semester</p>	 <p>“I see today without any doubt that instead of the great question of democracy being an extension of democratic control into further territory, the problem that faces us in America and faces the world is the question as to whether we can keep the territory which we thought democracy had already conquered.” —“The Possibility of Democracy in America,” <i>The Crisis</i> 35 (October 1928)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Readings are discussed on the day they appear on the calendar.</i></p>
<p>Week 2</p> 	<p>Sept. 8 – <b>Introduction to the course</b></p>
<p>Week 3</p> 	<p>Sept. 15 – <b>Early life, an overview</b>  <u>Assignment:</u> The film “W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices,” on Kanopy; Lewis, Preface and chs. 1 and 2; <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, Forethought and ch. 1  <u>For discussion:</u> The experience of being one of a few black people in a community still occurs today. How did Du Bois navigate this and how do people experience it today? What is the meaning of the “Veil” and what is its resonance for today’s society?</p>
<p>Week 4</p>	<p>Sept. 22 – <b>Higher education</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, chs. 3 and 4; <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, ch. 2  <u>For discussion:</u> In what ways did Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin respectively influence Du Bois’s thinking? Are some of today’s higher education issues reflected in his experience?  <b>FOR YOUR RESEARCH:</b> Using the suggestions on the Canvas page, identify those aspects of Du Bois’s life and thought that sync best with your own interests. Focus on <u>one</u> that will be the subject of your capstone paper. You are not limited to these topic suggestions.</p>
<p>Week 5</p> 	<p>Sept. 29 – <b>Pioneering social science</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, chs. 5-6; “The Conservation of Races”  <u>For discussion:</u> How has thinking on race changed since the late 19th century? Is it still evolving? What does Du Bois mean by “conservation?” What’s the current significance of Du Bois’s sociological work?  <b>FOR YOUR RESEARCH:</b> Email me by Friday 4:30 p.m. your choice of topic and why it interests you.</p>
<p>Week 6</p>	<p>Oct. 6 – <b>Accommodationism and resistance</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, ch. 7; <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, ch. 3, 4, and 5  <u>For discussion:</u> Have Booker T. Washington’s ideas survived into the present? In what ways does the question of black education remain controversial? What did Atlanta represent to Du Bois?  <b>FOR YOUR RESEARCH:</b> Do a 5-minute presentation of your paper topic with the class.</p>
<p>Week 7</p>	<p>Oct. 13 – <b>Revolt</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, ch. 8; <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, ch. 6 and 7  <u>For discussion:</u> What does Du Bois have to say about class and wealth among African Americans? What role(s) does class play in U.S. society today?</p>
<p>Week 8</p>	<p>Oct. 20 – <b>Civil rights</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, chs. 9 and 10, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, ch. 8  <u>For discussion:</u> What were the circumstances under which the NAACP was founded? How has it influenced subsequent civil rights initiatives?</p>

<p>Week 9</p> 	<p>Oct. 27 – <b>Was Du Bois a feminist?</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, chs. 11 and 12; “The Damnation of Women”  <u>For discussion:</u> Does Du Bois’s discussion of women have contemporary relevance? How do we reconcile his views with his personal life?  <b>FOR YOUR RESEARCH</b> – Starting today, set up individual consultations with me.</p>
<p>Week 10</p>	<p>Nov. 3 – <b>Explaining the South</b>  <u>Reading:</u> <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, chs. 9 10, and 11  <u>For discussion:</u> How does today’s South deviate from Du Bois’s portrait? What is the social and historical context of his anti-materialism? Du Bois had a tragic experience with infant mortality, which today is still higher among African Americans than among whites. What does Du Bois say about this?</p>
<p>Week 11</p>	<p>Nov. 10 – <b>Du Bois as social scientist and educator</b>  <u>Reading:</u> “Rethinking Race at the Turn of the Century;” “<i>The Crisis Children’s Page</i>”  <u>For discussion:</u> What are some intellectual differences and similarities between Franz Boas and Du Bois? What concerns did Du Bois have for black children? How are they pertinent today?  <b>FOR YOUR RESEARCH:</b> Bibliography due.</p>
<p>Week 12</p>	<p>Nov. 17 – <b>The crucible of the Great War</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, ch. 13 and 14, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, ch. 12  <u>For discussion:</u> How did World War I change African American life? What is the meaning of “The Coming of John?” Who was Alexander Crummell and what did he mean to Du Bois?</p>
<p>Week 13</p> 	<p>Nov. 24 – <b>Du Bois, internationalist and novelist</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, ch. 15 and 16, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, ch. 13  <u>For discussion:</u> Is there a link between the racial history of the United States and events in other countries? How does Du Bois make use of fiction? What is the relationship between his work and the development of African American literature?  <b>FOR YOUR RESEARCH:</b> First draft due.</p>
<p>Week 14</p>	<p><b>Class is now online</b>  Dec. 1 – <b>Du Bois and the Left</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, ch. 17 and 18, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i>, ch. 14 and Afterthought  <u>For discussion:</u> What was Du Bois’s relationship to the left at various times in his life? How is the left construed in today’s America?</p>
<p>Week 15</p>	<p><b>Class is now online</b>  Dec. 8 – <b>Abandoning integration?</b>  <u>Reading:</u> Lewis, ch. 19  <u>For discussion:</u> How did the Depression lead Du Bois to alter his program? Did he become a black nationalist?  <b>FOR YOUR RESEARCH:</b> Final draft due.  <i>At this point we’ve run out of time for assigned readings. If your research project involves pre-1940 material, you can stop reading after ch. 19. If you are interested in the development of Du Bois’s anticolonialism, his joining the Communist Party, and his leaving the US to live in Ghana, skip ch. 20 and read chs 21 and 22.</i></p>