

The prophetic vision of w.e.b. du bois



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

William Burghardt Du Bois remains one of the most outstanding African American intellectuals of the twentieth century. A pioneering poet, novelist, sociologist, editor, historian and organizer, the spiritual content of Du Bois works have been largely misunderstood. To the majority, Du Bois was an atheist. However, he was deeply and creatively engaged with religion. Spirituality was vocal in his approach to nuclear disarmament, pan-Africanism and Marxism. It also played a vital role in his interpretation of the spiritual significance of white supremacy.

Having been labeled a radical, Du Bois was ignored by people who thought that his contributions would die with him. But as Martin Luther King Jr. noted, Du Bois cannot be ignored by history, the reason being, if history does nothing but to reflect upon truth, then Du Bois is a contributor to that truth since he explored and discovered social truths. It is this ability to discover social truth and predict the future which has seen him being labeled a prophet. (Bloom, 2007)

Du Bois predicted the future of wealth holding in the United States in his economic analysis of the global capitalism. He also predicted accurately in 1903 that the problem of the twentieth century will be the problem of race. He also analyzed the impact of race on the Black's limited economic position. His work in 1920 entitled “ Darkwater: Voices Beyond the Veil”, he predicted that as the length and intricacy of technical production increases, their ownership get monopolized which easily widens the gap between the rich and the poor.

At the start of the twentieth century, America's industrial production and technological innovations caused massive inequities in wealth. The

advancement in technology, especially in information technology made the top one percent of America's household possessing more wealth than the entire bottom ninety-five percent just as Du Bois had predicted. (Chester, et al. 2000: 91) Du Bois prophetic analysis of racial capitalism in barring black business expansion is very crucial.

In his 1898 “ Philadelphia Negro”, he emphasized that the great postulate of economics which holds that men will often seek economic advantage is not true since in most cases, men will avoid this if association is involved, whether casual or formal, with blacks. In all judgment of Black's economic progress, he held that this aspect must be taken into account. Blacks comprising of almost 13 percent of United States population exhibited business profits amounting to only one percent of the total business receipts of the nation in 1990's.

From those who read the works of Du Bois, there was a feeling that they were in the presence of prophecy. To those who listened to his words, they believed that they had a divine presence. Many of his contemporaries viewed him as a sacred figure and a prophet with revelation into cosmic realities. To Hallie Queen and Langston Hughes, Du Bois was a spiritual guide whom they characterized as a leader called by God. Du Bois often used religious idioms to snatch from the whites, the control of black selfhood.

His works intervened in the extended theological debate over racial group's sacred status. Du Bois vision of a world freed from prejudice and exploitation motivated the battle for the liberation of black people. He envisioned a world without slavery and colony, a world which was based on common humanity. The path for the battle of pan Africanism was illuminated by this vision.

According to Du Bois, a new and just world would be created by the people of color; people who have experienced the ugly wrath of oppression, supported by all descent men and women.

Less than a century later, a person of color is vying for the top position in the United States with a high possibility of emerging the winner. In one of his articles, De Bois wrote that a great cloud swept over sea and settled on Africa twenty centuries before the Christ. This cloud darkened and blotted out Egypt's culture. It rested in this place for five hundred years until Queen Nefertiti, a black woman who was, in the history of the Egyptians, the most venerated figure, redeemed the world and her people when she rose to the throne of the pharaohs.

Twenty centuries after Christ, lying at the feet of the conquering Philistines of Europe, raped, shamed and prostrated is black Africa. Further beyond the awful sea is a black woman weeping and waiting, her sons on her breasts. She asks what the end will be, whether it will be the old system characterized by war and wealth, murder and luxury or a new thing characterized by new peace and a democracy for all races, humanity of equal men. (Robert, 1994) The woman seems to have been answered with the dawn of the twenty first century which came with a new concept of race and racism.

Du Bois predicted accurately that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of race. It has however extended into this century but with a different face. This century seem to be the century of judgment of whether there exists inferiority and superiority with regard to race. Du Bois often held that blacks had to come out and assert themselves if they were to realize

any justice. He knew that this could not be a simple task even though it was achievable.

Most of his predictions came true as the twentieth century witnessed the struggle among races especially in Europe and America. Whether people realize it or not, Du Bois works continue to shape thoughts on cultural and racial identity. Engaging Du Bois is thus to engage his numerous concerns, perspectives and questions which cycle contemporary debates on the issues. Even though there has been advancement in black American's economic life, racial inequities still persist. Blacks are also losing economic ground to other minorities in the increasingly multiracial America.

It was expected that at the dawn of this millennium African Americans will be on the path to achieving economic equality. Yet, while business profit is the measure of the nation's wealth, Du Bois held that the nation's prosperity should be measured not by the number of millionaires but by the amount of literacy, prevalence of health and absence of poverty. Du Bois could have seen what was hidden from his contemporaries owing to the fact that he accurately predicted important aspects of the contemporary society.

His works inspired many of the black Americans who have a history of slavery and racial prejudice. It also continues to direct perceptions and conceptions of race. Conclusion To many in his hey day, Du Bois was a prophet, a Wiseman, a visionary and an activist, With the passage of time however, many of Du Bois predictions have come to be. With the benefit of hindsight, historians as well as other scholars have come to appreciate this man's contribution to black America's awakening and the debate on the complete emancipation of the black race.

Du Bois therefore goes into the annals of history as one of the most outstanding African American intellectuals of the twentieth century. Word Count 1, 175 Work Cited Chester J. , Fontenot M. , Mary A. , (2000) W. E. B. Du Bois. Mercer University Press Bloom E. (2007) W. E. B. Du Bois, An American Prophet. University of Pennsylvania Press Robert Gooding-Williams, ed. W. E. B. Du Bois: Of Cultural and Racial Identity. Massachusetts Review 35. 2 (1994).