

W.E.B. DuBois

“The Souls of Black Folk” (1903)

Perhaps the work’s most famous line:

**“The problem
of the twentieth century
is the problem
of the color-line.”**



W.E.B. DuBois

(1896-1963)

- **Focused life work on combatting racism & first African-American to earn a doctorate**
- **Blamed this “problem of the color-line” on capitalism**
- **Worked towards nuclear disarmament: life-long peace activist**
- **Wrote the core principles contained in the Civil Rights Act, passed one year after his death**



W. E. Burghardt DuBois



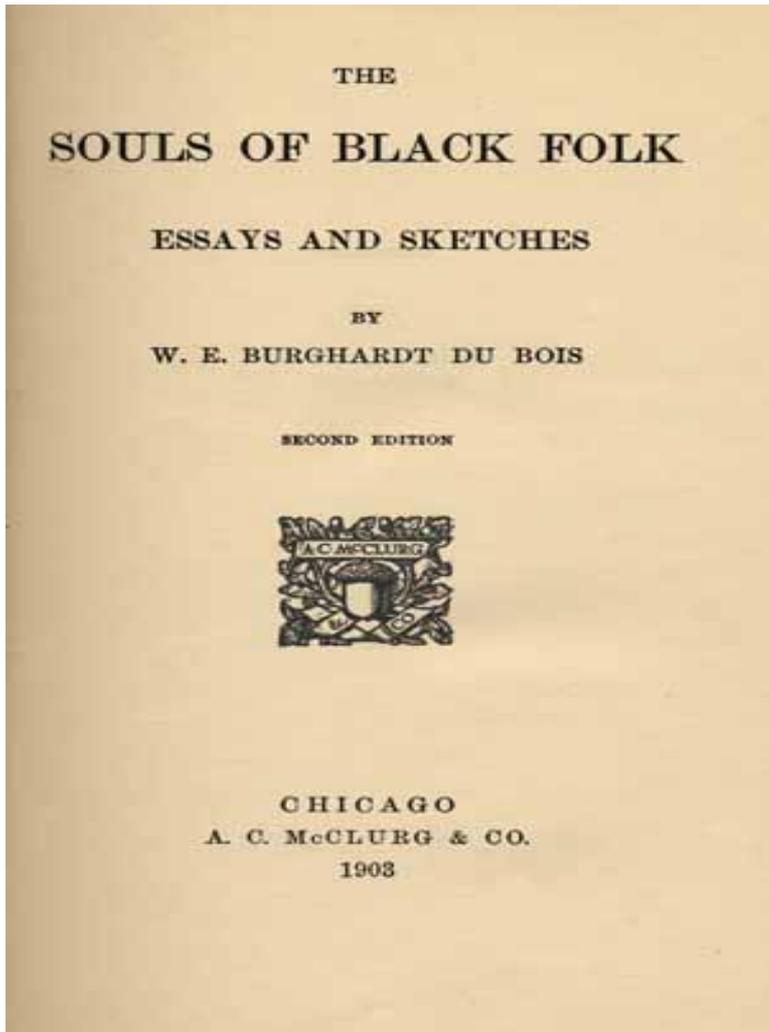
Pre-Reading: In-class reflection

Reflect on some possible interpretations of the title,
“The Souls of Black Folk.”

1. What impression does reading the title have on you?
2. Why might DuBois be compelled to write a book on this subject? (All theories are welcome.)



“The Souls of Black Folk”(1903)



In writing "The Souls of Black Folk" (1903), DuBois set out to prove the soul—and thereby—the humanity of blacks.

The Souls of Black Folk
Essays and Sketches
by W.E.B DuBois



“Racist Americans were making the case that black people did not have souls... and the beings that did not have souls were beasts.”

--from *Stamped From The Beginning: The Definitive History Of Racist Ideas In America*
(Ibram Kendi)

Quotations (part 1 of 2)



“If it requires lynching to protect women’s dearest possession from ravaging, drunken human beasts,” she said, “then I say, lynch a thousand a week.”

--from 1898 speech
by Rebecca Felton,
the nation’s first
female senator
(1922)

More historical examples:

[“The Paris Review, “The Soul of W.E.B. DuBois”](#)



from “Of Spiritual Strivings” (about “The Veil”)

1. “Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. ”
2. “After the Egyptian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. ”

Image from Nubingraphics.com



from “Of Spiritual Strivings” (“Double—Consciousness”)

- “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”
- “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.”



“The Souls of Black Folk”/ Jim Crow Laws



The writing of W.E.B. DuBois was meant to challenge the “separate but equal” doctrine.



This website gives abundant examples and illustrations of propaganda:

[Jim Crow Museum](#)



At-home writing assignment (part 1 of 2)

English 101

Writing Assignment/Prof. Ilse Schrynemakers

Word Count: 600-800 words/Format: MLA style, Times Roman, 12 pt.

Required Reading: Excerpts from W.E.B. Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk," specifically "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"

In the first paragraph, explore how a certain word or phrase describes how you view yourself. Include examples.



At-home writing assignment (part 2 of 2)

In the second paragraph, explore how a certain word or phrase describes how others (family, friends, or strangers) view you. Include examples.

In the third paragraph, explore a comparison and contrast between paragraphs one and two. How do you account for the differences in descriptions and definitions of your identity? Based on the previous paragraphs, how do you define "identity"?



Journal writing (part 1 of 2)

This week, you will be reading W.E.B. DuBois "Of Spiritual Strivings" (1903). Be sure to have reviewed the PowerPoint attached to the Discussion Board. Some of the language/phrasings/images may not be familiar to you. Jot down those challenges.

Before Reading: Consider how others perceive you. Sometimes this perception lifts us up; sometimes, it does not. W.E.B. DuBois centers on how he felt a "double-consciousness" and "a veil"--in other words, societal barriers because of his race.

While Reading: Take notes about especially poignant passages. What words/images stand out for you? Why? What passages might be challenging? Why? What are two passages that really stay with you? Why? What conflicts are being discussed? How do you interpret their cause and effect relationship?



Journal writing (part 2 of 2)

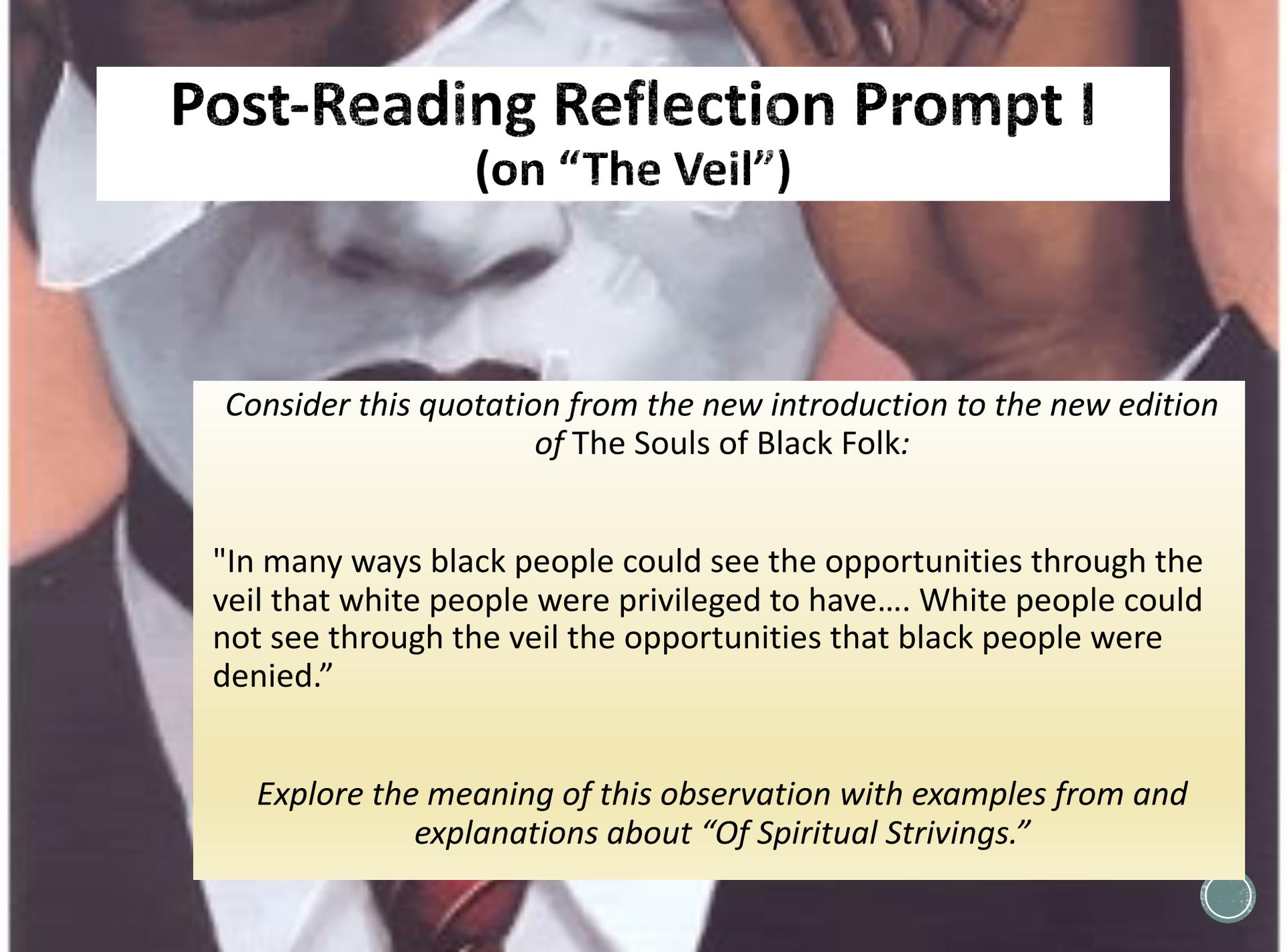
For the Journal:

Create two well-crafted responses to the reading. Select any aspect of the reading.

- State a central idea that you are focusing on in the paragraph. Underline this central idea.
- Highlight in yellow the evidence you would like to provide for this central claim. (More on evidence in the coming weeks).
- Highlight in green your explanation and comment on this evidence.

Remember: all paragraphs should be at least 150 words. Review notes on "They Say/I Say" from Week Two (in Course Materials).





Post-Reading Reflection Prompt I (on “The Veil”)

Consider this quotation from the new introduction to the new edition of The Souls of Black Folk:

"In many ways black people could see the opportunities through the veil that white people were privileged to have.... White people could not see through the veil the opportunities that black people were denied."

Explore the meaning of this observation with examples from and explanations about “Of Spiritual Strivings.”



Post-Reading Reflection Prompt II (on Double-Consciousness)

Consider this quotation:

“In his mind, this double desire, this double consciousness, yielded an inner strife between pride in equal blackness and assimilation into superior whiteness, and an outer strife from the Veil of American racism denying both.”

--Commentary from *The Paris Review*,
[“The Soul of W.E.B. Dubois” Ibram X. Kendi](#) February 14, 2018

Explore the meaning of this observation with examples from and explanations about “Of Spiritual Strivings.”



Additional Resources

MEDIA:

[Animated Video by The Atlantic \(2018\) on Double-Consciousness](#)

[Historical Overview \(done by college students\) ,YouTube](#)

[NPR \(2006\), DuBois, Still Relevant in the 21st Century](#)

ARTICLES/WEB SOURCES:

[Core Curriculum at Columbia University on W.E.B. DuBois](#)

[Columbia Core at Hostos Community College on W.E.B. DuBois](#)

[Crisis Journal edited by W.E.B. DuBois](#)



**Henry Louis Gates,
June 15, 2020,
*Harvard Gazette***

“Race relations in our wonderful country would measurably improve if all students were required to read this book.”

