

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

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Speaker 2 ([00:24](#)):

Welcome to GT Drive's Dynamic Dialogues, a Green berg Chart Diversity and Inclusion podcast. I'm your host, Nicki Lewis Simon, shareholder and chief diversity officer at the firm. We are excited to share this content with you, our listeners.

Misty ([00:40](#)):

I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to my colleague, Alex, to kick us off with a couple of questions for our panelists.

Alex ([00:48](#)):

Thanks, Misty. That was a great retelling of Du Bois's life. And so, all of you really went into detail, and gave us great stories about key moments in his life that affected him, and his trajectory in his career. Whitney, could you please tell us maybe some critical points or critical moments in his life, where it's just very strongly obvious that he is an agent of change in world history, perhaps starting with the Paris Exposition of 1900, or maybe going into some of his words.

Whitney ([01:26](#)):

Sure. Again, 1898, very tumultuous year for Du Bois. And also, I want to keep in mind between 1898 and I would say 1903, when the publication of the Souls of Black Folk is released, a lot happens in Du Bois's life, scholarship wise, his personal life, his academic life. So, he is at Atlanta University. He was not retained at University of Pennsylvania, which he acknowledges as an oversight on their behalf, because he did this amazing study of African-American life in Philadelphia, which for many was thought to be as invisible or unattainable. He being a trained sociologist, as in trained in Germany, as well as at Harvard, he was very in tune with the very newest methods in sociological study. And he employed those as he was doing the work that would become the amazing volume, The Philadelphia Negro.

Whitney ([02:57](#)):

When he did not get a position, he moved his very young family to Atlanta. But there, he was able to actually cultivate what is called the Atlanta School of Sociology, which is not given credit before Du Bois Scholar and Art and Educational author... Or actually I'm sorry. Sociologist, Alden Morris, actually writes a book entitled, The Scholar Denied. And in The Scholar Denied, he credits Du Bois as being the father, the foundation of what we know as sociological methods to date. From that, it literally entwined in all this very active moments into Du Bois's scholarly and otherwise life, he is approached by a good friend of his.

Alex ([03:59](#)):

Thomas Calloway.

Whitney ([04:00](#)):

Thank you. Thomas Calloway. There's a lot in here, sorry. Thomas Calloway, who actually has a position in the United States government, to help with the American Negro Exhibit that will be part of the Paris Exposition of 1900. Please keep in mind, that the Paris Exposition, while the American Negro exhibit is Calloway and Du Bois's brainchild, more likely Du Bois's than Calloway. But understand that just in other exhibits, very close to the American Negro exhibit, done by Du Bois and Calloway, there are still human zoos, they are still depicting Africans in the pre-colonial, meaning... I'm an anthropologist, so terminology is very difficult at this moment, but I'll try to be as simple as possible. It was really depicting at people of African descent, regardless of where they were from, in a very negative light.

Whitney ([05:06](#)):

Du Bois on the other hand, took this opportunity to create an exhibit that displayed the accumulation of wealth, the accumulation of entrepreneurship, businesses, the idea of education, the emergence of the historically black college, Fisk being one of them. Fisk opened in the year 1866, just after the emancipation... Just after slavery actually ended, even in Texas. And I would say that with all of this, he had such a wealth of photographs of African-Americans in all stages of life.

Whitney ([05:44](#)):

But not only that, all of his subject matter was from the rural south, as in Georgia. And understand, because there was Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois debates, that was true, but this was early on. And it was actually the words of Booker T. Washington that helped for this exhibit to become a reality. So, he was very involved in that. So in this back and forth, this exhibit is created, and it shows African-Americans to the world, in a way that perhaps was not even imagined. But this was something that was real, and it was African-American students at Atlanta University, and other sociological scholars that were doing a certain type of sociology, that was African-American centered, but still methodologically sound.

Whitney ([06:48](#)):

Remember, W.E.B. Du Bois said it wasn't just the knowledge, it was the action, it was the propaganda. So, if there can be propaganda with a human zoo, there can be propaganda with the fact that since 1865, African-Americans flourished in the South, in ways that he was able to display in his exhibition, as well as in my book. I'm kidding. This is Du Bois's data portraits, visualizing Black America. And it has all of the charts that were a part of the 1900 exposition, which is now permanently at the Library of Congress. Alex, I know that was very lengthy, but it's really hard to crunch Du Bois down smaller than he was.

Adam ([07:43](#)):

If I could add just a quick 22nd interjection, he pretty much invents modern data visualization in that process as well. And so, anyone who's seen those charts, knows that not only was Du Bois... And his research team were not... They weren't just a sociological revolutionary force. They were also a visual revolutionary force.

Misty ([08:06](#)):

That's awesome. Thank you for sharing that. And I think that touches upon what we were talking about earlier, in him sharing representation, and making sure that we're giving alternative stories to who black people are, and who they are in America. Question for Arthur and Adam. And I think you guys have touched upon this a little bit already in some of the stories that you've shared. But how was Du Bois's

environment, how did it shift his life and his career, and some of the paths that he took? Arthur, do you want to start? And then Adam, if you'd like to also add to that conversation?

Arthur ([08:50](#)):

Yeah, sure. Thanks for that question, Misty. I think it's really interesting to me, that when I think of grandpa, it depends on which day you ask me that question. On any given day, I can give you a different answer about how his life shifted, and how that shift in his life shifted the rest of American history, in many ways. I'll go to one of the points that Whitney was talking about, in terms of the Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois controversy.

Arthur ([09:23](#)):

So grandpa, at first when Booker T. Washington gives, what many historians call the Atlanta Compromise Speech, he gives this speech that talks about how black people should stay in the South, and remain there, and continue to support the southern economy, and put their buckets down where they are, pull themselves up by their bootstraps, are some of the words that he uses. Grandpa, at least initially, sends Booker T. Washington a nice postcard. It says, "That was a wonderful speech, and good job." Pats him on the back.

Arthur ([09:56](#)):

But then, as grandpa's perspective changes through his experience with Burghardt, experience with the Sam Hose issues, he starts to perceive Booker T. Washington in a different light. He perceives him as being an accommodationist, and somebody who is really not interested in having black people advance. So consequently, grandpa starts to think about, well, what are the things that made me who I am? And he realizes, it's this trip to Fisk, where he sees black people in a different light. It is his trip to Harvard that where he sees his representation at Harvard, the way they perceive him, the way they treat him. He starts to see that that whole business is all wrapped up in this idea of being accommodationist versus fighting against that.

Arthur ([10:47](#)):

He goes to the University of Berlin. He has a completely different experience there. He's treated differently. He has a different education that happens there. So, that results then in Philadelphia Negro, that results then in the words that he puts together for Souls of Black Folk.

Arthur ([11:03](#)):

So, during that period, right around 1900 that Whitney is talking about, his daughter is born, Yolande comes into the world, and that shifts his perspective a little bit. He starts to then really put into context, what is this world like, that he wants his daughter to grow up in? If you go and you read Souls of Black Folk, and you read of the passing of the first born, he is almost thankful that Burghardt is dead, that Burghardt has died, and does not have to experience the racism that he himself is seeing in the world. He is almost thankful that his son does not have to live behind the veil, which is the word that he uses to describe this racism that he's experiencing.

Arthur ([11:47](#)):

But then, his daughter comes along, and he realizes that this life that he has brought into the world is precious, and he wants her to grow up in a different world. He wants her to grow up in a world that

looks like the world that he wants it to be. He wants black people to experience what he's experienced. Higher education that lifts them out of the poverty that they're experiencing. He wants them to be able to have the opportunities that he sees for himself. And he doesn't see that happening for all black people in the United States.

Arthur ([12:25](#)):

And so, I think that controversy with Booker T. Washington, who was born a slave, who was born in the south, versus grandpa being born modestly, being born in the north, really comes to a head when you start to think about higher education as an opportunity for black people. And that's where they disagree most. They disagree about a number of things, but that's where the disagreement seems to come to a head.

Arthur ([12:50](#)):

Grandpa has, in his background then, this perspective that things need to change, that more black people need to be given this opportunity to go to HBCUs like this, and to be able to experience higher education's influence in their life. That, I think, becomes a real turning point for him. And even though a lot of people see the Booker T. Washington Du Bois controversy as being a battle of wills between two strong-willed men, it really is a turning point for American history, and a turning point for black people in this country.

Arthur ([13:25](#)):

What for me, sits as the relevance to today, is that we can't lose track of the words that Booker T. Washington put in front of us. We can't lose track of how those words are different from W.E.B. Du Bois. We have to understand that both of them have meaningfulness in our lives today. And that higher education, though it's important, isn't the only path to wealth, to knowledge, to success in this country. We have to understand that there were people around, like Ida B. Wells, who as a journalist, made clear that black women had a role in not only the formation of the NAACP, but everything that happened subsequent to that. We need to hear the words of all of those leaders, and understand that they brought to us many lessons that are important for us today to understand, as we go forward with Black Lives Matter, and a number of other different initiatives around social justice. Adam, what are your thoughts behind some of that?

Adam ([14:31](#)):

Yeah, thank you so much, Arthur. Du Bois's life involves so many geographical transitions, seriously dramatic moves. But there's also a moment in his posthumously released autobiography, where he reflects on just the change that living a long time forces you to undergo. So, Du Bois's rights in this autobiography that he remembers witnessing the miracle of electric street lighting, being old enough to see why that was significant. And yet also, being able in his lifetime to witness the miracle of Sputnik, of intergalactic... Not intergalactic, but non-planetary exploration, and the prospect of humans leaving the confines of the planet. But [inaudible 00:15:28]-

Misty ([15:27](#)):

Adam, can I just add to that? Because I think you're about to touch... Because we did get a question that, can you comment on his remaking himself every decade, and how did he view an effective person during his time?

Adam ([15:42](#)):

Yeah, that's a great question. I think, when we spoke to his biographer, David Levering Lewis last year, David Levering Lewis said, he says, "There are essentially 10 Du Bois's," which if you match that up means there's one for every decade of his life, including when he's a kid. And Du Bois talks about right there in the Souls of Black Folk, and then other biographical writings, about how he had to learn that people thought he was different or inferior. That wasn't just something he came out knowing. He had to learn that. That was a traumatic incident in his life. So, already before the age of 10, he's had the experience of being excluded on the grounds of race, which motivates him to be better than his classmates at Great Barrington. And sure enough, he was. Graduated top of his class.

Adam ([16:31](#)):

His move from Great Barrington to Fisk is significant, because what happens at Fisk is, for the first time in his life, he encounters a large number of black people. He's grown up in a society, in a family of what he called black Berkot's. He's grown up in a community of black people in New England, yet he's never seen hundreds, even thousands of fellow African-Americans at one time. And that's what he gets to see at Fisk, and that's where he hears for the first time the music that so influences his work.

Adam ([17:03](#)):

We so often think of Du Bois as being this highly verbal legacy, that's left to us. It's the written word, it's the eloquence of that. Yet, Du Bois's writing has a musicality. But his sensibilities were also artistic, and linked music, as you pointed out with that quote from the Criteria of Negro Art. All art is propaganda. Though too are the sorrow songs. So too are the songs of the Jubilee Singers at Fisk. So, that's a great realization. All these transitions build the person that he becomes.

Adam ([17:38](#)):

I think it's really important to point out here, we're 49 minutes into this talk, and we've been praising Du Bois. He makes mistakes down the way, like anyone does. At one point, he advocates for the so-called Talented10th, a rather controversial and somewhat elitist suggestion, that basically implies that the leadership of black America should be picked from among the most well educated elites. This is an idea that he essentially disavows later in life. He admits that he made a mistake. He also perhaps makes political decisions along the way, that we wouldn't think were very wise in hindsight, such as endorsing Woodrow Wilson for president, who was no friend to black Americans, or to the former or currently colonized people around the world. National self-determination evidently was only something that was available to white Europeans.

Adam ([18:36](#)):

So, Du Bois has had a lot of lessons to learn throughout his life, and he's very candid about those in all of his writings. And that's why I always direct people to his Posthumous autobiography, not because it's necessarily the most rigorously true, and completely stripped down version of Du Bois. He's always going to [inaudible 00:19:01] things, and tell things slightly differently, and push you in the directions he wants you to go.

Adam ([19:05](#)):

But because it presents the whole thing, front to back, and it really shows you the ways in which from each of these moves, whether it be going to Europe to study, whether it be moving around within

America, going from the bleak south of Sam Hose, and lynchings, and race riots, to the excitement of the Harlem Renaissance. Whether it be traveling to see the Soviet Union, Africa for the first time in the 1920s, when he goes to Liberia. And whether it's the very last journey he makes, which is the return to Accra Ghana, where he dies in 1963, where he spends the last two years of his life. All of these transitions he covers in that book, and he ascribes significance to them.

Adam ([19:48](#)):

So, that should help answer the question a little bit about what it is that makes him have all these different guises. It is in part, the paratives of circumstance, be they geographical, or be they political, or just the accident of something like the bereavement he suffers in 1898. Or you can also read it as a self-conscious understanding in real time, of what a life can look like. Kierkegaard says, "Life is lived forward, but understood backwards." I think Du Bois managed to understand his life as he was living it, hence why he collected his archive, and curated it as he went. So, I think that's one of the reasons why I think he stands out as a genius, because he could hold all these ideas in his head at the same time. But it helps explain why he was so comfortable at reinventing himself.

Adam ([20:42](#)):

And I've never done this before, but I sometimes think of him in relation to someone like David Bowie, constantly reinventing himself from a position not of... It's not just done for the sake of it. It's done from a position of confidence, and a belief in an idea. And yeah, that's the first time I've made that comparison. I don't know if I'm going to do it again, but I'll leave it there anyway.

Whitney ([21:05](#)):

And that's probably why [inaudible 00:21:07]-

Arthur ([21:08](#)):

Adam, I won't say that grandpa is turning over in his grave because of that comparison. I think he would probably look at it very well, because I think you're right. I think that there is a confidence there. But I think there's a need and a frustration there. I typed in answer into the question about his struggles, and also about the why did he reinvent himself. I think he was very frustrated with this society, with American society, and the speed at which it was changing.

Arthur ([21:38](#)):

And I know of that frustration firsthand, because in his posthumously published autobiography, he gives me some advice directly to me, when he is 90 years old and I am three months old. And I'm thinking, "Grandpa, you're talking to a three month old, what are you thinking?" But of course, they write it down, and it becomes something that I can read later, and becomes a guide for my life.

Arthur ([22:01](#)):

But he mentions in this advice, he says there isn't much difference between a 100 years and a 1,000 years. And I think that is the mindset that he is carrying forward with him. Even though he is frustrated with the society, he can look back and he can see the change, and he can realize that going forward we will have the opportunity to correct our mistakes, as you mentioned, as well as to move the race, and move the society forward, in ways that even he couldn't imagine at that time.

Alex ([22:33](#)):

Thank you for that, Arthur. So, I just want to point out one of the questions I was asked by a member of the audience. Can you describe any daily struggles that Du Bois had at Harvard? Was there any elements of passing that came into play during his time there? Arthur, I know you answered that your grandpa talked about being at Harvard, but not of Harvard, and he never felt accepted or connected to culture there. Just right off the bat, Whitney, Adam, were there any other issues that Du Bois felt while he was on Harvard's campus? Besides of course the issues with receiving credits from Fisk University, and all of that. Is there anything that you can add to that?

Whitney ([23:20](#)):

So, one of the things that actually go... It ties to the end of the last question/conversation, is that Du Bois also was able to reinvent himself because of his relationships and people he mentored, and how he learned from others. And that's a scholar that can be candid, and change his mind, is a very unique scholar. Believe me, I know. I work with them. But it's interesting just to see that. But for his reflections on his time at Harvard, he was extremely... And this we got from... Or I've learned, from another Du Bois scholar, out of University of Colorado. My names are-

Arthur ([24:17](#)):

Reiland Rabaka.

Whitney ([24:20](#)):

Thank you. See, we are such a good team. Thank you.

Arthur ([24:24](#)):

We are.

Whitney ([24:24](#)):

You see why this is wonderful. They can finish my sentences. So, Dr. Rabaka has talked about all of the help that he got from the black women who were a part of organization, the movement, black women voting that, but he had a whole infrastructure, that was made available to him because he was the only African-American... He wasn't the only on campus. But he was the first one to move through his programs as quickly and as successfully as he did. And so, he doesn't not give them credit, but what I would say is that, it was much more of a silent cooperation, that if it wasn't for those home cooked meals, his ability to wash his clothes. Remember, he could not stay in a dorm that was owned by Harvard, because of segregation. He could not eat in a dining hall that was for Harvard, because of his color. So, imagine even sitting in a seminar with all these other folks, you do not have the ability to even have a campus experience, because of segregation.

Whitney ([25:54](#)):

And within that, it did not deter his ability to continue and be successful. But it was because of those elder women, that actually really helped Du Bois get through this moment in his life. And I would say that, while he was in Great Barrington, that would be his mother. And his mother pushed him to Fisk, and Fisk went to Harvard. And he says, the two times where he felt most human in his life, were in Great Barrington, growing up very early as a child and being in Germany, and not being seen as a black scholar, but being seen as a scholar.



Whitney ([26:36](#)):

And so, his time at Harvard was very different. And if it wasn't for funding, I think he would have definitely stayed at the University of Berlin, to get his PhD from there. That's my opinion. I don't know that. But I know that Harvard was very difficult for him. Imagine having an amazing experience at Fisk University, where each summer he went to rural Tennessee, and taught all summer, to gain experience as a dynamic. Now, I'm not saying it was a dynamic public speaker, but as a teacher. He was an amazing teacher that could convey ideas, concepts, that were way ahead of his time.

Whitney ([27:20](#)):

And so, I think that it was always his dream as a son of Massachusetts, to go to Harvard, even if there are other universities in this state, like the flagship that we're sitting in right now. But it really has a lot to do with his networks that helped him get through Harvard. And so, I just used some examples. And him having a job while at Harvard, trying to pay other expenses, he didn't have anyone sending him money for books, for any of those things. So, he was really sustained by a network of black women and men, who I don't think go as credited as we don't really know who they are before, Reiland, Dr. Rabaka tells that story of his time in Boston as a young man. I'm sorry, Cambridge.

Arthur ([28:15](#)):

Yeah, I think that's a great question, Alex. And I would concur with Whitney. I think that he would've definitely taken that PhD from the University of Berlin, had even able to have that extra year of funding. The Slater Fund had given him money for those first two years, but you had to be there for three years in order to be eligible for a PhD. So, I think if he had been able to stay that extra year, he would've gladly have taken the PhD from the University of Berlin. He says in his posthumously published autobiography, that he grudgingly accepted a PhD from Harvard. And so, it really is quite to the point, that although Harvard was perceived here at the United States as being the premier university, it was not that perception. Across the pond, as it's called, they did not perceive Harvard as being a great university at that time.

Whitney ([29:17](#)):

And also, the Harvards and the other schools of the Ivy Leagues, were modeled after the university system in Germany. So, in many ways do boys, instead of being taught by those who were taught, by the creators, the ones who started these disciplines, Du Bois went to the source, which believed me, did not gain him any [inaudible 00:29:47].

Arthur ([29:48](#)):

He really did not get any accolades for having gone to the University of Berlin. He was definitely perceived negatively for having gone there and come back. He was taught there by Max Weber, and Max Weber is considered to be the father of sociology in the world. And so he brings that back when he comes from University of Berlin with him. So, all of the work that you see in Philadelphia Negro, that Whitney talked about earlier, is really born from what he learns there, at the University of Berlin.

Arthur ([30:24](#)):

I think too, when you look at some of his professors and mentors at Harvard, you see George Santayana. You see William James, and some of those folks, who were definitely stars in the Harvard pantheon of professors, but whose reputation hadn't been solidified in all the rest of the world. And so, I think to



Whitney's point, you really do see that work that he does at the University of Berlin, as being the foundation for everything that he does going forward, the work that he does at Atlanta. Then he goes away to NAACP, comes back as a special research person, then he goes back to Atlanta, and continues the work that he's doing there. And the whole encyclopedia [inaudible 00:31:13], that draws him to Accra, that Kwame Nkrumah invites him to complete at the end of his life. All of that work is really founded in the work that he was doing at the University of Berlin.

Misty ([31:27](#)):

Actually, perfect Segway, Arthur. You just mentioned NAACP. One of the questions, I wanted to ask you, Adam, what was Du Bois's influence on the NAACP? I know that we know that he was one of the co-founders, but how do you think, also compared to when it was founded in Du Bois's time, its mission? How has the mission evolved to meet the needs now currently?

Adam ([32:01](#)):

That is a very intimidating question, which I'll do my best to answer as concisely and as relevantly as possible. So, two things are really important to understand about the founding of the NAACP. The first is that, the NAACP is founded out of, or the so-called National Negro Committee, which ironically enough was mostly made up of white liberals. But the intellectual and decedent of the NAACP, is the Niagara movement, which Du Bois co-found back in 1905 with among others, William Monroe Trotter, who is another proud son of Massachusetts. A Bostonian radical, who would often have a quite tempestuous relationship with Du Bois, in fact with everyone, because that was his personality.

Adam ([32:54](#)):

But in any case, they founded a movement that met for the first time on the Canadian side of the border. They wanted to meet in Buffalo, New York, but couldn't because of not being able to be admitted to any of the venues. And they released a declaration of principles that was uncompromising, and that was in direct opposition to the Booker T. Washington School of Accommodationism. They said, "We refused to allow the impression to remain that the Negro American sense to inferiority, is submissive under oppression, and apologetic before [inaudible 00:33:28]."

Adam ([33:29](#)):

This does not, of course, lay the foundation stone for the NAACP, because unfortunately Du Bois becomes the only black board member when the NAACP is founded. But he takes with him these ideas from the Niagara movement. The biggest influence he has on the NAACP is because he takes for himself the rather brilliant title, Director of Publications and Research. And he grabs, as he can, as much independence in his guise of the editor of the Crisis Magazine, which has in its peak here, a 100,000 subscribers. It's through the Crisis that Du Bois presents his vision of what the NAACP should be doing, his vision of what the wider conversation around social justice and issues in America and abroad should be. And it's through the Crisis that Du Bois wields for a lot of people in the NAACP, a disturbing amount of power. And this is ultimately the root of his downfall, because as the Crisis loses subscribers, Du Bois does not lose any of his radicalism, but the power shifts to the board, and eventually he is forced out in 1934.

Adam ([34:40](#)):

But in this remarkable 15 year period, we're talking about practically a third of his professional life, he is this tireless, fearless and completely prolific journalist, editor, propagandist, public intellectual, in charge

of the Crisis Magazine. And he sets in this first generation of the NAACP, a rhetorical, and philosophical, and political framework, for the organization going forward. An organization which still gives out an annual W.E.B. Du Bois medal. And I happen to be sitting next to one of the recipients of that award.

Adam ([35:18](#)):

And while at the time it was an often contested relationship Du Bois and NAACP, his influence on the organization well into our own time, is undeniable. And so, we have to thank that he didn't want to just sit and be a board member, but he was prepared to leave Atlanta, move to New York, become a full-time newspaper editor, which he'd never done before. Become amazing at it, and leave a body of work, that even if you just took what he wrote for the Crisis, would be among the most significant contributions to the intellectual history of this country. So, it's such a vital and pivotal period of Du Bois's life, and I urge people to go online, read his editorials in the Crisis, because they still have such power. And they're written in such an immediate way, that anyone can understand what they're all about.

Adam ([36:13](#)):

Final point that I want to mention is, he also, with Jessie Redmon Fauset, helps found the Brownies book, in 1920, which is a version of the Crisis Magazine for kids. You think of Du Bois as this rather serious, formal, stuffy man, but he knew that he had to bring in youth as well, to celebrate youth, to celebrate black childhood, so often ignored to this day, in American culture. And so, there's so much just in Du Bois's life as the editor of the Crisis, that we could celebrate. And I will stop talking now, because otherwise we'll go on about for too long. But yeah, that's my summation of Du Bois and NAACP.

Arthur ([36:57](#)):

If I could add just a quicker point to that, Misty. I think that the NAACP really has as a foundational piece to it, all of the things that Adam just talked about, but also this idea of anti-lynching is critical to the conversation. You have to remember that in 1919, you see the prolific number of lynchings that people talked about, the red summer. But that isn't just the beginning of it, that's really the middle of this whole piece of the puzzle. Going back into the 1890s, the use of lynching as a way to intimidate black people, is really prolific throughout the south particularly, but throughout the country. And what you see is, you see the NAACP rising out of these white liberals who are anti-lynching folks, you see Ida B. Wells coming to the table with the foundation and the NAACP to also bring that anti-lynching message.

Arthur ([37:58](#)):

I think people don't understand that it's not just the South, that there were lynchings in Minneapolis, in Minnesota. There was the lynching of a white man in the South, the lynching of Leo Frank was the actual kickoff for the Anti-Defamation League. So, Jews were lynched as a way of intimidation as well. So, I think you really have to understand the context then that the NAACP comes into play in saying, "Hey, not only do we want to stop lynching, but we also believe in these other things that the National Negro Committee in 1909 has stated, and that the Niagara Movement has stated in 1905, the right to ride on the trains, the right to an education, the right to vote, women's right to vote."

Arthur ([38:48](#)):

I think that's another place where the NAACP doesn't get a lot of credit. They stood behind the Women's Movement in many ways during that time. Du Bois's impact on the Harlem Renaissance can't even be calculated, I don't think, through his work in the Crisis, and the work that he was doing in the NAACP. So,

there are lots of pieces that come together during that period from 1909 to 1934, that Adam is talking about.

Misty ([39:17](#)):

Thank you, Arthur. That's fantastic. We have about 12 minutes left of this program, so I just wanted to open up. I know we've had a few questions come in through the chat here, the Q&A chat. So, I just want to open it up, and see if anybody has any more questions that they would like to ask the panelists. If you have any, please go ahead and submit those at this time. But in the meantime, Alex, I know that you had a couple of other questions you'd like to ask as well.

Alex ([39:49](#)):

Certainly. Thanks, Missy. So in 1903, in the Souls of Black Folks, Du Bois wrote that, "Problem of the 20th Century is the problem of the color line. The relation of the darker to the lighter racism men in Asia, in Africa, in America, and the islands of the sea." 40 years later, Gunnar Myrdal characterized the race problem in the United States as a great dilemma, that if not resolves, threatens the ultimate success of our Democratic experiment. What were the most important issues related to race in America that Du Bois witnessed in his lifetime? I know you mentioned lynching upon, as well as the just general representation of black people at the time, as well as various narratives. And then also, can you give a general overview of his views on racism. And then lastly, if you have a moment, is the problem of the 20th Century still the problem with the color line?

Arthur ([40:49](#)):

Okay, Whitney, here we go.

Adam ([40:54](#)):

How many minutes until [inaudible 00:40:55]-

Misty ([40:55](#)):

No small questions around here, you guys. We have about 10 more minutes.

Whitney ([40:58](#)):

This question is like huge.

Arthur ([41:00](#)):

That's such a huge question, Alex. And it's a perfect question in many ways, because the title of this talk is Relevance to Today. And so, without beating around the bush about it, the problem of the 21st Century can be described as the color line, but it's not that simple. Grandpa encapsulated in that statement, and it's a wonderful statement and a perfect statement for that time, for 1900, 1903, that's a perfect statement. But for 2021, it's more complicated. It's not just about the color line, it's about gender differences. It's about homelessness. It is about, how do you deal with the rising population of folks who don't describe themselves as being singularly one race. Multiracial people really have started to stand up and say to people who collect those data like myself, "Hey, I'm not just black. I'm not just white. I'm not just Hispanic. I'm all of these things together." How do we as a society and as a culture, come to grips with what Du Bois simplified in that statement, but what has become more and more complex because of him?

Arthur ([42:16](#)):

Because he sat there, and he's talked about double consciousness, about being an American and being a negro, in that very same book that you're talking about. The thing that he does then, is to give us permission to acknowledge that we're not just two things. We're not just American, and just a negro. We're all of these other things. And over time, since 1903, we see those multiplicities of ourselves, the many hats that we wear, the many personalities that we encompass, coming to the forefront.

Arthur ([42:51](#)):

So today, we have a much more complex picture. We have a much more diverse society. Although that diversity probably existed in 1903, right now, it's coming to the forefront, and it's becoming a part of the fabric. All of us, when I say they, I mean everyone, is starting to say, "Don't ignore me. Don't ignore my history. Don't ignore my background. Don't ignore the things that I bring to the table of this discussion around diversity, inclusion, and equity. When we have that discussion, we're not just talking about black people, we're talking about everyone who brings a diverse perspective to this world and to the ways that we look at it. Okay, I'll get that off the soapbox now.

Whitney ([43:42](#)):

I would add to that, Du Bois, because the first time he uses the problem of the 20th Century is the color line, is actually in the 1900 Paris Exposition. It is on one of the data visualization. The other thing is that for me, I would encourage people to think about Du Bois, but to also think about James Baldwin. And then, think about Ta-Nehisi Coates. The reason why I bring up those two, is because they used words not for knowledge, not for entertainment, but for propaganda. The idea that these two, the title of Coates's book, *Between the World and Me*, is a quote of James Baldwin. And James Baldwin was taking on the mantle talking about that color line. But along though, that idea of the color line, to me I think about... Arthur brings up extremely relevant points. But personally, as a black woman, one of the things that stand out to me is that the fact that I have three healthy children, is an anomaly in our country.

Whitney ([45:05](#)):

The United States of America, my demographic, we go out and vote. Yet, it is almost impossible for us to have healthy babies, or for us to actually think about how that impacts the family. Think about how that impacts all of us. And so, the relevance today, I think that the problem with the 21st Century is the color line, but I also believe, like Arthur just said, it is much more complicated than that. And dare I say, class, education, your zip code, all of these factors, which Kimberly Crenshaw, who I hope that some of you would know as a person who is a lawyer, talking about that intersectional relationship of all those things. We've got to get out of the binaries. I hope that we understand that binaries hold us back. And so, that more complicated thing means, what do health disparities look like in the 21st Century? What they look like in a post-pandemic world? What they look like in a world where everyone does not have access to a vaccine, or everyone does not have access to adequate healthcare.

Whitney ([46:28](#)):

And then, I want to end with, the repercussions of that color line, is part of the reason why people that look like me are dying much more frequently than probably many other people. It's because of the stress. It's because of all those factors that are generational, in how they get reproduced. So, even if the color line was in the 20th Century, the children and grandchildren of that color line, are still being affected by the consequences of that line.

Adam ([47:06](#)):

May I add that, in 1980 when the Du Bois papers were opened here at UMass to the public, their own Bennett Jr., the editor of Ebony Magazine, gave a keynote address. He said, "In essence, Du Bois is still with us through the papers, through his work. And that to engage with Du Bois is to think with Du Bois, to work with Du Bois." "Du Bois," said Lauren Bennett, "is still on the case, and he's still alive in his papers." Reading Du Bois, and we do it every week here at the Du Bois Center in our weekly breakfast with Du Bois, which happen every Monday. What reading Du Bois gives you, is a moral and rhetorical framework for understanding the present. He absolutely can tell us truths about our own society, because they were also the truths about his society, about his time. Anyone who reads Du Bois is struck by the relevance that things written over 50, sometimes over a hundred years ago, have [inaudible 00:48:09].

Adam ([48:08](#)):

Take this one paragraph from his 1952 work, I take my stand for peace. He says, "I want progress. I want education. I want social medicine. I want a living wage, and old age security. I want employment for all, and relief for the unemployed and sick. I want public works, public services, and public improvement. I want freedom for my people. And because I know and you know that we cannot have these things, and at the same time fight, destroy, and kill, all around the world, in order to make huge profit for big business. For that reason, I take my stand beside the millions in every nation and continent." You read that, and you're in no doubt about the relevance to today. And if you read that and you are in any doubt about its relevance to today, well then I suggest you read more Du Bois.

Arthur ([48:58](#)):

So, that's a great segue, Adam. Thank you. There is a quote that I have that I close out my presentations on my grandfather with, that I think also brings this to relevance. "It is then the strife of all honorable men of the 20th Century, to see that in the future competition of races, the survival of the fittest shall mean the triumph of the good, the beautiful, and the true. That we may be able to preserve for future civilization all that is really fine, and noble, and strong, and not continue to put a premium on greed, and impudence, and cruelty."

Arthur ([49:41](#)):

I think when we look at our world today, and we look at some of the different struggles that we're having in Afghanistan, the Haitian refugees that we see at our border. That we see the homelessness issues that exist in every major city in this country. The country that is supposed to be the greatest country on the planet, that's supposed to be the richest country on the planet. We still have people who don't have jobs, who suffer from addiction problems, who really don't have the things that he was talking about in Adam's quote, and that Whitney was referring to. When we talk about the social determinants of health, and we talk about how those social determinants are actually disparate from many people in certain geographies, in certain races, in certain genders, we start to see them, that Du Bois, over a 100 years ago in the Philadelphia Negro, laid all of this out for us. He talks about the social environment. He describes the people and their languages, and their education and their jobs, and their work. He describes all of that back in 1897.

Arthur ([51:01](#)):

So, come on people, for real, that stopped having the conversation that says that we didn't know, that we don't know. If we didn't know and we don't know, it's not because Du Bois didn't tell us. It's not that

we weren't made aware of these issues. It's because we've decided to hide our heads in the sand, and not address them. How do we address them? We address them through programs like this, through diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, that reach down into our corporate cultures, reach down into our private cultures. And say to us, "Here is the reality that's going on around us. Let's not ignore it any longer. Let's do things. Act and do things, that change that reality for us."

Misty ([51:54](#)):

Thank you so much, Arthur. That was very powerful. And thank you all for this conversation. It's been amazing. I just want to point out real quick, we're at time, so we will be closing out this program. I will now turn it over to David, to close us out. But thank you everybody for your participation.

David ([52:12](#)):

Thank you, Misty, and thank you Alex for moderating this really fascinating discussion. 90 minutes has flown by. I've learned an amazing amount. We may have known the person on paper, but hearing from the scholars at the Du Bois Center, hearing from you, Arthur, the personal experience, this has really been a very special, courageous conversation. I think the key that I'm taking away and many of us are is, it's not enough just to learn. Our actions need to be as strong as the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, that he wrote hundreds of years ago. And I'm proud to say that Greenberg Traurig is making a contribution to the W.E.B. Du Bois Center, at University of Massachusetts, to sponsor one of the fellows to help get the word spread to the diaspora. And we're going to do everything we can to help the center here in Massachusetts and around the world.

David ([53:07](#)):

So please, read the link to the Du Bois Papers, under University of Massachusetts. It's free. It's accessible. And it's amazingly archived. It's relatively easy. It's really a wealth of information. And please stay tuned for the next courageous conversation. As the Boston managing shareholder, we're thank you to all the participants for helping you enlighten us about a son of Massachusetts, who deserves a little more light, shined on him. His life was truly courageous, and he's a very fitting expose for the Courageous Conversation series. And thank you to Greenberg's diversity equity inclusion team, for putting this series together. Especially Nicki Lewis Simon, who is just a force of nature, and a marvel that we all behold. So thank you Nicki, and thank you everyone for joining us.

Arthur ([53:58](#)):

Thanks for having us.

Misty ([54:00](#)):

Thank you everyone.

Adam ([54:08](#)):

Thank you.