

## Sandra Staton-Taiwo – W. E. B. Du Bois Center Fellow

Many institutions embrace a chant in which the community identifies with the institution. One example would be “We are Penn State.” Identification implies some form of investment, whether financial, spiritual, or intellectual. At the Du Bois Center, we are Du Bois. We all, in some way, identify with William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. I am Du Bois. I study Du Bois. I compare myself to Du Bois, and I am humbled. Cornel West once stated that we scholars can hardly read all that Du Bois wrote, let alone write all that he wrote. However, in my humility, I have studied Du Bois, and I have learned. I learned, for example that he would recycle, and rework material throughout his twenty-two single author works, as well as countless speeches, essays, and editorials. I addressed this in a poem called “Forgiven:”

And you recycled words,  
again and again,  
never wasting a thought,  
resurrecting piece after piece,  
like grandmothers  
who jellied peels  
and picked watermelon rinds. . . .

We are not alone when we say we are Du Bois, because Du Bois evidently believed that he, too, was Black America and even beyond, entitling most of his works in the spirit of collective consciousness, such as with *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, and when he ended his forethought in his highly acclaimed *The Souls of Black Folk*: “And, finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?” I have been arguing that Du Bois’ identification with those he called his flesh lies in his sense of the construction of reality. Like Immanuel Kant, Du Bois learned that reality was not a matter of pure reason or rationalism or of even the physical senses and science or empiricism but of the structure and rules for processing information, interpretation over perception. For this reason, I believe, Du Bois wrote the following in his “Criteria of Negro Art”:

Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.

In other words, Du Bois desired equality, in art as well as in life. Therefore, with his passion transferred, we can all enjoy, some if not all of his writing, as we continue to learn from, and identify with, W. E. B. Du Bois.

Sandra Staton Taiwo is the author of *Broad Sympathies in a Narrow World: The Legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois* available through Wayne State University Press:

<https://www.wsupress.wayne.edu/books/detail/broad-sympathies-narrow-world>