

collection of his essays, in particular, has a depth and breadth that is consummatory. It also leads to an ongoing conversation that expands the horizons of most every aspect of personal identity and of the culture we create.

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Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson, *W.E.B. DuBois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005.

For the last several decades, African American philosophy has seemingly revolved around a single DuBoisian axis. The introduction of his thought to the American philosophical canon has traditionally and almost exclusively focused on his study under white philosophical figures like William James, Josiah Royce and his emulation of Hegelian dialectics.<sup>1</sup> Though DuBois categorically rejects these associations and the training that many of the works "traditional" American philosophers insist make him a "philosopher," the most notable contemporary reflections on DuBois and his theoretical contributions are rooted in his ties to European and American thinkers. While DuBois is adamant in his later works (1930- 1963) that it is his African heritage, his cultural nationalism, and his anti-colonial disposition that he wishes to be remembered for, he continues to be valorized for his admittedly immature thought which emerged from his academic training at Harvard and Berlin. Here enters *W.E.B DuBois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, a recent collection of essays edited by Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson. As a much needed intervention into the dominant trends that currently define DuBois scholarship, Mullen and Watson's edited collection opens up many different avenues of future research that better situates DuBois as a theorist, activist and race thinker beyond the narrow confines of American philosophy.

In an introduction and four parts respectively entitled: "The Color Line Belts the World," "Darkwater Rising: Japan and the Color of Imperialism," World War II and the Anti-Colonial Turn," and "The East is Red: Revolutions and Resolutions," Mullen and Watson present the works of DuBois from the early 1900's to his death in 1963. Following the introduction, every part in the book is prefaced by an introductory essay that outlines the themes

that Mullen and Watson which to explore in the following collections of essays. The reader has to wonder how the editors came up for the organizing section titles, but they are extremely effective given the material presented in this collection, and the introductory essays are effectively written so readers unfamiliar with the material can understand the central themes and streams of thought throughout DuBois's reflections on Asia.

However, there are some aspects of this work and its introduction into philosophical curricula that remain somewhat problematic. In the introduction to the work, Mullen and Watson claim "from 1903, when he [DuBois] famously pronounced, in *Souls of Black Folk*, 'The problem of the twentieth century will be the problem of the color line,' to his death in Ghana in 1963, DuBois consistently saw Asia as the fraternal twin to African—and African American—struggle for political freedom and cultural self-preservation."<sup>ii</sup> While readers can certainly understand the need for the editors of the work to stress the importance of DuBois's views on Asia to his thinking on matters of race, this comment is far too totalizing. According to DuBois, it was his time in Germany during the fall of 1892, under the tutelage of Heinrich von Treitschke, Gustav Schmoller and Adolf Wagner were he "began to see the race problem in America, the problem of the peoples of Africa and Asia, and the political development of Europe as one."<sup>iii</sup> This view was not representative of a complete perspective in his viewing of race by any stretch of the imagination by the early 1900's. DuBois admitted that the dawning of his "post-colonial" African and Asian perspectives were erroneously dominated by his focus on political forces and somewhat immature.

While it is understandable that Mullen and Watson's work is limited in scope to the considerations of DuBois, some of their elaborations on DuBois's concentrations on Asia seem historically narrow. Mullen and Watson correctly point out that DuBois's accounts of Asia have been practically absent from philosophical and historical works on his thought, but fail to mention this as a symptomatic ignorance of the interests African-Americans had in the East after the Russo-Japanese war. The editors of this collection would like to claim that "well before it was fashionable," DuBois's was thinking about "globalization, national interdependence, and multiple ethnic diasporas as ineluctable elements of the modern world."<sup>iv</sup> However, at the

turn of the century, many prominent Black thinkers were analyzing the situation in Asia and Black scholars like Booker T. Washington, Kelly Miller, and John E. Bruce were using similar frames to understand European colonialism. In a similar vein, Black newspapers like the *Colored American* and the *Washington Bee*, were on the frontline of these debates concerning Asia between Black thinkers like Booker T. Washington, Archibald Grimke, W.E.B. DuBois and Kelly Miller to name a few. In fact, Reginald Kearney's book entitled, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?*, published a decade ago describes this historical shift at the turn of the century in not only DuBois's work, but most Black intellectuals' perspectives on race and colonialism at that time.<sup>v</sup>

As a philosophical perspective, Mullen and Watson want to claim a rather provocative thesis, namely that "more than any African or African American leader, it is Gandhi who qualifies as DuBois's most admired statesman and activist of the twentieth century."<sup>vi</sup> In fact, Mullen and Watson go so far as to claim that it was Gandhi's stance on non-violence that framed DuBois's thinking on the Civil Rights movement in the United States. To support this thesis Mullen and Watson offer readers "Gandhi and American Negroes," an essay written in July of 1957. While it is undeniable that DuBois wrote about Gandhi and the role of non-violence in the Civil Rights movement, he was constantly torn between the applicability of non-violence in the United States.<sup>vii</sup> In a book review published in 1959, for example, DuBois said he was "sorry to see King lauded for his opposition to the young colored man in North Carolina who declared that in order to stop lynching and mob violence, Negroes must fight back."<sup>viii</sup> Mullen and Watson's thesis is speculative at best given that DuBois does not afford Gandhi any substantial treatment in his autobiography, which was published posthumously in 1968. Given the care to detail DuBois affords Africanist scholars and other influences on his thought, one could only think it necessary to include Gandhi among them in light of Mullen and Watson's thesis.

Because Mullen and Watson believe that the "concentration on DuBois's Pan-Africanism has occluded DuBois's Pan-Asianism as well as the ways in which the two were complementary,"<sup>ix</sup> their work heavily stresses DuBois's Asian affinities over and against his Africanist roots. Since Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson are in fields

outside of philosophy, the implication of their work when considered by philosophers may be different than the implications they intended their work to convey to its assumed readers. Outside of Black Studies, one would be hard pressed to think of a popular work that definitively defends DuBois's personal relationships with Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore and Paul Robeson to the extent that Mullen and Watson claim. In philosophy, African American philosophers know all too well how these relationships with other Black intellectuals are either categorically dismissed as "not philosophically relevant," or overshadowed by the allegedly more definitive relationships DuBois shared with William James, Josiah Royce, and G.W.F. Hegel. Perhaps this is why Mullen and Watson's work seems to be a success—to the extent that it introduces much needed primary texts to philosophers that would have otherwise been ignored in favor of more "creative interpretations" linking DuBois to established European or America philosophical traditions—while simultaneously revealing itself as a misguided attempt to make outrageous claims about the Asiatic origins of DuBois's perspectives which are simply not substantiated by the evidence presented by or referenced in this single work on DuBois's thinking.

*W.E.B. DuBois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line* can serve as a useful resource for philosophers interested in exploring all aspects of DuBois's thinking on Asia, but African American scholars looking to explore a more rounded anti-colonial perspective in DuBois, throughout his life, may find themselves at odds with the orientation the editors take in presenting some of these primary materials. Either way, outside of the editors' essays, scholars in Africana thought, Black Studies, and philosophy can utilize DuBois's writings in classes on post-colonialism, race theory and Pan-Africanism.

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<sup>i</sup> In a book review, "The Souls of Black Folk", W.E.B. DuBois describes the style he used in writing the *The Souls of Black Folk*, he says "In its larger aspects the style is tropical—African. This needs no apology. The blood of my fathers spoke through me and cast off the English restraint of my training and surroundings" ("The Soul of Black Folk," *The Independent* 57, November 17, 1904, 1152).

<sup>ii</sup> Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson, eds., "Introduction," in *W.E.B. DuBois on Asia*, viii.

<sup>iii</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 162.

<sup>iv</sup> "Introduction," in *W.E.B. DuBois on Asia*, viii.

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<sup>v</sup> See Reginald Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998).

<sup>vi</sup> Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson, eds. "World War II and the Anti-Colonial Turn," in *W.E.B. DuBois on Asia*, 114.

<sup>vii</sup> See W.E.B. DuBois, "Will the Great Gandhi Live Again?," in *Newspaper Columns by W.E.B. DuBois, vol. 2. 1945-1961*, eds. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1986), 983-984.

<sup>viii</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, "Crusader Without Violence," in *Newspaper Columns by W.E.B. DuBois, vol. 2. 1945-1961*, eds. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1986), 1017.

<sup>ix</sup> Mullen and Watson, "Introduction," x.