

## *CRIBB<S>NOTE*

There is a lot of unfinished business that still requires our attention and diligence as we go forward together in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In 1903, sociologist, journalist, and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois, the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard University, wrote in his book, *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” His prediction remains a subject of study and controversy even as the events of the past one hundred years proved the scholar accurate. Color and race remain part of the unfinished business that plagues our nation. Dr. DuBois did not limit his forecast to the United States. He recognized the clutches of color prejudice extended around the world to Asia, Africa, Europe, the Pacific Island nations, and across America.

In 1968, New York Senator Bobby Kennedy, a presidential candidate, announced that a Black man would be elected President of the United States in 40 years. In 2008, 40 years later, President Barack Obama became the first African American Commander-in-Chief, and he entered the White House as a resident and not a servant.

Did the election of President Obama solve “the problem of the color line” 105 years after Dr. DuBois’ prophetic examination? Is that business finished? Every significant indicator from financial attainment to health care declares a resounding “No!” There remains plenty of unfinished business when it comes to race in America.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2007, the average African American family income was \$33,916 compared to \$54,920 for White families. African American men are nearly 2.5 times as likely to die from prostate cancer as White men.

Dr. DuBois described “the relation of the darker to the lighter races” as the basis of the problem.

The recent earthquake in Haiti is a gross and undeniable reminder of the extent to which the unfinished business remains with us. Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, and is residence to the poorest, ‘darker’ population in this hemisphere. Haitians personify ‘the relation of the darker to the lighter races’ as they vainly scrape to survive. But, we need not scan the globe for evidence of Dr. DuBois’ critique. Islands of neglect and pockets of under-served communities abound within short driving distances of our community. Almost everywhere African American, Latino, and Native Americans live in concentration, the absence of greater opportunities is punctuated by an over abundance of lost hope, broken dreams, and denied justice.

The scarcity of trees, for example, combined with the shortage of properly prepared physicians and educators in high-occupancy, People of Color districts signal more evidence that a lot of work has yet to be done if we are to create a society that honors and promotes the ideals of equality, fairness, and solutions to the lingering problems of the twentieth century.

We cannot dismiss the advancements that produced the 2008 victory of President Obama. At the same time, we can ill-afford to become blinded by the glare of one long over-due political success story and ignore the plight of tens of millions of Americans who continue to struggle under the burden of racism and color consciousness that pits darker and lighter persons against each other.

Perhaps, there is more than a bit of irony in the bi-racial, black and white composition of our new president at the early dawn of the twenty-first century. President Obama may be the hybrid personality required to forge an answer to Dr. DuBois’s troubling problem of the color line.