

## Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)

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### Debate over Du Bois

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Monday, June 19 GREAT BARRINGTON — Education and outreach to local schools were the two principal conclusions reached Saturday by a panel of experts who discussed the best ways to use the newly opened W.E.B. Du Bois Center on South Main Street. A host of professors from about 40 colleges and universities were on hand for the special seminar, including Edmond Gordon, head of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Columbia University, and a friend of Du Bois; John Stauffer, professor of English and American Literature at Harvard University and a prize-winning author; Jonathan S. Holloway, professor of History, African-American Studies at Yale University and James Campbell of Brown University, a professor of American Civilization, Africana Studies and also an award-winning author.

The group also included historians and scholars from Wellesley College, Boston University, NYU, CCNY, the University of Massachusetts, Simon's Rock College of Bard, Berkshire Community College, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and SUNY Albany.

The group convened on Saturday for two basic reasons, according to **Randy Weinstein**, the founder of the center and its director. First, to talk about the legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois in Great Barrington and what various groups are doing in support of that legacy. The second aim was to determine what the center itself could do to promote the Du Bois legacy.

William Edward Burghart Du Bois was born in Great Barrington in 1868 and spent his early years here. In later years, he would become an author, essayist and speaker, and is known as the father of the modern civil rights movement.

But in 1961, a few years before his death in 1963, Du Bois joined the Communist party, an act which many Americans, including area residents, interpreted as a deliberate decision to turn his back on his country. Du Bois' own words and papers prove this to be false, and in particular he showed great affection for his boyhood home. His principal intent in becoming a Communist, according to Du Bois' own writings, was to embrace a philosophy that did not discriminate against blacks, a situation Du Bois found pervasive in his own country.

But in his opening remarks on Saturday, Weinstein referred to a two-year-old letter to the editor of The Eagle in which a writer reviles Du Bois as a man who "hated America and that for which it stands."

That attitude, said Weinstein, is a not uncommon one that has generated a "love-hate" relationship with Du Bois on the part of many residents.

Still, the last few months have been a gratifying time for Weinstein, who for many years, was the unofficial "W.E.B. Du Bois tour guide." On Saturday, he estimated that he has shown the Du Bois family gravesite at the Mahaiwe Cemetery about 700 times. Du Bois himself is buried in Ghana, where he died at age 96.

"It's not as easy as it sounds," said Weinstein of the tours. Even though the Mahaiwe Cemetery is

adjacent to his business, North Star Rare Books. "Visitors from all over the world, as far away as Korea, Ghana and England, would show up at my door."

Although Simon's Rock has an annual Du Bois Lecture Series, and Du Bois' birthsite and boyhood home are both commemorated by markers, the town as a whole has done little to embrace the man who is easily its most famous resident.

"If W.E.B. Du Bois had been named George Washington," remarked Eagle columnist Alan Chartock a few years ago, "everything in town would be named after him."

But, said Weinstein in an interview yesterday, he is pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming support he has gotten from the educational and college community, both locally and from other parts of the country since the center opened in February.

"This (seminar) was essentially done on spec," he said. "(Co-organizer) Carl Kaestle and I sent out letters to people we thought would be interested. And we got an overwhelming response."

With education and outreach in mind, said Weinstein, the center has been contacting local schools to offer educational lectures and classes and will continue that activity.

In April, the center and the Boston Symphony Orchestra sponsored a workshop, "Teaching the Harlem Renaissance" for area teachers.

Later this year, a major exhibition, "Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois and the Spirit of African Culture," will be offered at the center, and a lecture series is in the works.

Weinstein is also working with teachers from Mount Everett Regional and Lenox high schools. He also plans to reach out to the administration at Berkshire Hills Regional School District.

In addition, the center is also working with the Great Barrington Historical Society. The Society has purchased a projector to present a series of "Films That Matter," hosted by a famous person. Playwright Wesley Brown will host "Major Dundee" in late July.

These events are but the start, said Weinstein.

And, he said, "I will continue to conduct tours."