

Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)

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Section: Letters to the Editor

Like Du Bois, he made a difference

Letters

Sunday, March 11 To the Editor of the EAGLE: W.E.B. Du Bois was certainly a controversial figure in American history. This gentleman of African-American heritage was a prodigious writer, scholar and long-time lover of the Berkshires, with its beautiful "golden river," the Housatonic. Although many may not agree with his politics, many more would agree with his position on basic human rights and the struggle for them in this country.

As a teacher of social studies, I teach our students to recognize the contributions made by local people, including Elizabeth Freeman (Mumbet), Daniel Shay, Norman Rockwell and Du Bois. Our children learn that people who have made an impact on the world have come from here. A part of delivering that message effectively has been the opportunity for field trip-based learning, visiting places like the Sheffield Historical Society and the W.E.B. Du Bois Center.

About a year ago now, for example, **Randy Weinstein** pioneered the opening of the Du Bois Center, a place dedicated to furthering education about Du Bois. This physical location provides a focal point for student learning. It offers kids the opportunity to get out of the classroom into an environment where they can see objects, flip through books, watch audio-visual material and on occasion, discuss with local experts Du Bois' childhood history and his adult socio-political beliefs.

This field trip venue helps them gain a deeper understanding of the man, his motivations, his strengths and his actions. It provides them with a way to make a connection to the man and the mural dedicated to him in Great Barrington. Its presence adds testimony to the rich historical and cultural heritage of this area — our nation's most recently created National Heritage Area.

As one of the students visiting from Egypt on the KIDmocracy Tour recently wrote in his reflection journal, "the study of Mr. Du Bois and Elizabeth Freeman has made me realize that as one person, I can make a difference." **Randy Weinstein** has made a difference by opening the Du Bois Center, a place where one of America's more controversial "free thinkers" can be examined, evaluated and, in some small way, experienced.

MIKE FARMER

Sheffield, March 3, 2007