

# W.E.B. Du Bois: Born by a Golden River

Wednesday, July 11, 2018  
2:00 P.M.



Du Bois and other Founders of the Niagara Movement, 1905

W.E.B. Du Bois River Park, River Walk

Walking tour of downtown Du Bois sites

Reception, the former Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church

Great Barrington, Massachusetts

## Program

Welcome

Rachel Fletcher

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes

Presented by Ted Thomas.

“The Sorrow Songs” from *The Souls of Black Folk*

Vocal interpretation by MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Ph.D.

The Housatonic River by W.E. Du Bois

Read by Dennis Powell and Leah Reed for NAACP Berkshire County Branch, Wray Gunn in memory of Elaine S. Gunn, Cora Gunn for Clinton Church Restoration, Pearl Conaway in memory of Rev. Esther Dozier, Brian Burke for Great Barrington Historical Society & Museum, David Glassberg and Camesha Scruggs for Public History at UMassAmherst, Dan Bolognani for Housatonic Heritage, Whitney Battle-Baptiste for the W.E.B. Du Bois Center at UMassAmherst, and Bernard A. Drew for African American Heritage Trail.

Elegy/Celebration for Du Bois

Musical libation performed by Master Drummer Kwaku Kwaakye Obeng, and Saxaphonist Antoine Roney.

Introduction by James Browne.

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Walking Tour of Great Barrington sites

Led by Bernard Drew, Camesha Scruggs, Whitney Battle-Baptiste, and David Glassberg

Reception at the former Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church

## Program Notes

### “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes

Presented by Ted Thomas.

Harlem Renaissance writer and poet Langston Hughes composed “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” in 1920, when he was only eighteen years old. One year later, literary editor Jessie Fauset brought the poem to Du Bois’s attention. Du Bois was the founder of *The Crisis*, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and editor between 1910 and 1934. He published Hughes’ poem in the June 1921 issue. In 1926, Hughes dedicated the poem to Du Bois when he published his own first volume of poetry, *The Weary Blues*.

*I’ve known rivers:*

*I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.*

*My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*

*I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.*

*I’ve known rivers:*

*Ancient, dusky rivers.*

*My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*

—Langston Hughes, 1920



### “The Sorrow Songs” from *The Souls of Black Folk*

Vocal interpretation by MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Ph.D.

Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois makes a major contribution toward preserving Traditional Spirituals by calling them “Sorrow Songs” and placing them as epigraphs for all of the essays in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), his most popular book. He tells us that these are not just sorrowful songs; they are also songs about Hope, Triumph, and Jubilation! According to Dr. Du Bois, they are “the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas,” “the greatest gift of the Negro people,” and “the sole American music.” In a voice that is deep, moving, and powerful, MaryNell Morgan-Brown invites acapella, participatory singing of some of those songs.

### “The Housatonic River” by W. E. Du Bois

In 1930, Dr. Du Bois returned to the Berkshires to deliver the keynote address at a reunion of alumni of Great Barrington High School. His talk “The Housatonic River” recognized the beauty of rivers around the world, and held special praise for his beloved Housatonic:

*Rescue the Housatonic and clean it as we have never in all the years  
thought before of cleaning it; restore its ancient beauty;  
making it the center of a town, of a valley,  
and perhaps-who knows? of a new measure of civilized life.”*

—W.E.B. Du Bois

Dr. Du Bois always took the time to remember the Housatonic. At age 93, he wrote:

*The Housatonic River is the natural Main Street of the Town of Great  
Barrington.*

*It should be a clear and limpid stream, flowing gently through grass, trees and  
flowers;*

*flanked by broad roadways and parks as the lifestream of a town.*

—W.E.B. Du Bois

Letter to Searles High School Alumni President  
George P. Fitzpatrick, 13 June 1961

### Elegy/Celebration for Du Bois

Musical libation performed by American Saxophonist Antoine Roney  
and Ghanaian Master Drummer Kwaku Kwaakye Obeng.

Introduction by James Browne.

On Tuesday, 27 August 1963, on the eve of the great March on Washington, during which the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his iconic “I Have A Dream” speech, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois died in Accra, Ghana, having expatriated there two years earlier at the invitation of Kwame Nkrumah, the president of the newly independent West African nation. Dr. Du Bois was buried initially at Osu Castle in Accra, a site from which, over the course of centuries, countless shiploads of Africans were sent to the Americas to be enslaved. It is therefore just and fitting that in celebrating Dr. Du Bois’s astounding life and legacy, that an offering of gratitude by these talented and reverent musicians be respectful of his African and American duality.

## Biographies of the Participants

### Ted Thomas



Ted Thomas is an award-winning poet. He has published three collections of his own poetry and edited dozens of anthologies of creative writing by other writers. He has led creative writing workshops in venues including public schools, hospitals, universities, a woman's shelter, and Framingham State Prison. Three years ago, Mr. Thomas moved with his wife to Pittsfield from Boston, where he taught in the Humanities Department at a local community college and was adviser to the Creative Writing and Poetry Club. In the Berkshires, Mr. Thomas has been active in several organizations. He is currently working on

his fourth collection of poetry and editing an anthology of poetry written by ninth graders from Drury High School in North Adams through a partnership with MASS MoCA where he has twice been Poet-in-Residence.

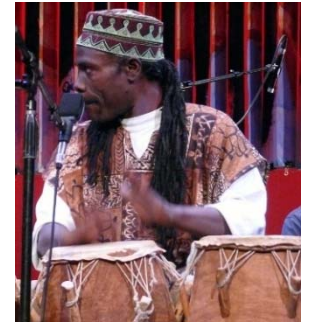
### MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Ph.D.

Dr. Morgan is an inspirational performer of traditional spirituals and other genres of music, including the blues and popular songs. She is a professor in the Social Sciences Department at SUNY – Empire State College. She includes songs in her teaching and she teaches whenever she sings. Her singing and teaching have taken her to the stages at The Egg, Caffè Lena, The Peoples' Voice Café, Bard College, Xavier University of Louisiana, the University of Illinois at Carbondale, and several others. She has performed with Pete Seeger and other renowned folk singers and songwriters. She is especially passionate about singing and talking about “The Sorrow Songs” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by W.E.B. Du Bois.



### Kwaku Kwaakye Obeng

Renowned master drummer, composer, dancer and educator originally from Ghana, West Africa, Kwaku Kwaakye Obeng has been active for 30 years within international music circles. He began drumming at age five and progressed to become appointed Royal Court drummer for the high chief of the Aburi-Akuapim area of the Eastern region of Ghana. He later joined the National Arts Council Folkloric Ensemble. Moving to the US in 1981, he joined the New England based Talking Drum ensemble. He has served on the faculty of Brown and Wesleyan Universities and has taught and given master classes at Boston College, New York University, Yale University, and many other institutions.



### Antoine Roney

Tenor and soprano saxophonist Antoine Roney is one of the most unique musicians of his generation. In his music, there exists a high level of creativity from which he strives to break new sociopolitical, spiritual and metaphysical ground. His playing can range from the beautifully abstract to profoundly traditional. Roney has played with his family; which includes his brother, the astounding trumpeter Wallace, his late sister-in-law, pianist Geri Allen and Antoine's son Kojo, a remarkable prodigy in his own right, in addition to many great Jazz masters including Elvin Jones, Chick Corea, Freddie Hubbard, Jackie McLean, Rashied Ali and many, many others.



### James Browne

For 40 years, James Browne has been active as an impresario, a radio broadcaster, artist manager, music venue owner and record producer. He began his career in the 1970's at New York City's WBAI-FM, went on to spend nearly 20 years at the nation's pre-eminent Jazz radio station WBGO-Jazz88FM, and was, for a number of years, an on-air personality on the Jazz and Blues channels at Sirius Satellite radio. In addition to managing one of NYC's major Jazz clubs, Sweet Basil, he went on to own and operate the club's successor, Sweet Rhythm. He is currently active as a member of the Board of Directors for NYC's non-profit performance space known as the Jazz Gallery.

## About the W.E.B. Du Bois River Park

*I was born by a golden river  
and in the shadow of two great hills,  
five years after the Emancipation Proclamation.*  
—W.E.B. Du Bois  
*Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*

The Great Barrington native W.E.B. Du Bois was born on Church Street, a few hundred feet from this spot. The Great Barrington Land Conservancy dedicated the park in September 2002 to honor Du Bois's love of the Housatonic River and his lifelong campaign for environmental justice and the restoration of rivers everywhere. The park provides an entrance to the Housatonic River Walk and is a site on the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail.

## About Clinton A. M. E. Zion Church

Dedicated in 1887, the Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was the cultural, spiritual, and political home for the local African American community for 130 years. A place of significance for W.E.B. Du Bois, the church has been called “a crucible that nurtured the spirit and honed the skills of ‘Willie’ Du Bois” and “a place of continual and important social reference for him.” It is now being restored and repurposed as an African American heritage center.

## About the Niagara Movement

The Niagara Movement was Du Bois's first attempt to form a civil rights organization and the first substantial Black-organized protest movement of the twentieth century. It led to the founding of the N.A.A.C.P. in 1909. The first annual meeting convened on July 11, 1905, on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls in Fort Erie, where the four great lakes of Michigan, Huron, Superior and Erie empty into the Niagara River.

Of the wondrous Niagara Falls, Du Bois wrote:

*Upon the awful mystery of that inner, deeper, wilder fall  
no human eye may look. Its frightened bloodless face is veiled.  
Vast sheets of mist roll up and with wild white hands  
screen this sanctuary of Almighty God, while this,  
the pale waters churning and foaming  
shines His shadow below in silent rainbows.*

—W.E.B. Du Bois, Letter to daughter Yolande Du Bois, 1911

## W.E.B. Du Bois: Born by a Golden River

### Sponsors

River Walk/Great Barrington Land Conservancy ([gbriverwalk.org](http://gbriverwalk.org))  
Housatonic Heritage ([housatonicheritage.org](http://housatonicheritage.org))  
Clinton Church Restoration ([clintonchurchrestoration.org](http://clintonchurchrestoration.org))  
Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail  
([africanamericantrail.org](http://africanamericantrail.org))  
Du Bois National Historic Site ([duboisnhs.org](http://duboisnhs.org))  
Public History at UMassAmherst ([umass.edu/history/public-history](http://umass.edu/history/public-history))  
NAACP Berkshire County Branch ([naacpberkshires.org](http://naacpberkshires.org))  
Great Barrington Historical Society & Museum ([gbhistory.org](http://gbhistory.org))  
W.E.B. Du Bois Educational Series

The participation of musicians Kwaku Kwaakye Obeng and Antoine Roney is made possible through a generous grant from the Cheswatyr Foundation.



W.E.B. Du Bois in 1907

### Special thanks

Eugenie Sills, Christine Ward, Dan Bolognani, Wray and Cora Gunn, Emily Wasserman, Tommie Hutto-Blake, Al Blake, Dennis Powell, Stephanie Bergman, Elia Del Molino, Kev Troiano, Meri Powell, Jake Adamczyk, Andrew Liss, Heather Cupo, Plant Euphoria, Ward's Nursery, Gt. Barrington Fish & Game, Cathy Roth, and the participants.

### Photographs

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes, by permission of Harold Ober Associates; Aaron Douglas art © Heirs of Aaron Douglas/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.  
Slater, R. P. Niagara Movement founders, 1905, 1905. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries (W.E.B. Du Bois, 2<sup>nd</sup> row, fourth from left).  
W.E.B. Du Bois, Boston, 1907. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Caption: Photo made in Boston, Summer 1907 in conjunction with 3rd Annual Meeting of Niagara Movement.  
MaryNell Morgan-Brown Ph.D. by Daesha Devon Harris, Saratoga Springs.  
Kwaku Kwaakye Obeng by Frank Rubolino-Jazz Photo. <https://goo.gl/images/r1NATL>.  
Antoine Roney <https://goo.gl/images/FJxyg5>.