

W.E.B. Du Bois: I've Known Rivers

Saturday, August 27, 2022

2:00 P.M.



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

Walking tour of downtown Du Bois sites

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

Great Barrington, Massachusetts

Program

Welcome Rachel Fletcher

Emcee James Browne

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes
Presented by Delano Burrowes.

We Have Known Rivers: From Africa to America and Return
Vocal interpretation by MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Ph.D.

The Housatonic River by W.E. Du Bois

Read by Frances Jones-Sneed for the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail, Sandra Burton in memory of Dr. Don Quinn Kelley, Virginia Conway in memory of Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church congregants, Dennis Powell for Berkshire NAACP, Camesha Scruggs for Public History at UMassAmherst, Bernard A. Drew in memory of David Graham Du Bois, Wray Gunn in memory of David Gunn and Elaine S. Gunn, Will Singleton for the Du Bois Center of Freedom and Democracy, Select Board Vice Chair Leigh Davis for the Town of Great Barrington, Mattie Conaway in memory of sisters Rev. Esther Dozier and Pearl Conaway, Delano Burrowes for his unseen and unheard Black ancestors, and Shirley Edgerton for Women of Color Giving Circle/Rites of Passage & Empowerment Program.

Elegy/Celebration for Du Bois

Musical libation performed by cornetist/trumpeter Graham Haynes.
Introduction by James Browne.

Honoring the Year of the Return

Performed by Dennis L. Powell.
Accompanied by MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Ph.D.

* * *

Walking Tour of Great Barrington Sites

Led by Bernard Drew and Camesha Scruggs.

Reception at the historic Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church
9 Elm Court, home of the Du Bois Freedom Center

Presenter's Notes

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes

Presented by Delano Burrowes.

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.

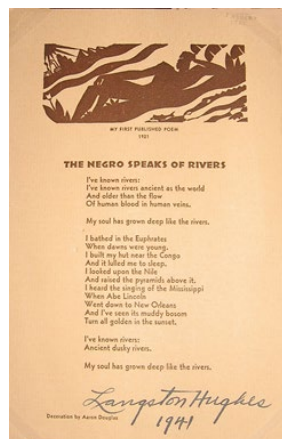
*I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.*

I’ve known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

—Langston Hughes, 1920



We Have Known Rivers: From Africa to America and Return

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

It is fitting to honor and celebrate the W.E.B. Du Bois River Park with some of the numerous sacred and secular songs about rivers. Some are mentioned by Dr. Du Bois in Chapter 14, “The Sorrow Songs,” which is the final chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), his most popular book. Chapter 14 is the only chapter that does NOT begin with “Of.” Despite its title, Dr. Du Bois tells us that these are not just sorrowful songs; they are also Traditional Spirituals about Hope, Triumph, and Jubilation! Furthermore, 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.” Drawing from Dr. Du Bois’s list of Ten Master Songs, some of the songs he used as epigraphs for each chapter, songs he discussed in Chapter 14, popular songs of more recent times, and songs that I have written, we will lift our voices in songs that evoke strong images of rivers and their life sustaining role in our world.

“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 cornetist/trumpeter Graham Haynes.

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 this talented and reverent musician be respectful of his African and American duality.

Biographies of the Participants

Delano Burrowes



Delano Burrowes is a writer/artist, originally from Great Barrington, whose work explores the double consciousness of Black identities. His writing has been published in *The Rumpus*, *Huffpost*, and (forthcoming) *Kweli Journal*, among other places. His current multi-city community art/discussion series, The Great Barrington Project, questions how Black people are seen (and not seen). He is one of the founding members of the non-profit, The BlackYard Collective, a support network for Black queer people recovering from addiction to drugs and alcohol.

MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Ph.D.

Dr. Morgan is a Du Bois scholar, educator, and singer. She is an inspirational performer of traditional spirituals and other genres of music, often with audience participation. She is a Professor Emerita of Social Sciences from SUNY – Empire State College. Her singing and teaching have taken her to many stages, including The Egg, Caffé Lena, The People’s Voice Café, and several colleges and universities. She has performed with the late 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.



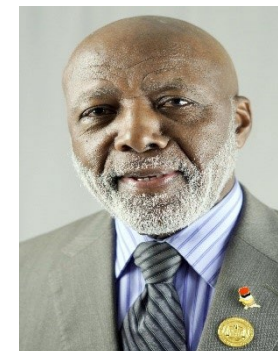
Graham Haynes

Graham Haynes, born in Brooklyn, New York, and raised in Hollis, Queens, NY, is an American cornetist and composer. His two years at Queens College, 1978-1980, studying composition, harmony, and theory, spurred his interest in classical and electronic music. Robert Moog was professor of electronic music at the time. Haynes became a disciplined student, studying trumpet and jazz harmony privately with Gillespie alumnus Dave Burns while playing in the Pentecostal church. The son of jazz drummer Roy Haynes, Graham is known for his work in nu jazz, fusing jazz with elements of hip hop and electronic music.



Dennis L. Powell

Community activist Dennis Powell is president of the Berkshire County Branch of the NAACP and Vice-chair of the W.E.B. Du Bois Center for Freedom and Democracy. He currently serves on the boards of the New England Area Conference of the NAACP (NEAC), the Greylock Community Development Advisory Board, the Railroad Street Youth Project (RSYP), the Pittsfield Licensing Board, and the Police Advisory Review Board (PARB) of Pittsfield. Dennis has received the Berkshire Nonprofit Lifetime Achievement Award and the Massachusetts Black Excellence on the Hill Award, among several other honors. A retired culinary educator and Veteran of the United States Army, he is most proud of his four beautiful, intelligent, and joyous grandchildren.



Honoring the Year of the Return

Performed by Dennis L. Powell. With Dr. MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Ph.D.

In 2019, Dennis Powell joined an NAACP-organized pilgrimage from Jamestown, Virginia to Jamestown, Accra, Ghana to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival in 1619 of the first documented enslaved Africans in the United States. His pilgrimage began in Great Barrington, where he collected water from the Housatonic River near W.E.B. Du Bois’s birthplace, then carried it to Du Bois’s resting place in Accra. Delayed some years by the pandemic, he now releases water he collected in Accra into the “golden river” where Du Bois was born nearby.

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.

W.E.B. Du Bois: I've Known Rivers

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 enters the town's community-created Housatonic River Walk, which is a National Recreation Trail. The park is a site on the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail.

About Clinton A. M. E. Zion Church and Du Bois Freedom Center

The Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, formed in the 1860s as the A.M.E. Zion Society, served as the cultural, spiritual, and political home for the local African American community for 150 years. Scholars have called the church, the first Black institution of W.E.B. Du Bois' life, "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." The church, which was deconsecrated after closing its doors in 2014, is currently under restoration by the nonprofit W.E.B. Du Bois Center for Freedom and Democracy. The mission of the Center is to educate the public about the life and legacy of civil rights pioneer W.E.B. Du Bois and the rich African American heritage of the Berkshires.



Sponsoring Organizations

Great Barrington Land Conservancy (gbland.org)
Housatonic River Walk (gbriverwalk.org)
NAACP Berkshires (naacpberkshires.org)
The W.E.B. Du Bois Center for Freedom and Democracy (duboisfreedomcenter.org)

Participating Organizations

First Congregational Church of Great Barrington
Housatonic Heritage (housatonicheritage.org)
Public History at UMassAmherst (umass.edu/history/public-history)
Town of Great Barrington (townofgb.org)
Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail (africanamericantrail.org)
W.E.B. Du Bois National Historic Site (duboisnhs.org)
Women of Color Giving Circle/Rites of Passage & Empowerment Program (ropeberkshires.org)



The participation of musician Graham Haynes is made possible through a generous grant from the Cheswaty Foundation.

Special thanks

Eugenie Sills, Beth Carlson, Christine Ward, Arianna Collins, David Edgecomb, Ed Abrahams, Dan Bolognani, Emily Wasserman, Al Blake, Tommie Lou Hutto-Blake, Karen Richards, Zoe Schoen, River Walk volunteers, Heather Cupo, Plant Euphoria crew, Greenagers interns and leaders, Ward's Nursery & Garden Center, Berkshire Corporation, Triplex Cinema, and the participants.

Du Bois and other founders of the Niagara Movement, 1905.

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, 2nd 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.