



March 8, 2018

Sandra Phoenix
Executive Director
HBCU Library Alliance
111 James P. Brawley Drive SW
Atlanta, GA 30314

Dear Sandra,

I write this letter in support of the HBCU Library Alliance's "Building Capacity for Humanities Special Collections at HBCUs" proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities. This project will directly impact the value of humanities collections for scholarship, history, and culture.

My work includes teaching history and humanities at the College of Biblical Studies, a predominately African American school in Houston's culturally rich Mahatma Gandhi District. While not an HBCU in the tradition of a land grant or denominational institution, CBS's demographic profile matches that of a traditional HBCU and its mission and vision focuses exclusively on African Americans. I am also a scholar of American religious history and African American studies and a specialist in the life and thought of W. E. B. Du Bois. My work as a historian has taken me to numerous archives housed at HBCUs, so I write this letter out of a personal conviction to see the work of HBCUs and their archives flourish, and out of professional practice. I am a regular writer for the online publication *Black Perspectives*, and in 2017 I wrote about my work in black intellectual history in the context of a research visit to Fisk University. You can read my essay by following [this link](#).

Working in the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, I conducted research in the extensive archives of the W. E. B. Du Bois Collection. Scholarly research at Fisk University has shaped my scholarship as a historian and has informed my classroom teaching as well. I have visited the Fisk archives on two occasions. It is imperative that HBCU archivists have an abundance of resources for preserving black history. Maintaining archival materials is vital not just for scholars and historians, but also for students of the next generation who will discover Du Bois's timeless insights while strategizing to realize democracy's full potential.

The publications listed below resulted from my research conducted at Fisk University:

"Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called Communists': W. E. B. Du Bois and American Religious Culture, 1935-1963" in *No Deed but Memory: Forging American Freedom in W. E. B. Du Bois's Twilight Years*, ed., Phillip Luke Sinitiere (University Press of Mississippi, forthcoming).

"My audiences have grown in intelligence and power of criticism:' W. E. B. Du Bois's Lecture Tours and Itinerant Intellectual Labor," in *Du Bois at 150: Reflections on the Life of an American Scholar-Provocateur*, ed. Randall Westbrook (forthcoming).

At the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library (GA), I scoured the files on W. E. B. Du Bois from the John Henrik Clarke Africana Collection and discovered a rare volume of Du Bois's poetry published in 1964. Also, I found a 1982 publication that reflected on Du Bois's Pan-Africanism in light of contemporary anti-apartheid

activism. In addition, files from Du Bois's tenure at Atlanta University provided insight into his life as a professor and classroom teacher and rare photographs humanized the towering scholar while presenting a unique visual record of the past. Scholarly research at Clark Atlanta University (GA) has enhanced my scholarship as a historian and has assisted my classroom teaching as well.

The following publications resulted from research conducted at Clark Atlanta University:

Protest and Propaganda: W. E. B. Du Bois, The Crisis, and American History, co-edited with Amy Helene Kirschke (University of Missouri Press, 2014).

“Leadership for Democracy and Peace: W. E. B. Du Bois's Legacy as a Pan-African Intellectual,” in *Leadership in Colonial Africa: Disruption of Traditional Frameworks and Patterns*, ed. Baba J. Jallow (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 202-239.

“A Legacy of Scholarship and Struggle’: W. E. B. Du Bois's Life After Death,” in *Citizen of the World: A History of W. E. B. Du Bois's Late Career*, ed., Phillip Luke Sinitiere (Northwestern University Press, forthcoming).

Recently, in February 2018 I returned to Clark Atlanta University to participate in the Symposium Examining Race and Economic Inequality on the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of W. E. B. Du Bois and the 50th Anniversary of the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. As a conference presenter, my talk on Du Bois and poetry drew on my previous research at CAU and Fisk. You can find the conference schedule following [this link](#). You can access my presentation by following [this link](#) (it starts at about the 4:41:05 mark).

In Prairie View A&M's University (TX) Archives, I accessed unique materials related to W. E. B. Du Bois's educational philosophy. In addition, documentation on his efforts in the 1940s to pool intellectual resources of HBCUs in the production of scholarship offered insight into his interest in preserving access to black history for tomorrow's generations. Furthermore, assisted by archivist Phyllis Earles, I was able to read and publish one of Du Bois's unpublished speeches delivered at Prairie View State College (TX) in 1935. There in an HBCU archive I discovered how those who today have access to these rare archival materials are direct beneficiaries of Du Bois's intellectual labors. Research conducted at Prairie View A&M University (TX) led to scholarly publications while it has also continued to inform my classroom teaching. It is imperative that we follow Du Bois's example in sustaining black history and working tirelessly to preserve for our descendants in the future the richness of the past housed at HBCUs.

The publications listed below resulted from research at Prairie View A&M University (TX):

“Outline of Report on Economic Condition of the Negroes in the State of Texas’: W. E. B. Du Bois' 1935 Speech at Prairie View State College,” *Phylon* 54/1 (Summer 2017): 3-24.

“My audiences have grown in intelligence and power of criticism:’ W. E. B. Du Bois's Lecture Tours and Itinerant Intellectual Labor,” in *Du Bois at 150: Reflections on the Life of an American Scholar-Provocateur*, ed. Randall Westbrook (forthcoming).



-Page 3-

The publications listed above reflect my current research. I anticipate on completing future publications from my research in HBCU archives. Maintaining access to treasured resources housed at HBCUs must be a priority because it fosters critical perspectives on the past that assist in making informed decisions in the present. Furthermore, Stanley Nelson's recent documentary *Tell Them We Are Rising* could not have been told without the rich resources of HBCU archives. Without the preservation of the records housed at HBCUs, future films and other projects of this nature will be impossible.

W. E. B. Du Bois's words on black history from a 1946 *Chicago Defender* newspaper article remain highly relevant to the current day: "Nothing gives one greater courage than looking forward into the past, that is, carefully examining the present and then comparing it with what actually happened in years gone by." The preservation of HBCU archives will continue to make this future possible.

The HBCU Library Alliance, in its role to preserve library collections, is well positioned to undertake a project designed to advance support for conservation and preservation of at-risk humanities-based materials at HBCUs. I am confident that this project will improve access to these outstanding resources. This project will also uncover even greater humanities collections to promote community, academics and student engagement.

As a potential direct beneficiary of support to advance humanities based collections at HBCUs, I'm excited to see this project approved and implemented in HBCU libraries.

Sincerely,

Phillip Luke Sinitiere