



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Honoring the life and achievements of the scholar, scientist, and fighter for world peace William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, and declaring 2018 as the Year of W.E.B. Du Bois in the City of Philadelphia

WHEREAS, W.E.B. Du Bois, a sociologist, scientist, historian, editor, educator, and fighter for world peace made substantial contributions to the foundations of civil rights activism, Pan-Africanist thought, peace, and the fight against white supremacy and colonialism; and

WHEREAS, Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts on February 23, 1868, Du Bois attended Fisk University, a historically Black college in Nashville, Tennessee, where, as he said, he “touched the very shadow of slavery”, and began analyzing the impacts of the entrenchment of American racism on the African American Community and on the nation; and

WHEREAS, Du Bois, after graduating from Fisk University, was admitted to Harvard University, becoming the first Black American to earn a doctorate from the institution in 1895; and

WHEREAS, After teaching at Wilberforce University in Ohio, Du Bois was invited by prominent women connected to the University of Pennsylvania to conduct a study of the Black Community in Philadelphia. Living in the Seventh Ward at the College Settlement Association at 617 Carver Street (now Rodman Street) he studied the sociopolitical factors that contributed to high rates of poverty and crime in Black Communities; and

WHEREAS, In his groundbreaking sociological text, *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois applied the scientific method in his argument that conditions of economic deprivation were the result of structural racism and the unwillingness of white employers and City officials to hire African Americans who had migrated to Philadelphia from the South after the Civil War. Du Bois additionally noticed that, in spite of a 1880 Pennsylvania law banning educational segregation, Philadelphia’s schools remained segregated. Du Bois’ portrait of political and economic conditions that shaped Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward, which contained the City’s highest concentration of African Americans, was a seminal social scientific refutation of white supremacy and white superiority; and

WHEREAS, After publishing *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois embarked on a prolific career in the spheres of research and activism, notably publishing *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, a series of essays which aimed to portray the humanity and genius of the Black Race and developed the idea of the color line as the problem of the 20th Century; and

WHEREAS, Committed to finding solutions to the problems of race and the color line, Du Bois, along with others, created the first modern civil rights organization, the *Niagara Movement*, in 1905; and

WHEREAS, In 1910, at the Second Annual National Negro Conference, Du Bois led efforts to create the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an interracial civil rights organization committed to fighting for human rights for Black People across the globe, and served as editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*, which featured his work challenging notions of white superiority, male supremacy, and colonialism;

and

WHEREAS, As a champion of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois believed that the global unity of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora was critical to the achievement of Civil Rights, anti-colonialism, and world peace. His notion of Pan Africa would eventuate in his idea of the unity of Pan Africa and Pan Asia in the fight against racism; and

WHEREAS, After years of government persecution for his activism against nuclear weapons, Du Bois was invited to move to Ghana, a newly independent African Nation, and to publish an Encyclopedia of Africa. He died on August 27, 1963 at the age of 95 in Accra, Ghana; and

WHEREAS, As DuBois wrote that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line”, scholars and activists today continue to invoke DuBois’ prolific work in challenging racial inequality and inequity and in expanding political and economic access and power to people of color; and

WHEREAS, In light of his invaluable scholarship to our historical understanding of Black civic life in Philadelphia, and given that the City of Philadelphia was the site of his sociological research that continues to help us understand urban Black America, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois’ 150th birthday serves as a landmark of the progress that Philadelphia has made in the continuing battle to combat racial inequality, poverty, homelessness, and illiteracy, and a reminder that we must continue to fight against deep levels of poverty and racial exclusion across the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The Year of Du Bois will commence with a series of symposia sponsored by the Saturday Free School, the first of which will celebrate DuBois’ vision of unifying Pan Africa and Pan Asia and challenging systems of colonial oppression; and

WHEREAS, The backbone of the Year of DuBois is a literacy campaign, “Philadelphia Reads W.E.B. Du Bois”, featuring reading groups that meet twice a month and reflect on DuBois’ works at over fifteen different community sites; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors the life and achievements of the scholar, scientist, and fighter for world peace William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, and declares 2018 as the Year of W.E.B. Du Bois in the City of Philadelphia.