

# “A Peculiar Sensation”: Mirroring Du Bois’ Path into Predominantly White Institutions in the 21st Century

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*Over 130 years have expired since William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois transitioned from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Nashville, Tennessee, to a predominantly White institution (PWI) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. While Du Bois’ HBCU experiences were not always peaceful in the then Jim Crow South, when compared to his PWI experiences with regard to race, his HBCU experiences were far more encouraging. Despite centuries of civil rights and legislative efforts toward dismantling an educational system initially created to serve only White students, African Americans today continue to confront racist structures mirroring those encountered by Du Bois. In this paper, I employ Du Bois’ experiences of negotiating his path into a PWI and his double consciousness theory as a reflective framework, asserting that a great deal of work remains in order to provide safe, anti-racist spaces for African Americans pursuing postsecondary degrees at PWIs, particularly in their music programs.*

*Keywords: African Americans, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), predominantly White institutions (PWIs), Black student college experiences, race, racism, double consciousness theory, critical race theory (CRT), music*

Unlike Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) did not emerge as institutions whose student and faculty populations, resources, and curricula reflected great abundance. They began as modest learning spaces where formerly enslaved Blacks were taught certain skills such as reading, writing, and etiquette, needed to assimilate into a majority White, American society (Allen and Jewell 2002, Bennett and Xie 2003). Cheyney University, the first HBCU, was established in 1837, while Harvard University, the first predominantly White institution (PWI) and first institution of higher learning in the United States, was established in 1636 (Crewe 2017). According to the U.S. Congress (Roebuck and Murty 1993), in Title III of the

Higher Education Act of 1965, HBCUs are institutions that were established prior to 1964 whose mission largely centered on educating Blacks. While no legislative artifact exists that delineates PWIs, scholars have often defined these institutions as schools comprised of majority White students and faculty. Scholars define those institutions whose White student populations are no longer majority but continue to maintain a predominantly White faculty and culture as PWIs. For example, while Georgia State University's (GSU) student population is largely Black, its faculty and administrative body, as well as its cultural context and structure, reflects that of White dominance, particularly within its music program. The location of GSU in Atlanta, Georgia, a large, predominantly Black city, and its commuter status contributes to its majority Black student population. However, historically Black institutions, whose student and faculty populations no longer portray a Black majority, continue to be designated as HBCUs, solely because of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Today, there are 4,583 degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States, and of those, 105 are HBCUs, approximately 95 institutions less than what was reported in the 1890s (Brown and Davis 2001, NCES 2019). Despite the fact that HBCUs make up 2.2% of all higher education institutions in the United States, since their inception they have continued to do "the lion's share" of educating and empowering Black students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), HBCUs enroll 20% of all Black college students and grant 40% of all baccalaureate degrees awarded annually to Black graduates.

Since their establishment, HBCUs have transformed into some of the most influential institutions in the world by cultivating a base of artists, scholars, activists, and public figures, including Thurgood Marshall, Cannonball Adderley, Martin Luther King, Jr., Toni Morrison, Debbie Allen, Jessye Norman, Spike Lee, and Kamala Harris, to name a few. HBCUs have provided African Americans and other underrepresented cultural and socioeconomic groups opportunities to acquire a post-secondary education (Allen 1992; Allen and Jewell 2002; Brown and Davis 2001; Guiffrida and Douthit 2011). Specifically, these institutions have consistently provided Black students a temporary escape from some of society's most hostile and oppressive structures, including those at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Despite HBCUs affording Black students some temporary relief, it is almost certain that many of these students, at some point, must attend a PWI if they

wish to pursue a graduate degree. This is especially true for graduate music study, as only six HBCUs offer a master's degree in music and none offer a doctoral degree (McCall 2013). Additionally, due to a number of challenges such as funding, a smaller faculty, and seeking accreditation from a national accrediting agency, these graduate music schools are limited in the resources needed to provide a variety of graduate music degree programs (i.e., music education, performance, music theory, ethnomusicology, jazz, composition). Black HBCU music graduates must make the inevitable leap of transitioning into and negotiating a predominantly White graduate music program. With this experience comes a number of anticipated, as well as unexpected, realities including racism.

While this paper centers on racism as a critical component of African Americans' PWI experiences, it should be noted that other aspects of student identity such as gender, class, and place also contribute to challenges encountered by Black students at PWIs. For instance, in addition to African American students wrestling with racism in their predominantly White learning spaces, they are often tasked to negotiate such spaces in a substantially different place or geographical location than that of their hometown (Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington 2011). Given that this certainly is not a new phenomenon among many college students, including those who are White, the intersection of race and place presents challenges encountered exclusively by certain minoritized racial and ethnic groups of individuals.

### Du Bois as Framework

A mirror, in the simplest sense, is an inanimate object, that with the help of light, reflects the surface of images placed before it, yielding a virtual, real-time "mirroring" of both movement and stillness. Mirrors are commonly used to assist in grooming and admiring one's self, and to determine spatial awareness, locating objects in our peripheral and rear view. In architecture, multiple mirrors are used to increase light and extend depth in small, dim spaces. However, an infinity or infinite mirror—created when two or more mirrors are placed across from each other—manifests a series of reflections that appear to reverberate seemingly forever. For this paper, I adopt the infinity mirror as a metaphorical device to assert that reflections of Du Bois' path into a PWI over 130 years ago linger well into the 21st century. Similar to how light assists in manifesting reflections of images

placed before a mirror, I extend the metaphor of the mirror by using racism as the light that aids in sustaining the experiences of Du Bois and four men in the 21st century. By placing images of Du Bois' accounts in front of the mirror, alongside recent experiences of African Americans similar to those encountered by Du Bois, America's protracted legacy of racism throughout generations may be realized. Given that Du Bois' double consciousness theory is an extension of his experiences, I employ it as a zoom lens to focus in and out on the reflections produced, detailing the similarities and differences of "racial injuries" endured by Du Bois and African Americans today in predominantly White music programs in the United States (Solórzano et al. 2000, 63).

### Du Bois' Image

William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois was born in 1868—five years following the *Emancipation Proclamation*—to Alfred and Mary Silvina Du Bois (Du Bois 1968). Du Bois' family was one of few Black families in his predominantly White hometown of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Recalling the beginnings of his life-long battle with racism in a collection of essays titled *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903/2003) revisited a class activity in his childhood elementary classroom that was intended to cultivate a welcoming environment for new students by presenting them with welcome cards. In this particular reflection, Du Bois recounts his interaction with a young, White girl who refused him and his efforts altogether. In that moment he realized that a "vast veil" excluded him from a world that Whites occupied (45). Du Bois further includes that instead of posing the question, "How does it feel to be the problem?" directly, he noted that Whites often frame their racism through poor attempts to shroud their messages among niceties and supposed concerns. For instance, a senior White professor might say to a new, Black junior professor, "Nicholas, he's nice and also a Black professor. You two should get along." Despite these and other racial obstacles, Du Bois went on to become the first African American to graduate from his then majority White high school.

Despite Du Bois' desire to attend Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, after high school, the lack of financial resources prevented him from doing so (Du Bois 1968). With the assistance of members in his church and encouragement from teachers and family, he attended Fisk University, a private HBCU in Nashville, Tennessee. Because of the education he received in

Massachusetts, Du Bois entered Fisk in 1885 as a seventeen-year-old sophomore. Throughout his tenure at Fisk, as a student and post-graduate instructor, Du Bois encountered two worlds, one in which he was seen as a man and fellow citizen, and the other in which he was often viewed and portrayed as subhuman. On campus, he was immersed in a haven of Black culture and excellence, including becoming a member of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. However, beyond the walls of Fisk stood a vastly different reality—daily occurrences of White terrorism against Black bodies and communities. From 1885 to 1894, in addition to scores of mutilations and sexual assault crimes committed against African Americans, approximately 1,700 lynchings went unpunished in America (Du Bois 1968).

Following his completion of a Bachelor of Arts at Fisk in 1888, Du Bois attempted to enter Harvard's graduate program; however, because Harvard deemed Fisk's coursework inadequate, Du Bois was not granted immediate acceptance into their graduate program. Instead, they permitted him to begin his Harvard experience as a junior, embarking on yet another pursuit of a bachelor's degree. In an effort to counter his loneliness and to cultivate experiences similar to those at Fisk, Du Bois set out to audition for the Harvard Glee Club. Hoping his vocal talent and personality would elicit a welcoming response, Du Bois was greeted with blatant racism, as his White peers indicated that they did not want a *nigger* on their team (Anderson 2007). These and other racist incidents shattered all hopes Du Bois had about the north being more enlightened and progressive than the south, as both regions presented Black folks with inhumane and, at times, unbearable realities. Noticing Du Bois' struggles, two well-known American philosophers on the Harvard faculty, William James and Charles Sanders Peirce, came to his aid. James later became Du Bois' mentor and friend, contributing to Du Bois completing a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy with cum laude distinction in 1890.

In 1892, shortly following his initial experience at Harvard, Du Bois was awarded a scholarship to pursue a doctorate at the University of Berlin (now Humboldt University) in Germany. His studies included the phenomenology of consciousness, cultural critique, and the philosophy of history (Lewis 1993). Appiah (2014) likened Du Bois' time in Germany to that of a romantic escape, as his experience in Europe as a Black man was starkly different than his experience in America. He could come and go as he pleased, while enjoying the same social activities and educational experiences as his European colleagues. Du Bois learned that,

similar to how White American schools like Harvard perceived Fisk's curricula, European institutions of higher learning viewed Harvard as an unsuccessful impersonator of their college system. It was in this experience away from home that Du Bois realized that America and its so-called "Negro problem" were acutely unique in the world. Instead of completing his studies in Germany, he returned to Harvard in 1895, where he became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. (Anderson 2007, Du Bois 1968). Du Bois' educational experiences, including others that would follow, became the basis from which he constructed his double consciousness theory and a platform that would inspire the work of civil rights activists and critical race theorists around the world (Delgado and Stefancic 2001).

### Double Consciousness Theory

In *Souls*, Du Bois highlighted his accounts as well as other African Americans' personal encounters with racism in America. Embedded in the first chapter was his double consciousness theory, a theoretical framework illustrating African Americans' experience of grappling with a psycho-social division of personal and social self, instigated by the colorline, or racism, a transparent yet permanent barrier separating self from the rest of the world (Du Bois 1903/2003; Upegui-Hernandez 2009). Du Bois also employed the idea of "the veil" as a metaphorical tool, disclosing African Americans' wrestling with being Black and becoming an American. Dissimilar to their White counterparts, for African Americans, this *being* and *becoming* never consolidates, but manifests into a dual consciousness from which they must view themselves, both through their own eyes and those of Whites. Du Bois articulates the following:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903/2003, 9)

Du Bois warned America that if it failed to act, the colorline would endure. Today, over 115 years later, critical race theorists and researchers (Delgado and

Stefancic 2001; Dixson and Rousseau 2005; Hacker 1992; Ladson-Billings 1998; Omi and Winant 1994; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000; Stroter, Mienko, Chang, Miyawaki, and Schultz 2012; Winant 2004) assert that not only does the colorline persist, but African Americans continue to grapple with what Du Bois refers to as “a peculiar sensation”—double consciousness.

### *Images of African Americans in the 21st Century*

Employing Du Bois’ experiences of negotiating his path into predominantly White higher education spaces and his theoretical model as a reflective framework, I assert that not only does the colorline persist well into the 21st century, but that racism has found safe harbor in our music programs in higher education (Bradley 2017, 2007; Dixson 2012; Koza 2008). These spaces have been often assumed, perceived, and celebrated as anti-racist and inclusive (McCall 2015, 2018). To provide evidence of the aforementioned, I revisit my dissertation where I investigated how academic, cultural, social, and racial aspects of college experience influenced degree perseverance among eight African American men transitioning from an undergraduate music program at an HBCU to a graduate music program at a PWI (McCall 2015). Data revealed that when compared to challenges associated with academic, cultural, and social aspects of their undergraduate experience, race and racism played a significant role in the shaping of participants’ experiences of their respective predominantly White graduate music programs.

For this paper, I use critical storytelling, a mode of narrative inquiry, to highlight how four *images* (the narratives of four men from my dissertation)<sup>1</sup> mirror Du Bois’ experience of negotiating his path into a predominantly White graduate program. Similar to the storytelling rationale of critical race theory, critical storytelling affords individuals a place from which to unapologetically unpack the world from their viewpoint, empower others to do the same, and provoke actions to construct socially just and equitable power relations (Barone 2001, Ladson-Billings 1998). Critical stories have the potential to incite deep thought about one’s own participation in the world, particularly from someone else’s viewpoint, as well as the potency to influence how an individual might move forward to make the world a better place for others (Barone 2001, 1992; Delgado 1989). Critical storytelling positions the storyteller to disclose stories so provocative and rich the reader has no choice but to wrestle with challenges associated with a reality not belonging to

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them. As an African American woman, I identify deeply with the images included in this manuscript, as I, too, have negotiated similar experiences. Because of my personal connection with these narratives, coupled with the fact that Black stories in music education have rarely been told by members of the Black community, I am compelled to undertake the professional and personal responsibility of telling the stories highlighted in this paper (Barrett and Stauffer 2009, 22). While participants' stories intermingle with my own, as a narrative researcher, my goal for this paper is to represent participants' accounts of their lived experiences, illuminate how certain truths—when provided with a supportive platform to share them—can assist in uncovering profound, authentic narratives that have either gone ignored or untold, and instigate long overdue change and reform in music programs at PWIs. However, I must note that the responsibility I assume here entails not only a labor of research, but also an emotional labor that might not exist, had a predominantly White readership deployed anti-racist efforts early on to realize systemic change.

#### Karl's Image

Karl was born in 1963, making him the oldest participant at the time of the study. His family lived in Cowell, Maryland, a large city outside of Baltimore. Karl's parents were both college graduates. Following military enlistment, his father earned a divinity degree at Binder University (BU), a predominantly Black HBCU in his hometown. His mother earned degrees in drama and musical theater, respectively, from Hughes College for Women and Kerr University, both PWIs. She later earned a Ph.D. in theater from Kerr. After completing her doctorate, she briefly taught at Ruffin State University, another local HBCU, and retired as a professor of theater at BU. Early in his childhood, Karl's father insisted he understand the world: Blacks have to be twice as good as White people to make it, despite the fact that the payoff would be half of what they deserved. This sentiment stemmed from his father's experiences of living as a Black man in America and serving in the segregated U.S. Army. Karl initially lived in a majority Black neighborhood, but his family later relocated to a predominantly White community following his tenth birthday. He participated throughout his youth in the Cowell Youth Orchestra program as a percussionist, receiving additional instruction in music theory and aural skills, and took private lessons from the in-house percussion teacher, Mr. Marcus. Karl

admired his percussion teacher as a great musician and as an advocate of all things Black. He also participated in Black events facilitated by the BU drama department.

In 1980, Karl enrolled in Binder University (BU) after learning that Mr. Marcus accepted a professorship there. He did well in his classes and participated in a number of student organizations, including the marching band, Kappa Kappa Psi (KKPsi), and Phi Mu Alpha (PMA) Sinfonia. Karl graduated from Binder in 1984. One year after completing his undergraduate degree, Karl pursued a master's degree in percussion performance at Trapper University (TU), a large PWI in Florida. He was one of two Black students in the master's program. He was known as "the Black guy," as no one bothered to learn his name. During his first year, Karl discovered quickly that his percussion teacher, Dr. Keaton, was not going to help him. Each time Karl entered his studio, Dr. Keaton would abruptly stop sharing information about important upcoming events and opportunities with Karl's White percussion peers. Seeing that he was left to navigate the program alone, Karl constructed his own plan to succeed. He sought out information from peers, faculty, and by meticulously investigating bulletin boards in the school for additional information. In the spring of his second year, he performed an incredibly challenging percussion piece at the annual Modern Music Festival, the same composition his professor performed prior to Karl's arrival. Not only did Karl perform it well, but from memory. Shortly after his performance, Karl learned that his professor attended all the performances of his White peers that day and failed to attend his. Many professors found him to be an anomaly because he was Black, and he came from an HBCU. This was unheard of—a Black student from an HBCU enrolled in a "reputable" White music school. Because Karl was an outstanding percussionist and his work ethic was unparalleled, his professors began asking Karl about other Black HBCU students he knew who might consider attending TU.

To counter TU's lack of racial diversity, Karl and some of his Black graduate friends created the "Black Caucus," an unofficial student organization aimed to provide a safe place for Black students to be themselves. He also walked to Prescott State University (PSU), an HBCU across the train tracks, to seek refuge from "Babylon," Karl's description of TU. He engaged with his KKPsi and PMA brothers and other students who looked like him and shared similar cultural histories, as these interactions were not possible at TU. To add to the neglect Karl and many of his

Black peers experienced, they also witnessed White people's ignorance regularly about Black history. Karl shared the following:

I hear these two [White] guys talking [on the campus shuttle]. One of them had gone to history class and the other had not. So, the one that hadn't gone was asking what happened. The other guy was like, "Well, man. We were talking about some dude. I don't remember his name. I never heard of him before. . . . Ah, Malcolm X." I remember thinking to myself, "How do you get to college and never learn about Malcolm X?" But, I remember someone saying that when you are African American in America, you grow up at the very least bi-cultural. White people, they just don't have to know.

Karl graduated with his master's in 1987. At the time of the study, Karl mentioned that he was speaking with his college-age son about what to anticipate upon entering into a PWI. Similar talks had been given to him by his father.

#### Michael's Image

Michael was 48 years old at the time of the study. He was born in 1966 in a small, rural town in Texas, the oldest of four brothers. Michael's parents' highest level of education was high school. Michael was very active in an all-Black local Boy Scout troop in his community, which was also predominantly Black. As early as the fifth grade, Michael began experiencing what he believed to be racial discrimination, after moving with his family to another small town just outside of McClain, a large city in Texas. Michael wanted to continue his participation in the all-White Boy Scout troop in his new neighborhood but was discouraged from doing so, as none of the boys were hospitable despite his efforts to befriend them. He later discontinued his membership.

All of Michael's educational experiences prior to college were situated in majority-White schools. Michael was a clarinet player among very few African Americans in a mostly White band program. His band director was Mr. Kein, a young, White man with freckles who clearly had his favorites—all of whom were White. Michael was regularly targeted by his band director. For instance, after playing his clarinet in front of the class for a test, Mr. Kein immediately stood over him saying, "Your embouchure is terrible! We're just going to call you 'Jello jaws!'" He took Mr. Kein's insults as motivation to defy him by practicing every chance he got. Despite not having his own instrument and access to private lessons like his White peers, Michael kept first chair in the clarinet section. In the following year, Mr. Kein was

not invited back to teach. Mrs. Butler, a White, young female, immediately replaced Mr. Kein. She later became Michael's high school band teacher. Michael really enjoyed her, as she sought to teach and encourage all her students. Throughout high school, Michael continued to excel in band, making it to the Texas Music Educators Association All-State auditions. He was the only Black student in the entire state to audition that year on bass clarinet. Michael was often perplexed by the lack of Black people participating in music and the lack of Black music being played in marching band, as he knew that many Black musicians were influential in music worldwide.

In 1985, Michael entered his freshman year of college at Kingfield State University (KSU), an HBCU just outside McClain. Michael participated in the marching band. Because he was a great clarinetist and leader, he quickly became the clarinet section leader and president of the symphonic band. He was a member of KKPSi. The band and students on campus were a close-knit community. They looked out for one another and supported each other. However, he discovered racist, conservative communities surrounding the campus. They often displayed disdain for KSU's Black students in public verbal confrontations. In 1990, Michael graduated with honors and began teaching middle school band in McClain.

In 2009, while also teaching full-time, Michael began his master's degree at the University of McClain (UM). While the city of McClain appeared to be accepting and progressive, the university was not. Recalling his first day of class, Michael states:

When I walked into class and looked around, I was like, I'm the only Black person! It was not that I was the only male or one of three males. No, I was the only Black person in there.... I remember ... just doing the coursework. I just had this thing like I have to work five times as hard as everybody else, because they [will expect] me not to know certain things based on the way I look—the skin color thing.

After sharing with his professor that he taught at Capital High School, a large predominantly Black high school in McClain located in a majority Black neighborhood, his professor was astonished, "My goodness, you teach at *that* school?" It appeared that a group of Black teens had mugged Michael's professor while riding his bike to school. While Michael tried to convince him that not all Black kids committed such crimes, his professor found it hard to believe. In conducting class, his White peers "mistakenly" forgot to make copies for him for rehearsals, a

reoccurring event throughout the semester. Michael, the only Black graduate conducting student, ended up sharing with another student of color, a female Latina student. She and a White male peer who taught at an Episcopalian school were the only two students in conducting class who spoke to Michael. Often, he asked himself, “Man, what’s wrong with these White people?” Not only did Michael experience isolation in class, but outside of class as well. No one bothered to speak or have a conversation with him, despite his efforts to reach out to his peers, including students who were supposedly his brothers in KKPsi, all of whom were White. While he met one Latino brother who welcomed him with open arms, Michael came to his conclusion about the University of McClain—Black people were not welcomed.

### Denzel’s Image

Denzel, born in 1984, was 29 years old at the time of the study. He grew up in a predominantly Black community outside of Corman, Georgia. While Denzel’s father did not earn a degree in a traditional sense, he obtained certification as a barber and carpenter upon returning from Vietnam. Denzel’s mother, a retired principal, earned an undergraduate degree from Camden State University, an HBCU in Georgia, a master’s degree from Western State University, and a specialist certificate from Eastern University, both PWIs in Georgia.

Through the Urban Diversity Program, an initiative aimed toward providing students, particularly Black students, access into high-performing schools, Denzel attended a predominantly White middle school. He is the only participant in the study who was bussed to school. While he was one of few African Americans in his middle school, Denzel believes that because he was placed into this program as one of few, he was forced to learn how to deal and network with people who did not always look like him. After middle school, Denzel chose to attend an all-Black high school, where he participated in choir and band. Combined with his interests in learning as well as his parents’ expectations of him, Denzel knew he would go to college. In 2002, because he was awarded academic and music scholarships that fully funded his education, Denzel chose to attend Hawkins University (HU), a large HBCU in a big city in Tennessee. Unlike the other men in this paper, Denzel initially began his undergraduate career as a biology major. He participated in the concert and marching bands. Despite HU often being labeled as a party school,

Denzel believed it took great strides to cultivate a sense of community and belonging among its students. In addition to participating in music ensembles, he was also a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia. Many of his music professors, including Dr. Galloway, the Black marching band director, supported Denzel and encouraged him to pursue his passion for music by performing in ensembles and taking private lessons while completing a biology degree. The faculty made such an impact that Denzel completed his biology degree and returned to pursue a second bachelor's degree in music education, graduating in 2009.

In the following year, Denzel entered the Master of music education program at Greenwood University (GU), a large PWI in Alabama. Despite not initially being offered a graduate assistantship, he chose to attend GU because Dr. Galloway, also an alum, spoke highly about its quality music program. Unlike HU, Greenwood was not located in a large city, nor were the student and faculty populations majority Black. Only one African American professor was in the School of Music. Among five African American students in the School of Music, Denzel was the only full-time graduate student and the only African American in all of his classes. He was welcomed into Phi Mu Alpha, but because of his busy schedule he declined. Many undergraduate music education students enjoyed being around Denzel and speaking with him. In their exchanges, he discovered that GU placed their student teachers only in predominantly White schools. Denzel found this problematic, as he believed that future music teachers should be provided opportunities to teach in many spaces.

Given that Denzel enjoyed learning from others by observing them teach, he attended every rehearsal when his schedule permitted. Taking notice of Denzel's work ethic and interest, the director of the marching band offered him a graduate assistantship that would pay for most of his college costs. After learning of his assignment to the concert band as a graduate assistant (GA), with excitement he quickly reached out through emails to the two other White graduate assistants assigned to the same ensemble to start planning for the spring semester. He received no response from them. Similar to Michael's experiences, the two GAs only made score copies for themselves. They also excluded Denzel from all correspondence pertaining to the concert band and sometimes falsified information in emails, as their goal was to tarnish his reputation and force him to withdraw from the program. To counter what Denzel perceived as racism, he purchased his own scores

and set out to work even harder. Denzel not only excelled in his duties as a GA but earned all As in his classes. Some of his White peers refused to accept the fact that a Black HBCU graduate could surpass them. Other White peers regularly interrogated Denzel about his former teachers and what he did prior to attending GU, as they believed Denzel was out of place. In a study group, one White male peer cornered Denzel saying, “Are trying to make us look bad? You always turn in your assignments early and [the professor] never [returns] any of your writing assignments.” While the student tried to appear as though he was joking, Denzel knew better. He was serious. In response to his experience at GU, Denzel shared the following:

In my mind, I always thought that in music it didn't matter if you were Black or White, everyone could sit down and enjoy a piece of music and talk about it. And [you didn't have] to worry about people judging you and talking about you, you could just enjoy it. I never thought that going into situations like that, you had to think of people doing stuff like that to you or treating you like that, and they don't even know you. That's the thing that kill[ed] me.... [they're] thinking that I'm coming to take away what they have.

### Johnathan's Image

Johnathan was born in 1987, making him the youngest participant in the study. Because of his father's military career, his family moved to a new state every three years. While Johnathan's father did not earn a college degree, he received intensive training and education throughout his military career. Johnathan's mother earned an Associate degree from Mosley State Community College in Cox, Alabama. Johnathan encountered one of the most disappointing experiences while attending an elementary school in Florida. Not only was he placed in special education, but he was often demeaned by his White third grade teacher, who regularly called him stupid. She believed that he was dumb and would never amount to anything. In another instance, the same teacher constantly scolded another young, Black boy because of how he spelled his name, even though he spelled it correctly. While Johnathan did not understand why he and other Black boys were treated differently by his teacher, he had some idea that it was related to his appearance. After relocating to Alabama, Johnathan was suddenly the smartest kid in his class. This particular memory of his past prompted a brief discussion by Johnathan about Carter Woodson's (1933/2010) *The Miseducation of the Negro*, a book detailing

how Blacks were *miseducated* in America's schools in his day. According to Johnathan, this book validated his feelings of frustration and resentment about his primary school experiences.

In middle school, Johnathan participated in band as a saxophonist. He was also someone his peers approached if they wanted to learn the latest hits from the radio, including DMX's "Ruff Rider's Anthem." In his predominantly White high school, Johnathan participated in the marching, concert, and jazz bands, all in which he earned first chair. While he sought to become a section leader in the marching band, he was denied the opportunity because his White band director believed another student who was also White deserved the opportunity to lead, despite the student's inability to connect with his peers. Johnathan realized that sometimes the world does not decide in his favor, even when he deserves it.

After graduating from high school, Johnathan sought to find a university that could offer him a vastly different experience than that of his high school experience. In 2006, Johnathan enrolled in the undergraduate music education program at Sumter Tech University (STU), an HBCU in Alabama. According to Johnathan, only seven White and even fewer international students attended STU. There was only a handful of White professors. Johnathan enjoyed STU and the opportunity to connect with so many different Black students. Because of his exceptional musical skills, Johnathan was awarded a full scholarship. In addition, because of his enlistment into the National Guard after high school, he was able to pay for books and other expenses using his tuition assistance and the GI Bill. Due to Johnathan's outstanding musicianship and ability to quickly learn new concepts, Mr. Nettle, the marching band director who was also Black, provided him with opportunities to lead the band, including arranging music for the band. Outside of his classes and ensembles, Johnathan actively participated in Nu Rho Sigma, the Negro Philharmonic Society of Historically Black Students, and Alpha Phi Alpha.

After graduation in 2011, Johnathan pursued a master's degree in saxophone performance at Stenton University (SU), a PWI located in a large city in Tennessee. Initially, Johnathan assumed that the students would be smarter and far more advanced than him, but to his surprise, academically, he kept up with his peers. In the jazz band, he struggled. He discovered that he would have to spend a great amount of time in the practice room. However, his peers, mostly White, cruised through rehearsals, as many of them came from well-known performance music

programs in the United States. While he knew that at SU he would no longer be a part of a majority Black population, he was shocked to realize that the entire jazz faculty were all White, and that he was one of three Black graduate students in the School of Music. In addition to a sparse number of Black students and the competitive culture of the school, Johnathan struggled to find students with whom to spend time. In comparison to STU, Stenton did not encourage creativity. He was also abandoned by one of his White professors, who told him that he had given up on him. Johnathan offered a critique of SU's goals and objectives:

Honestly, the faculty and student population are very goal oriented. If you weren't much help to where *they* were trying to [go], they didn't have much to say ... there was a way they took the joy out of making music... In the end, [Stenton] just stripped me of all I wanted to do in music. I became a better sax player, but not the way I wanted to.

Many of Johnathan's graduate experiences contributed to a mental breakdown that he experienced. He concluded that if he had to do it all over again, he would not choose to attend SU. Although Johnathan graduated in 2013, he shared with me in his last interview later in the same year that he was still in the process of recovering what Stenton took from him.

### *Reflections of Du Bois*

In this section, I highlight three *reflections* rendered by placing images of Du Bois and the four participants whose stories are included in this article in front of the infinity mirror—their pre-college experiences, undergraduate HBCU experiences, and graduate PWI experiences. Using Du Bois' personal accounts of negotiating his path into a PWI and his double consciousness theory, I illuminate the similarities and differences of racial injuries reverberating in each set of reflections.

#### Reflection One: Pre-college Experiences

Similar to Du Bois, most participants' introduction to racism manifested early in their childhood as racialized encounters instigated by Whites and forewarnings shared by parents. While Du Bois and the participants were not able to fully articulate why these challenges occurred, reflecting back as men, they were confident in identifying the intent of each racist incident. This might be due, in part, to participants' acquiring over time tools such as resistant capital to negotiate racist

encounters, including their graduate PWI experiences (Yosso, 2005). Johnathan's and Michael's White teachers regularly taunted them and other Black students. Due to the isolation and lack of hospitality received as a participating member in an all-White Boy Scout troop in his new neighborhood, Michael ended his membership. Along with other Black boys at his elementary school, Johnathan was placed in special education without any sort of rationale why. After transferring to another school, all of a sudden, he was the smartest kid in his class. This was very disconcerting to Johnathan, as he found his teachers' perceptions about him and other Black students both inaccurate and problematic. Assigning Black students, particularly boys, to special education without reason was one of many examples of how Whites disguised institutional racism as progressive educational efforts. Johnathan's and his peers' experiences parallel with Carter's (1933/2012) proven hypothesis about how strategies of cultural indoctrination were employed throughout America's education system to purposefully control how Blacks' saw themselves and to further slow their progress in obtaining an equal education. Such practices—which continue today—prohibit Black students from realizing their full potential (Craft and Howley 2018, Jordan 2004, Ladson-Billings 2011).

Participants' experiences above mirror Du Bois' depiction in *Souls* of how Blacks are confronted with feelings of being seen as "the problem." According to Du Bois, Black folk are born into two-ness where "the veil," a barrier of exclusion, only permits them to see the other world from afar. I speculate that most African Americans begin negotiating "a peculiar sensation" in their childhood. Because the first episode of racism can be so traumatic and awkwardly unfamiliar, Black folks have no choice but to recall its fine details and devastating impact. For example, I was in kindergarten when I first realized that I could not fully participate in the world my White classmates enjoyed daily. After completing a hand-painting activity, several of my female peers and I were sent to wash our hands in the restroom. Like most children, we played around a great deal with each other. I jokingly acted like I was going to place my paint-filled hands on a White classmate. I did not, but my jovial movements made almost everyone laugh except her. She ran to our teacher, who was also White, with a false story. Instead of listening to my side of the story, she beat me with a meterstick. To this day, my family is unaware this happened to me. By the way, the color of the paint used that day was red.

To provide his son with insight on how best to navigate a world that fundamentally favored Whites, Karl's father pressed upon his son to understand that he would not always receive honest pay for honest, hard work because of the color of his skin. According to Hacker (1992), Black parents, unlike their White counterparts, must pass on this information to their children to ensure their survival and to make sense of the world. Hacker states:

There will be the perplexing—and equally painful—task of having to explain to your children why they will not be treated as other Americans: that they will never be altogether accepted, that they will always be regarded warily, if not with suspicion or hostility. When they ask whether this happens because of anything they have done, you must find ways of conveying that, no, it is not because of any fault of their own. Further, for reasons you can barely explain yourself, you must tell them that much of the world has decided that you are not and cannot be their equals; that this world wishes to keep you apart, a caste it will neither absorb nor assimilate. You will tell your children this world is wrong. But, because that world is there, they will have to struggle to survive, with the scales weighted against them. They will have to work harder and do better, yet the result may be less recognition and reward. We all know life can be unfair. For Black people, this knowledge is not an academic theory but a fact of daily life. (32)

The disappointment Johnathan experienced in high school, resulting from his White band director overlooking his hard work and skillset to promote a White student with lesser qualities, supports Hacker's point about how Whites are rewarded—no matter their deficiencies. Michael found the lack of Black representation among student participation in school music programs, music programming, and support to be quite disheartening. Sparse representations of Black bodies revealed racial disparities that permeated throughout all participants' experiences.

Participants' early bouts with racism mirror Du Bois' double consciousness theory by highlighting how Black folks are introduced to a world that not only "looks on in amused pity and contempt," but one that, in many cases, seeks to establish its dominance early on (Du Bois 1903, 9). I echo Du Bois by asserting that early encounters with racism ignite an internal conflict with self, so much so that one is split into two modes of consciousness. I add that similar to how Du Bois depicts the colorline or racism as the sole conspirator of double consciousness, racism also shines a light today that creates reflections of the racist past encountered by Du Bois.

### Reflection Two: Undergraduate HBCU Experiences

Participants' HBCU experiences were mostly positive, excluding experiences such as traveling off campus. These experiences mirror Du Bois' Fisk episodes of negotiating two worlds—on-campus and off-campus. While one world permanently etched painful memories of trauma and violence into Du Bois' consciousness, the other world presented a counternarrative of intellectual fortitude and cultural pride. During their HBCU experiences, participants were immersed in an environment that encouraged and celebrated Black student interactions and identity. As opposed to their experiences at PWIs, discussed in the following section, students immediately felt welcomed and included in their classes as well as campus culture. Participants chose to attend their respective HBCUs for a number of reasons including affordability, desiring a different cultural and musical experience than that of high school, and to continue music study with a former music teacher. They found that their respective institutions provided social spaces where they and other students could fellowship and interact with one another, and just be Black. In the marching band, they formed strong friendship and family bonds with other students that continue today. Additionally, participants joined Greek and music organizations, further extending their bonds of friendship and fraternal ties with other young Black men. While Du Bois is noted to be one of the most famous members of Alpha Phi Alpha, he did not become a member until 1909, three years after it was established and seven years after earning his Ph.D. Although many professors were strict and demanded their best, participants appreciated their tough love and commitment to every student, as both motivated them to succeed, work hard, and give back to the Black community.

These findings align with research examining African Americans' undergraduate experiences at HBCUs and how these schools aim to cultivate a culture of care, belonging, and empowerment as a collective hallmark of student success (Felder 2010, Allen 1992). Connecting to the latter, Black students at HBCUs are more engaged in campus and classroom culture than their Black peers attending PWIs (Guiffrida and Douthit 2011; Chen, Ingram, and Davis 2006), as faculty members at HBCUs regularly encouraged students to assume leadership roles and welcomed them to engage in collaborative learning projects. For instance, Johnathan's professors not only supported and mentored him, they encouraged him to assume leadership roles and to work alongside them in arranging tunes his peers would

later perform. Scholars assert that these and other assets and opportunities offered at HBCUs, geared toward emboldening cultural competence and self-efficacy, incite motivation among students to succeed academically (Allen and Jewell 2002, Allen 1992). Dissimilar to their pre-college and PWI experiences in the following section, Du Bois' and the participants' HBCU experiences—excluding those taking place off campus—reverberated glowing reflections free of racial discrimination, racial injury, and exclusion.

### Reflection Three: Graduate PWI Experiences

When compared to their HBCU experiences, African Americans negotiate a starkly different campus terrain and climate at PWIs. Some experiences include but are not limited to racism, microaggressions, exploitation, and isolation. These challenges are often compounded in graduate study at PWIs due to a lack of Black student support and sparse representations of Black students, faculty, and administrators (Felder 2010; Shears, Lewis, and Furman 2004). However, participants reported that they regularly encountered racism from their White peers and professors. Several of Michael's and Denzel's White, male classmates attempted many times to sabotage their success and reputation in their music programs. Not only was Michael not welcomed by most of his White peers, he was alienated by his own fraternity brothers. From physically cornering him to intentionally excluding him from important correspondence to fabricating emails, Denzel's White peers purposefully sought to intimidate him, hoping he would drop out. In addition, they constantly questioned his legitimacy and presence in the program. This mirrors the cynicism and racism Du Bois and other participants faced upon entering their PWIs. Instead of embracing the knowledge and skills he brought with him from his HBCU, Karl's White professors dismissed him completely. This was especially true of his percussion professor, who refused to provide him the same information and support he willingly gave his White students. Karl's professors' failure to embrace or acknowledge his skills parallels Yosso's (2005) work about how some individuals' knowledge and cultural capital is often dismissed by those whose capital is largely celebrated in majority White spaces. Denzel's frustration in response to the racism and White fear he encountered aligns with that of Du Bois' (1903/2013):

[The American Negro] would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of White Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (8).

This mirrored viewpoint presents a historical yet critical perspective of how African Americans wish to be treated as fellow citizens, just as Whites do, and embraced for the gifts they bring to the table.

To many of his peers and professors, Karl was simply “the Black guy” from *that* school. Only after noticing his exceptional work ethic and musical abilities did Karl’s professors begin to take an interest. Their interest did not result in celebrating or embracing him, but rather, their interest fueled a desire to further their own agendas by exploiting Karl and other prospective Black, HBCU music students. In addition, Karl’s assumptions about White people’s negligence of Black history was often confirmed. Michael’s professor’s broad categorization of Black youth, coupled with his devaluing of predominantly Black schools, illuminated his racist, narrow views about Black people. These views align with what critical race scholars articulate as essentialism, “a belief that all people perceived to be in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways” (Ladson-Billings 2013, 40, see also Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Such assumptions can be dangerous and may possibly result in violence and/or death. Many Whites, particularly White women, have been noted to fabricate narratives based on essentialized views to categorize Black people, especially Black men and young boys, as criminal predators. In 1955, a White woman’s false story resulted in the ruthless murder of Emmett Louis Till, a 14-year-old Black boy. Similar essentialized stories continue today and have resulted in police brutality, incarceration, and/or death (Alexander 2011, Bonilla-Silva 2010, Coates 2015, Lowe, Stroud, and Nguyen 2016, Welch 2007). Johnathan, the youngest participant at the time of the study, also encountered harsh experiences, including being told by his applied studies professor that he had given up on him. Similar to the motivations of Karl’s professors, Johnathan’s music program only aimed to use him for their advancement. His goals and perspectives were not of their concern. He felt trapped in a space that simultaneously emboldened a culture of competitiveness and sameness, while discouraging creativity and other music viewpoints. Johnathan also anticipated not being able

to keep up with his White peers upon entering into his graduate program. Earlier disheartening experiences, such as those he experienced in elementary school, might provide clarity as to why Johnathan perceived himself as inferior. This mirrors Du Bois' experiences of wrestling with how racism and its pervasive nature deepens self-skepticism.

Karl was the only participant who sought out and constructed safe spaces for himself and other Black students on campus and at a nearby HBCU. For other participants and Du Bois, their safe spaces were often within the confines of their own living quarters. Similar to the proximity of Karl's PWI to the HBCU he regularly visited, many HBCUs are within a stone's throw of PWIs. For example, The University of Houston, a PWI, is a short walk across the light rail in downtown Houston, Texas to Texas Southern University (TSU), an HBCU. While TSU is not a land-grant institution, many HBCUs were established because of the Second Morrill Act of 1890, which required states that supported a dual, segregated system to provide and maintain at least one land-grant institution serving Black students equivalent to that of a White institution (Redd 1998). Legislative mandates such as this and others like the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), I believe, contribute to a shared experience of neglect and marginalization among many Blacks. While HBCUs were created as a result of the Second Morrill Act, they have yet to acquire the appropriate resources and support needed to be truly equal (Crewe 2017, Rashid 2011).

Like Du Bois, every participant faced blatant racism and oppressive structures that made their experiences at PWIs incredibly difficult. These resemblances present uncanny reflections of Du Bois' experiences, so much so that if certain qualifiers such as name, time, and place were removed, it would be difficult to distinguish which story or fragments of participants' stories belonged to whom and in what century. While participants successfully obtained their graduate degrees, similar to Du Bois, their reflections suggest that none of them escaped their respective PWI without racial injury. This is particularly true of Johnathan, as the trauma he endured resulted in a mental breakdown. I speculate that every participant continues to navigate a world and profession framed by White supremacy. In the following section, I provide suggestive measures about how predominantly White music programs should work to *dim* the light of racism by dismantling their own

racist culture from within, to provide Black students safer, anti-racist learning spaces.

### Dimming the *Light* of Racism, Anti-racist Work

Images of Du Bois and the participants in this project, reflected in an infinity mirror, show not only that much of the Black college student experience remains the same, but also that institutions must move beyond business as usual to deny reflections of our past place in the 21st century and beyond. Doing so means that institutions must embrace more robust methods such as anti-racist work to tackle all forms of racism (e.g., individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural). In the attempt to further extend my use of metaphor, I call this dimming the *light* of racism. Now, some readers might ask, “Instead of dimming the light of racism, why don’t we just get rid of it altogether?” While I wish that was the case, it is neither realistic nor responsible. Racism cannot be eliminated with one fell swoop, and we must not be naïve to the fact that racism is endemic in American culture (Dixson and Rousseau 2005). Like critical race scholars, we must become vigilant in examining and acknowledging the many subtle and insidious ways in which racism persists in addition to the burning of crosses, hanging of nooses, and wearing of swastikas and white hoods. To gain an in-depth understanding of the pervasiveness of racism and how to unearth it, PWIs must take up a mantle of honesty, active listening, inclusion, and commitment. These institutions must acknowledge that their spaces are not and have not been safe for all students but rather hostile mine fields of racial injustice, exclusion, and violence. PWIs, particularly their music programs, should recognize that their efforts to challenge White supremacy and increase diversity may be interpreted by minoritized racial populations as yet another lash of interest convergence, meaning that when the interests of certain groups of individuals, in this case Blacks, overlap with those of Whites, then and only then will their interests matter (Bell 1980, DeCuir and Dixson 2004, Ladson-Billings 2013, Yosso, et al. 2004). For instance, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) has often been cited as one of the most successful court cases to alter the racial terrain of K–12 public schools in the United States. However, while the ruling of *Brown* was presented on the surface as a means of responding to the educational neglect African Americans experienced, underneath it all, *Brown* was used as a ploy to advance a one-sided agenda resulting in the displacement of Black

students, administrators, and staff, and the liquidation of Black K-12 schools and later HBCUs (Bell 1980, Richardson and Harris 2004, Yosso et al. 2004). *Brown* was also used as a tool to bolster the world's view of America as a global leader against racism. Simply put, desegregation, self-preservation, and optics took priority over equal education.

In the last few decades, PWIs have emerged as super-advocates and supporters of affirmative action, arguing that marginalized racial populations, including White females, further diversify their campuses. These institutions contend that the diversity rationale provides at minimum three benefits for all students: “1) cross-racial understanding that challenges and erodes racial stereotypes, 2) more dynamic classroom discussions, and 3) better preparation for participating in a diverse workforce” (Yosso, et al. 2004, 8). Based on the stories mentioned in this paper, this rationale is nothing short of moot. The diversity-rationale re-centers Whiteness by ushering minoritized racial populations into White institutions simply for the purpose of “helping White students become more racially tolerant, to liven up class dialogue, and prepare White students for getting a job in a multicultural, global economy” (8). So, the questions PWIs should ask are, “Whom are we *really* here for? Some or all?” The light of racism that creates reflections of our distant and recent past suggests that PWIs continue to underwrite a history and perpetuate structures that largely serve White students. To disrupt such dynamics, institutions must interrogate disparities created by their attempts to diversify their campuses at the cost of inclusion. Questions might include: 1) Besides a college degree, what other benefits might my institution provide minoritized racial populations that would prove helpful prior to and following their departure? and 2) Is my institution's relationship with minoritized racial populations an equal partnership or a one-way pipeline where only we benefit? While I speculate that most PWIs will struggle to respond to these questions honestly and deeply, rather than in a way that paints them in the best and most positive view, I believe these sort of inquiries are bold steps to understanding how PWIs might move to enact sustainable anti-racist efforts (i.e., establish a culture of care for all students, reconceptualize broader definitions of success, examine and reimagine campus power dynamics, mandate critical consciousness development, and build culturally relevant curricular designs). If institutions are truly interested in ensuring all students' success, it is incumbent upon them to look at themselves in the full light of racism,

pinpointing and owning up to their oppressive histories, then self-correcting and sustaining their efforts as a means of beginning to dim the light of racism.

While some faculty may perceive anti-racist work to be daunting because of the pushback they may receive from students, colleagues, and administrators, one of the most accessible ways of engaging is getting know your students. Echoing Yosso and other critical race scholars (2004), institutions must seek and actively listen to the stories of marginalized racial populations, as doing so affords opportunities “to fully understand the ways in which race and racism shape educational institutions and maintain various forms of discrimination” (15). Dissimilar to Du Bois’ professors, William James and Charles Sanders Peirce, none of the PWI professors of the four participants in this article checked in on them. Merely admitting Black students into predominantly White music programs without checking in on their experiences and helping to facilitate their success adds to an already growing narrative about how PWIs exploit Black students for their own gain. This was certainly true of Johnathan’s and Karl’s experiences. I strongly encourage institutions to hear all students, as storytelling or “naming one’s own reality” provides individuals a platform to share the nuances of racist incidents that go unnoticed by those who are often on the giving end (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995, 56). When critical voices of Black students are absent or few, PWIs should not simply assume that only these select few were good enough to enter into their programs. Instead, institutions should investigate how their structures, practices, and curricular limitations may prohibit access, discourage students from applying, or pressure students to dropout, even when they are more than qualified to remain in the program.

None of the participants in this study reported their racial injuries to any university administrator, faculty, or staff. I speculate that their choice not to report may be due, in part, to their understandings about how Black voices have historically been either ignored, silenced, or disposed of. Additionally, for many Black students and other minoritized racial populations, reporting may be quite challenging, especially when the student is one of few or the only Black student in a program or school, even though we are living in what has been perceived and celebrated as a so-called “post-racial era.” Denzel states:

How do you report something like this in the twenty-first century? People assume that everything is okay for everyone and it’s not. Yeah, we’ve come a long way, but we have so far to go. It’s hard to explain to people who don’t deal with these things on a daily basis. If you’re not Black, you don’t really get it.

While White people may not fully comprehend what it is like to be Black on America's college campuses in the 21st century, the inability to grasp this state of being does not exempt them from searching for understanding. For example, given that scholarship about race, racism, and Black history extends back as far as 130 years, most American institutions of higher learning should already have access to a wealth of resources on their campuses, including scholarship in the areas of study such as African American and African Diaspora Studies, Anthropology, Law, Sociology, and Education, to name a few. PWIs should study and use these materials to come to terms with how they have historically jeopardized the learning and well-being of Black students.

The stories of four Black men in this paper underline a highly problematic issue in predominantly White music programs—the problem of whose culture and knowledge matters most (Yosso 2005). Similar to Harvard's denial of Du Bois' Fisk education, participants were met by White students and faculty who often questioned their belonging and perceived them as inferior, largely because they were Black and graduates of HBCU music programs. Two other participants from my dissertation shared invaluable insights about how predominantly White music programs often fail to look beyond their own ego and self-preservation to appreciate Black students and HBCUs. One stated:

There is not a person who enrolls in a [predominantly White] graduate [music] program with the intention to dropout. They go with the intention to learn... Don't just assume that he or she should have learned what you are attempting to teach [them] in undergrad. Also, don't assume that because HBCU graduates weren't able to get certain information, that their programs are inferior. That's not the case... You have a person in front of you with the potential to work hard. Don't limit them by saying, "Oh, you don't understand this information, so you are out of the program or you need remediation or whatever." ... No, what we should be saying is, "What should we be doing to mold this student?"

The other participant included additional thoughts:

Some of the students that you are getting from HBCUs were big fish in [a] small pond, and it's not up to you to break them and say, "You're not that good!" ... You're getting the cream of the crop from these HBCUs... These [are] the focused ones, so now you have very focused and intently minded students who know exactly what they want to do, but don't know just exactly how to get there.

Music schools at PWIs must acknowledge that they are not the only music experts. HBCUs and African Americans have contributed exponentially to the

creation, performance, analysis, and innovation of music. Not only should PWIs embrace Black students, HBCUs and their expertise, they should also seek their leadership and counsel on how best to erect spaces designed to care for, empower, and engage Black students.

Among White institutions of higher learning, Black students are expected to meet the same academic expectations as their White peers, while simultaneously navigating a world that collectively views them as insignificant. During his tenure at Fisk, in addition to tackling his studies, Du Bois negotiated the relentless effects of a then Jim Crow South. Nearly 100 years later, during Karl's and Michael's college experiences, the American government assumed a largely neutral role in South Africa's apartheid as well as in its own crack-cocaine epidemic targeting racially marginalized communities (Canzater 2017, Evans, Garthwaite, and Moore 2016, Netherland and Hansen 2016). Both apartheid and the crack-cocaine epidemic claimed the lives of tens of thousands through mass incarceration and death (Alexander 2011). Interestingly, in America's recent opioid crisis, which disproportionately impacts Whites more than marginalized racial communities, the government has proved more responsive and not as quick to condemn (Canzater 2017). Prior to and following his election, Barack Obama, the first Black President of the United States, and his family endured countless racial attacks (Obama 2018), similar to many attacks which occurred throughout participants' undergraduate and graduate experiences. In 2012, Johnathan's second year of his PWI experience, George Zimmerman, a White man, murdered Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old, Black boy in Florida. Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges and released the following year. Not only did participants in this paper negotiate academic rigors and White supremacy in their predominantly White music programs, but they also grappled with how the world perceived, devalued, and squandered Black bodies.

From the *Emancipation Proclamation* (1863) to the *Higher Education Act* (1965) to the *White House Initiative on HBCUs* (1980) to now, the United States and its institutions of higher learning have fallen far short of balancing the scales of "equality and justice for all." Instead of covering up or shattering the *infinity mirror* that reflects the persistence of racism on their campuses, carrying on as if their pasts never existed, PWIs must look at themselves in that same mirror, identifying and addressing the many ways in which they have participated in

maintaining the systemic, racist culture they perpetuate and shelter. Doing so means that they must make a serious commitment to prioritizing an agenda of inclusiveness, proactiveness, and, most importantly, strategizing efforts and implementing actions that are common sense, self-reflective, and responsive to the needs of their students. The latter is critical, as looking squarely into the mirror and, in the full light of racism, assessing the many ways that institutions can improve their spaces for the betterment of all students, is essential to realizing change. I could argue for more diversity training, broader initiatives, sustainable resources, expansive research and policies, and better administrative leadership; however, if our institutions are not ready to seriously and intently commit to improving their spaces through action, the former is inconsequential to the latter. While some may conveniently argue that, unlike their White counterparts, HBCUs may be inherently positioned to cultivate inclusive spaces because of their historical majority Black student and faculty populations, let us not forget that PWIs, in part, made them that way by initiating and cultivating a history of exclusion and White supremacy.

Du Bois' experiences stand not only as a prototype of a continued legacy of racism, they also foreshadow America's sustained negligence of African Americans. It has been over 130 years since Du Bois entered Harvard, and the reflections of his experiences mirrored today feel, for many, as if we have yet to move forward. In 1903, Du Bois posed the question, "How does it feel to be the problem?" troubling Whites' attempts to underhandedly situate their own racism. In the 21st century, Michael asks, "What is wrong with these White people?" Like Du Bois, he locates the problem, but makes no attempt to mince words. Du Bois warned America that if it failed to address the colorline, then racism will persist. Well, here we are. If PWIs' failure to *dim the light* of racism endures, inescapably Black folk, particularly those who are college students, will continue to wrestle their way through unsafe, racist spaces that will undoubtedly underwrite and resound narratives mirroring "a peculiar sensation."

## About the Author

Joyce McCall is an assistant professor of music learning and teaching at Arizona State University where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses such as introduction to research, critical race theory and the Arts, and culturally relevant pedagogy in music teaching. Her research—positioned within the context of frameworks like critical race theory and double consciousness theory—centers on how race and culture impact equity in music learning and teaching and throughout the music education profession. She also examines how the use of culturally relevant pedagogy influences student success in the music classroom. McCall is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated and Sigma Alpha Iota International Music Fraternity for Women, and has proudly served in the United States Army Bands from 1999 to 2013.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> All participants' names, schools, and towns were replaced with pseudonyms.