

INTELLECTUAL VOCATION AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN THE TRUMP MOMENT

- *Dr. Cornel West**

I have no monopoly on truth you can see and I have no monopoly on beauty either, but I am involved in a quest for truth and goodness and justice and as a Christian based on that rich prophetic legacy of Jerusalem, love of the holy. So I want to begin on a very personal note, a very existential note before we get into talking about vocation and struggle, my dear brother Donald Trump in the White House, and he is my brother, he is made in the image of God just like just like all of us. He has just chosen to act like a gangster. I was a gangster before I met Jesus and I'm a redeemed sinner with gangster proclivities so I could say I understand gangsters!

But I want to get on this note of acknowledging that wonderful introduction that: I am who I am because somebody loved me, somebody cared for me, and somebody targeted me. I take very seriously a revolutionary notion of piety and piety is not uncritical deference to dogmas, not blind obedience to doctrine. It is the acknowledgment of the sources of good in our lives given our brief trek from our mama's womb to tomb. So the highest honor I have ever received has nothing to do with Harvard, Yale, Princeton or the University of Paris or the grand Union Theological Seminary, but it is being the second son of Irene B. West and Clifton West. And dad passed away 24 years ago. Mom stronger than ever; first-grade teacher, principal at an elementary school named after her: Irene B. West, right outside of Sacramento, California. And I say that because when we talk about the Trump era we have to follow our Amilcar Cabral and Amy Suelzer, returning to the source; what kind of human beings are we really and what has gone into the shaping and molding of who we all are, what Antonio Gramsci called an historical, critical self-inventory: What kind of intellectual, spiritual, moral political resources do we have available

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both as persons as well as communities and traditions. And I followed the grand lead of my teacher Hans-Georg Gadamer (blessed to study under him for four years at the Boston College), author of *Truth and Method*.

The inescapability of traditions and I say traditions with an ‘S’ because Fredric Jameson is right: you historicize, you contextualize and you pluralize, and that's true with ourselves as well. Not one of us have one identity but a variety of identities as we attempt to choose certain visions, virtues and values. So yes, it is the West family and the Shiloh Baptist Church on that chocolate side of Sacramento at Ninth Avenue in Oak Park. We had a legendary pastor, Willie P. Cook. And he was a pastor, not a CEO. That's very important. Churches have been commodified, commercialized and marketised since some pastors became CEOs and some choirs became praise teams, and when the blood at the Cross became Kool-Aid just to dip in, in order to get your next commodity-driven blessing. I want to be candid of where I come from. The Black Panther Party right next door meant the world to me in terms of those precious children coming to the breakfast program. I could never join because I'm a Jesus lover and a free black man but I was in deep solidarity and remained so with the focus on those poor, precious, priceless children. And even today one out of two black and brown children under six live in poverty in the richest nation in the world: still morally obscene, still spiritually profane. It was not just Shiloh and the Black Panther Party but also Harvard College, where the teachers made a difference. The John Rawls and the Robert Nozicks and the Hilary Putnams and the Israel Schefflers and the Samuel Beers and the Martin Kilsos and the Preston Williams and Judith Slars. They took me seriously and we were talking about this dialogue with the young folk. By the time I arrived at Harvard, I already had in place a certain kind of spiritual fortitude and by fortitude I don't mean just courage but diffusion of courage and magnanimity of courage and a quest for greatness of character; greatness manifests not like Alexander the Great, not like Julius Caesar, not like Charlemagne, not like Napoleon but like Jesus, like Amos, like Martin Luther King Jr., like Fannie Lou Hamer, like Grace Lee Boggs, like Dorothy Day, like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, like Edward Said. I could go on and on and I'm talking about people on the love train.

Love warriors are different from polished professionals. O, young brothers and sisters of all colors here at Dartmouth! Always remember the difference between what it means to really fall in love, the quest for truth and goodness and beauty as opposed to falling in love with commodities, possessions and status; and we all fall short. Samuel Beckett says, “*Try again and fall; fail again and fail better.*” But in the moment in which we find ourselves today, we need a focus on those particular traditions - secular and religious - that

highlight a quest for integrity, honesty, decency, fortitude, courage and magnanimity. That's why I want to begin with my epigraph which I haven't got to yet. My epigraph comes from probably the greatest Democratic and public intellectual in the history of the American Empire in the 20th century. He has got some candidates. John Dewey was a league of his own in many ways; Edmund Wilson and Susan Sontag, Muriel Rukeyser, Lionel Trilling, Reinhold Niebuhr were some candidates. But I still go with W.E.B. Du Bois.

W.E.B. Du Bois, in 1951, stood handcuffed in court working with the World Peace Center, charged to be working as a foreign agent on behalf of the Soviet Union in just trying to rid the world of nuclear weapons. He was supported by Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell and others. He finally found a house in the greatest borough in the world: 31 Grace Court, Brooklyn, New York, which was the house of the great Arthur Miller, my dear brother, who I was blessed to know well, who was a towering figure, not just of the stage but of American Arts. Miller facilitated Du Bois moving into his house. His passport was taken away and had one visitor Paul Robeson whose passport was taken away too and who was living under house arrest in Philadelphia at his sister's house 4645 Walnut Street, Philadelphia. De Bois turns to his wife Shirley who was no lesser an intellectual firebrand and said that *"I have got to write a letter to the younger generation because there may come a time in the history of this fragile experiment in democracy in this Empire and we have to be able to think two ideas at the same time: fragile experiment in democracy and the Empire simultaneously which had got to be true to the experiences of indigenous peoples and black peoples and red peoples with moving borders when Texas and California, New Mexico (used to be Mexico) and we've got to be true to the experiences of those Europeans some of whom were escaping vicious persecution be it religious persecution with the wave of the first waft or be it ugly, ethnic, racial, class persecution and exclusion that our precious Irish brothers and sisters faced under British Imperial policies that helped facilitate famines or be it those Southern Italians in Sicily and other places, be it the Jewish brothers and sisters escaping Jew-hating Europe and Jew hating Russia."* W.E.B. De Bois says, *"I'm going to write a love letter because America may have to come to terms with another wave of the rule of big money, big business, big corporations. America may have to come to terms with the rule of politicians who are able to very cleverly deploy xenophobic appeal and end up trying to convince our fellow citizens to scapegoat the most vulnerable rather than confront the most powerful."* America may have to come to terms with that spiritual blackout that Brother Andrew was talking about. The relative eclipse of integrity, honesty, decency and courage and fortitude across political and ideological lines. It's not a question of just having a correct analysis. It's the question of being a caring, compassionate and a self-critical human being who is in the

struggle for the long term. De Bois embarks on the writing of three novels and that's something at 83 years old.

The love letter that he writes is three novels. *The Black Flame*. You turn to that first novel, *The Ordeal of Man's Heart*, page 275 where he writes, “*These are the questions that I've been wrestling with and I hope those of the younger generation will continue to wrestle with these questions in subsequent years as they come to terms with various forms of the neoliberal order*”, but it looks as if what's emerging is a neo-Fascist regime. We shall see. We've got evidence of it already. Disregard of rule of law, disregard of constitutional practices and procedures and so on.

First question De Bois says is, “*how shall integrity face oppression?*” Now De Bois already acknowledges that he himself comes from a tradition of black people who have been terrorized for 400 years, traumatized for 400 years, hated for 400 years and yet have taught the world so much about how to love. I just celebrated the 100th anniversary of Ella Fitzgerald, joy and love in every note. John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, I could just turn it on and sit down. It's true. It's beyond language. Has there ever been a character on the American stage who was more loved than Mama in a Raisin in the Sun, written by a genius from Chicago named Lorraine Hansberry? Transgenerational love flowing through her with unbelievable dignity and we should note, those who are graduating here at Dartmouth very soon as I salute you, congratulations, but momma didn't go to college, but a college went through her. So what do you mean, Brother West? She said, “*Nobody has a right to graduate from college if they haven't learned how to die in order to learn how to live.*” And that's what mama did. She learned how to die by critically examining her assumptions and presuppositions and when you let go of some of those assumptions and presuppositions go, when you let go of certain prejudices and prejudgments go, that's a form of death. There's no growth, there's no maturation. There's no development. Now as a Christian of course for me, no rebirth without death, that wonderful eulogy that Dorothy Day wrote for Martin Luther King Jr. on April 5th, 1968. Martin Luther King Jr. learned how to die daily. What a gift! Kenosis: emptying himself by critically examining who he was so that he could grow and ascend. Now of course Stanley Cavell and others called it ‘Emersonian perfectionism’. The ascension of the self, the reliance on the self, in order to be what? In the world but not of the world, a nonconformist against the world as you never attain the ultimate self that you would like, but you're forever in process. That's called the Emersonian New England-like version of Protestant Christianity. That's really what it is and Christians certainly have no monopoly on it. It is a certain way of being in the world. Integrity facing oppression and the first challenge is spiritual integrity. What is spiritual integrity? It is a thoroughgoing self-investment and self-involvement in a willingness to understand a particular

situation in light of its genealogy, in light of its diagnosis and the projection of a prognosis. In a fallible mode, you could be wrong, but then choosing as a form of life that the conclusion will be like a practical Aristotelian syllogism - not a proposition, but a life lived. Deeds, actions, taking risk, going to the edge of one's own abyss and through a connection with the best of one's tradition, stepping out on nothing and yet still landing on something. De Bois came from a people who taught the world so much about the connection between voice and vocation and love and as Martin Luther King Jr. used to say, "*Justice being what love looks like in public*". Justice and love may not be identical but are certainly indivisible. As the great Reinhold Niebuhr used to say, "*Any justice that's only justice soon degenerates into something less than justice.*" If it's not grounded in love it runs out of gas. De Bois was very aware and juxtaposed integrity, cupidity, love of money, venality, everybody for sale, everything for sale, the ubiquitous commodification across the board from family, church, mosque, synagogue, university, college. The market model has become so hegemonic that it is normalized and naturalized and De Bois says, "*Be Socratic. Contest it, interrogate it, examine it, historicize it, and contextualize it. It doesn't have to be that way.*" And one of the reasons why we ended up with the xenophobic, mendacious and mediocrity as a kind of quasi-complement to Brother Trump is because America does have a long tradition of white male mediocrity in high places. There's absolutely no doubt about that. Family connections, cronyism and nepotism but Trump makes that look bad and that's just at the level of knowledge and competence. It's not even at the level of what I call gangster: grabbing a woman's private parts or taking somebody's oil that's not your oil. That's not my subjective expression, that's an objective condition. The use of arbitrary power thinking that Lysimachus is right in the republic rather than Socrates, thinking somehow that even quasi-Nietzschean wills to power don't work. A certain kind of interrogation because of a lack of moral and spiritual dimensions, that's gangster, and that has become a model for too many in the American Empire and around the world and De Bois says, "*what about integrity? What about moral consistency? Has stupidity and venality so thoroughly devoured our culture that those who talk about integrity are outdated and antiquated?*"

It's certainly countercultural. How much integrity do we see in corporate media? Hardly any at all. Too much money. It's how you sit in the church. Black church. Where has the Black church has been in the last 25-30 years? Dominant form and well-adjusted to injustice, well adapted to indifference. The most adorable of all public philosophers William James used to say, "*Indifference is the one trait that makes the very angels weep.*" Heschel says, "*indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself because it becomes a whole way of life.*" That's what we're dealing with, young people. That's what has been bequeathed to you at its worst. But De

Bois is trying to keep track of your access to the best, that Socratic legacy of Athens that said that an unexamined life is not worth living in section 38a of Plato's Apology. That said that you might be unpopular, but it ought to be a result like Socrates' Parrhesia, that line 24a of Plato's Apology. That frank speech, plain speech, and fearless speech, unintimidated speech in a fallible mode but still a speech that would get you in trouble. He was on his way to the hemlock. That prophetic legacy of Jerusalem that says the spreading of acid of loving kindness to the orphan and widow and the fatherless and motherless, to the vulnerable, the weak, the poor, those rebuked and scorned and spit on, and dishonored and devalued then demeaned. Yes, De Bois says, "*we somehow have to keep the traditions alive that connect to those legacies.*"

And of course the West has no monopoly on it given its vicious histories of genocide. We just had a celebration last week or I shouldn't say celebration, I should rather use 'acknowledgement', 'commemoration' of the worst of the human spirit in terms of genocidal attacks. Our precious Jewish brothers and sisters, Armenians as well, how do we build on the sensitivities of those catastrophes and come to terms with the catastrophes in our own day? And I submit, we shouldn't begin with Donald Trump, we don't want to fetishize Donald Trump, and we don't want to ascribe magical powers of Donald Trump. Donald Trump is as American as cherry pie. He comes out of a long tradition of white supremacy, male supremacy and homophobia. He comes out a long tradition of spiritual emptiness and more virtuosity. He comes out of long tradition and he's a human being, he's on a continuum with us. We don't like to say that but I'm here to remind you. Oh yes, this here is a black man in America for 63 years so Trump is not news for me. 244 years of white supremacist slavery. The average slave died at 26 and a half years old, working son up to sun down. It's a form of torture. He couldn't worship God without white supervision in the land of religious liberty. Oh that's catastrophic! How did they fight back? They stole away at night, held hands in a ring and lifted their voices saying, "*Swing low sweet chariot*". Refusing to respond to the cowardly gangsters who were enslaving them in a gangster-like way. Just like Emmett Till's mama who said, right with his body standing and laying in front of her, tears flowing, "*Only child, I don't have a minute to hate. I will pursue justice for the rest of my life.*" You don't do that by yourself. That's not an isolated individual act. Something has been shaped of the sole craft there and that's what spiritual integrity is. It's a soul craft there. That's what I liked about brother Bernie Sanders. He's my dear secular Jewish Brooklyn Vermont-living brother. We didn't have to agree with everything. Brother Bernie and Sister Jane, we were pushing each other over and over again on the Empire and a whole host of other issues, but the one thing you cannot deny, especially lined up against the other candidates, he had more integrity. He refused to sell his soul for a mess of pottage. He knew that Trump's populist language was pseudo-populism; he knew that

Wall Street would still be in the driver's seat; he knew the Goldman Sachs would still have access in the way it did it and even more so now under Barack Obama. He could feed through the neoliberalism of the Democratic Party and he could see through the escalating neo-Fascist sensibilities of Donald Trump and company, so when you talk about integrity at the highest levels of our elected officials, well it's pretty cold up there and that's a sad thing because when I was coming around and when I was growing up and brother Donald was growing up, there were a lot of figures in national life in the country who had integrity and who wouldn't sell out for just a political ideological matter. They were true to themselves. Even William F. Buckley Jr. with his right-wing self. He had integrity but he was just wrong most of the time. And of course, I'm deeply committed to the brother of Rush Limbaugh's legacies, the right-wing fighting for their right to be wrong. I have libertarian sensibilities in terms of commitment to a robust public conversation with people in a space without humiliation, with respect. I'm not talking about just a hate speech like brother Milo who got attacked in Berkeley. It was wrong to attack him but he doesn't need to there at Dartmouth or Berkeley. He doesn't have the qualities to be a part of a high quality conversation. So you don't invite the defenders of 'Earth is flat' in a serious discussion of physics. I mean you go to have some criteria, but that doesn't mean you attack the brother. Not at all, just let him stay home. But integrity has consequences and most importantly, it means that you're choosing to be a long-distance runner.

So I really loved the conversation with the young folk where we were talking about the Dartmouth Action Collective, with Sister McCain and the others who were so wonderful with their Socratic energy coming at me. Nietzsche used to say, "*It is not just a question of having the courage of your convictions, but the courage to attack your convictions.*" That is a part of learning how to die and that is what education is about too, being unsettled and unearthed and unhoused in that way but the question with respect to integrity, which is like Jane Austen's constancy is, will you be a long-distance runner in your calling, in your vocation at this particular bleak moment where it looks as if all hope is being cast aside? I hear De Bois saying, "*I've been there before.*"

Like John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, what are the conditions under which ordinary people consent to their own servitude? That's a profound question to which we do not yet have a definitive response. It's like Plato telling us democrats that you will never ever be able to sustain a democratic experiment because the *demo* is shot through with unruly passion and ubiquitous ignorance and it will generate a strong man in the patriarchal form, given the vicious legacy of patriarchy, and it will generate tyranny. Every democracy has

within it the seeds of a tyrant because the *demos* don't have the capacity to rule themselves. We are yet to provide a definitive response to Plato, as profound and as wrong as I think he is, because in our democratic forms, what do we still have? The oligarchs and the plutocrats. In our democratic forms what do we still have? Too much xenophobia. Hatred of trans-genders and gays and lesbians, not staying in contact with working people's humanity, bosses ruling over workers as if they're masters vis-a-vis slave like persons. We still have empires even as democracies were expanding and Plato says, "*I told you so. Believed all that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Muriel Rukeyser, James Baldwin democratic mess. You're are going to end up with even tighter forms of oligarchic rule given your belief in the capacity of ordinary people.*" That's Plato always whispering in the ears of us radical democrats. Even if we refuse his conclusions, we have to come to terms with his challenges. Can there be a live-able answer to the De Bois' question of integrity facing oppression? And what is the difference between vocation and profession, what is the difference between calling and career? It has everything to do with that *kenosis*, that self-emptying. That's what is so magnificent about, for me, greatest tradition of spiritual fortitude in the modern world which is the Black musical tradition. There has never been a tradition on such intimate terms with catastrophe and still able to generate such unbelievable forms of creativity, compassion and fortitude. De Bois understood that in the last chapter, *The Souls of Black Folk in the Sorrow Songs*.

One of the saddest moments in the last thirty years is the erosion of spiritual integrity, younger generation, the erosion of the quality Black music in the last 25 years, the almost non-existence of the lifting of tender and sweet and gentle voices that sing together in tune. I come from The Dramatics and The Delfonics and The Whispers, The Main Ingredient, The Isley Brothers and The Jones Girls and The Emotions and the Hutchison Sisters, and David Ruffin and The Temptations, Smokey Robinson and The Miracles. Those aren't just entertainers. They are love warriors in song and they listen to each of those voices with a gentleness, and they raise their voices not in order to give attention to themselves for a bigger market presence, but to empower others. James Brown would go on for four hours and he would always end every concert, I was there every night, "*I'm an extension of you and you're an extension of me. I don't exist without you. Did anybody come here to hear a song we didn't play? I know we've been going on for four and a half hours but did anybody come to hear a song?*" Someone might claim that we didn't play Soul Power and we ought to do it immediately, and that's *kenosis*. That's serving others, giving of oneself, using what gifts you have in order to provide some light in a bleakness, in a darkness. That's what integrity is. Those who are committed to integrity are always up against the grain and in my own language, you're choosing the way of the cross and that cross signifies

unarmed truth and the condition of truth is always to allow suffering to speak. It's unconditional, unapologetic love and that love is manifest in a willingness to pay a major price in saying what you say.

Now I know a lot of people tried to be very harsh with me, trying to hold on to integrity in the age of Obama. Tied me to Wall Street and drone strikes. I called George Bush a war criminal after 45 drone strikes. Obama has 506, so they got surprised, "*why'd you call him a war criminal?*" Moral consistency. How many innocents did he kill? How many children did he kill? Let's keep track. We didn't keep a track of how many Iraqis died, we didn't keep a track of how many Afghans died, and we didn't keep a track of the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who have been killed since the US invasion and occupation, given the gangster attack on us in New York. Those Muslim lives have the same value as any other human life and we wonder why does the gangster respond? Well no, we can't talk about that with a Nobel Peace Prize winner. 26,172 bombs dropped in 2016. Over 12,000 bombs dropped in Syria last year under Obama administration and Trump drops some bombs and people start barraging him and calling him a war criminal. We get all upset but where is our moral consistency? Those lives in Syria. Where was the focus on Libya when those lives were undergoing such ugly treatment? And oh my god, when we get to the Middle East! How do we hold on to our spiritual integrity and tell the world that 'We will ensure that there's never another vicious, wholesale attack on our precious Jewish brothers and sisters as has been the case so often for 2,000 years? But at the same time, when they choose to occupy a people, when they choose to align themselves with the US Empire, that loses sight with the Palestinian brothers and sisters. That Palestinian baby in Gaza has exactly the same value as that precious Jewish baby in Tel Aviv.' It's a delicate issue and it's hard to stay on that tightrope because there's so many anti-Jewish pitfalls in it given how pervasive anti-Jewish prejudice and hatred is, but anti-Semitism must never be an excuse that loses sight of the occupied peoples, of Palestinian peoples who are undergoing levels of social misery because like Kashmir, like in the Western sub-Sahara with Morocco occupation, like Tibet under Chinese occupation, occupation lacks moral and spiritual integrity.

It's wrong, it's unjust, it's illegal and if we don't come to terms with it we're going to reap what we sow like any other historical moment and thank God we're seeing a moral and a spiritual awakening tied to integrity. I was just with my brothers and sisters, if not now, among the young Jewish population. Some of them had mothers and fathers inside the APAC. They were not just standing for spiritual integrity. They were not just trying to be sensitive because it's a nice issue to be popular about. No, no, no! Wipe away all

deodorized bureaucratic discourses of diversity and inclusivity. Talk about integrity! Talk about integrity! If there was a Palestinian occupation of Jewish brothers and sisters, I'd be at the same march with the same sense of righteous indignation because it's wrong. You have 550 Palestinian babies killed in 51 days and hardly anybody can raise their voices, not a moaning word for any major elite, that is a sign of a lack of moral integrity. Somebody is scared. Somebody doesn't want to tell the truth. Somebody doesn't want to be unpopular. "Ob" De Bois says, echoing Martin Luther King Jr., "*I'd rather be dead than afraid.*" And when you get so fearful you're already spiritually dead.

The second question that De Bois raises is, "*What does honesty do in the face of deception?*" What does it mean to be an honest human being? This again cuts across politics and religion. There is a wonderful essay of Kierkegaard in which he writes, "*All of my work in many ways comes down to an attempt to be honest.*" He says, "*I'm sorry that's not a Christian virtue.*" I'd go with the pagans on that. But that's all I wanted to be - talking about faith, hope and love. Indeed, those Christian virtues, talking about cardinal virtues of prudence and temperance, justice and courage, but in the end, just to be honest. We live in an age of massive mendacity and criminality. It's very difficult for honesty to surface and in the Trump era it's not just fake news because fake news is very misleading. That gives you the impression that CNN has been telling the truth. It gives an impression that the New York Times has been telling the truth because the fake news are the 'alt', the alt-right and the alt-left and all you need to do is go to the non-alt center. That is of course not true. Truth is buried, and you need intellectual excavation beneath the discourses.

What is hidden and concealed? What is latent? What are people trying to cover up? The alt-left, alt-right or non-alt center. So yes, there's a lot of lying going in on a whole host of different blogs and so forth and so on, but it's not as if you just turn to the establishment institutions that are under assault and find the truth. There's a reason why the establishment in the Republican Party went over, went under. There's a reason why Brother Bernie put pressure on the establishment in the Democratic Party. It almost went under and he was not treated fairly but that's another lecture. There's a reason why the establishment and the corporate media is under contestation and that's just not scandal-driven Fox News at the moment. They all are tied together and people are feeling helpless, impotent, and hopeless and the choice is between, as we saw in 2016, neoliberal disaster and neo-fascist catastrophe, and the neoliberal disaster was our dear sister Hillary Clinton. The sexism was really coming at her we have to acknowledge that. There's no doubt about that, but it wasn't only that. There was also an element of detachment from ordinary people, living in the elitist bubble that too often the Harvards and the Yales and the Princetons and the Dartmouths and

Berkeleys and Chicagos generate. So all you got to do is just connect to the folk in your bubble, the sophisticated ones and one mark of their sophistication as always the excessive use of the word 'obviously'. Well, it's not so obvious to me no! That's a sign of the in-crowd, the sign of the chattering classes who have been formally educated in certain ways so they reinforce each other's sense of being smart and what De Bois is talking about has nothing to do with the land of dollars and smartness. It has to do with compassion and wisdom. Let the phones be smart, we've got to be wise and compassionate and self-critical. The whole cult of smartness the whole cult of 'obviously' is part of the market soul craft, and it generates broader gaps and high hiatuses between elites and educated sites and everyday people and it's a very sad moment when that gap becomes so overwhelming that the rug is completely pulled from under the establishment and the only thing left is an option of a neo-Fascist catastrophe. That was what was most sad about 2016 and why I'm still deeply upset in terms of how my brother Bernie was treated, because I was thoroughly convinced that he had the gusto, that wonderful word of William Hazlitt, he had the insight and the power to generate enthusiasm against the enthusiastic folk behind Trump. The neoliberal project is running out of gas and the New York Times hadn't got the memo. I know Thomas Friedman and others, and they hadn't got the memo. They were convinced, but those of us who were out in the field could see it so clearly. It meant the need for more integrity in the face of oppression. More need for honesty in the face of deception.

De Bois' third question: "*How shall decency respond to assault and attack?*" All of these white supremacist attack that are so micro-social and sometimes macro-social, dealing with police brutality, dealing with these ugly stereotypes not just on TV but sometimes generated by the very young folk themselves in the worst of hip-hop culture as opposed to the best of hip-hop culture. There has got to be ways in which you can preserve your sense of decency as a spiritual and moral issue and we've got to learn how to inhabit the spiritual and moral space that holds at arm's length those market sensibilities and market orientations. And they're always intertwined, they're always overlapping but there's got to be some space. You can't do it by yourself. You need groups, institutions and that's why as an example, Brother Jeff Stout is now given the Gifford Lectures and that's like the Nobel Prize in philosophy. He has just arrived yesterday and we've taught a graduate course together. It had much to do with exemplarity as opposed to celebrity. You see, spiritual and moral exemplarity, examples as opposed to market driven celebrities. I tell my young folk all the time that you can just look at the juxtaposition of those who are highly visible. Coming back to music again, I love my dear sister Beyonce. She's one of the greatest entertainers in many ways and she has got a lot of

energy, a lot of discipline and she has got a certain kind of genius and an unbelievable commitment but she's not Aretha Franklin.

Now what's the difference between Beyonce and Aretha Franklin in terms of spiritual exemplarity, market-driven celebrity? Aretha Franklin, when she shows up, all she needs is a microphone. She's not part of the culture of superficial spectacle. She doesn't have to ask her girls to be in formation. She's not talking about a black Bill Gates. She's not talking about using her paper for revenge. We come from the people of justice, not revenge. We don't need to read Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* to know the difference between justice and revenge, because if all we were driven by revenge, there wouldn't have been a Martin Luther King Jr., there wouldn't have been an Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and there wouldn't have been an A. Philip Randolph. There has been a civil war in America every generation because if you're going to terrorize us, we're going to terrorize you and if terrorize you, there's going to be a civil war every generation. You ought to be lucky that we produced a Martin King and Aretha. I tell my white brothers and sisters all the time when you see Negroes, give them a standing ovation. Thank you for Martin, thank you for Ida. You could have been different.

There could've been black versions of the Ku Klux Klan, black versions of ISIS, black versions of Al-Qaeda, black versions of the Jewish Irgun. All our rich Jewish tradition, all of its overwhelming prophetic practices still produce some Jewish terrorists too. Menachem Begin was a part of it. Meaning what? "*Oh! It's a complicated situation and sometimes you got to revert to violence.*" We understand that. Nelson Mandela founded the spirited nation. He was also a terrorist in terms of attacking the property. They didn't kill anyone intentionally, but they did use violence. That's a complex conversation about pacifism and just war. We love our Quakers, Mennonites, Desmond Tutus, Martin Luther King Jrs. - all pacifists. But even the Malcolm Xs were full of love but were no pacifists. He still didn't call for just terrorizing white folk randomly. Not at all! Not at all, meaning what? Meaning that when we talk about honesty, these are subversive things these days.

Last question: "*What does virtue do in the face of brute force?*" Back to De Bois' house arrest and FBI surveillance. In 1919, Archibald Stephenson set before the Senate and said, "*The most destructive and dangerous person in America is Jane Addams.*" She was a darling of the liberal establishment. She was courageous. She was a visionary. She was a pacifist who opposed World War I. Many professors, the Charles Bemis's and others, Charles Beard also resigned to Columbia over the dismissal of professors because of their

opposition to World War I. So it's always fascinating to me to see the citadels of higher learning always talk about objectivity and value-free inquiry and detached reflection and as soon as war kicks in, they shift gears. Massive mobilization in order to defend the country and the flag. You say, "*How come?*" Because there's a catastrophe. Well you know what? Indigenous peoples have been dealing with catastrophe since 1492. You know what? Working people have been dealing with catastrophe, given the corporate greed that has escalated with 1% of the population on 22% of the wealth when I was the age of the undergrads and now that 1% own 42%. That's catastrophe too! Only when the catastrophe comes to your house, in your neighborhood did all of a sudden, objectivity is pushed aside. *'All you black folk! All you black students and brown students! You are always so full of anger.'*

That's not anger, that's commitment, that's righteous indignation. It's catastrophe we're dealing with. Yes, we believe in self-criticism. We ought to, indeed, but when it comes to virtue in the face of brute force, and he's talking about the enabling virtual of courage because all the other virtues are vacuous and empty without courage, what I'm calling fortitude, but those moral and spiritual dimensions to courage. Where will we find that today? I thank God for the International Women's March. It was a wonderful way to start the Trump era and I believe in a united, multiracial, multi-gender, multi-sexual orientational, multi-class coalition against the Trump administration and its various forms of cold-heartedness and mean-spiritedness, that fusion of billionaires and military elite and xenophobes who constitute his personnel and there's always a sense in which personnel does partially, disproportionately dictate policy. So that coalition's crucial. It was a beautiful thing to see the women's strike on March 8th. It was a different slice of women just like you have got different forms of feminism. You got corporate feminism, centrist feminism, some of them leaning in like Sister Sheryl Sandberg. She told us, "*I'm not leaning in. I'm a love warrior.*" So you're in love, you're not leaning in, you have dived in. You tell your wife, "*Oh honey, I'm just leaning in with you.*" She says, "*What? Well you better get on in here, brother.*" I want all of you, yeah, all of me. Aha! Back to John Coltrane, *kenosis*, giving it your all, giving all that you have based on your mobilization of the resources of the past, when traditions become unavoidable but you have to be selective in your hermeneutical humility, so that what you choose is something that gives you longevity with integrity and honesty and decency and with courage and that's all we do as human beings. That's all we're going to do during the Trump era, try to come together, overlap, tell the truth, have our various kinds of correspondences in terms of unity but never unanimity. And we're going to tell the truth about where we are. I want to acknowledge my dear Brother Darrick White and the wonderful work that he has done. I don't know if he's here today. I want to

acknowledge my dear Sister Bond and her work as well. We've got to lift up something in one's own context and say, "*Oh, we are with you critically, in the sense that we recognize that the best of what you are doing has something to do with this integrity and honesty and decency and courage.*" It doesn't take full agreement and none of us ever want wholesale embrace. We take each other seriously by giving each other the right of being wrong, so that we can be empowered. That's what learning how to die in order to learn how to live is all about. Does America have what it takes? It's an open question maybe the American cabinet is beginning to put pen to paper to write the decline and fall of the American Empire. Melville had already put it forward in *Moby Dick*, *Bartleby*. Maybe Melville is more prescient than Emerson and if he is, we're going to need some 'Emersonian energy' to overthrow that Malvillean challenge, which is another way of saying that the blues tradition (because Melville is a vanilla blues man) and Ralph Ellison says that "*the blues ain't nothing but a personal narrative of a catastrophe lyrically expressed.*" America is dealing with multiple catastrophes. Ecological catastrophe is around the corner. Nuclear catastrophe with Russia as the Cold War escalates. The moral and spiritual catastrophe we've been talking about. The economic catastrophe of escalating wealth inequality and income inequality. Do we have what it takes? We never know. It all depends on the kind of human things we choose to be, the kind of vocations we adopt, the kind of voices we raise, the kind of courage we exhibit. T.S. Eliot says, "*Ours is in the trying and the rest is not our business.*" None of us are in control. No group is in control. The Empire may simply have run out of gas. We don't know, but some of us are going to go down swinging, like Ella Fitzgerald and Muhammad Ali, full of that commitment that De Bois was writing about. Thank you all so very much.