

*“The man that spends his life earning a living, has never lived. The education that trains men simply for earning a living is not education.”<sup>1</sup>*

– *W.E.B Du Bois*

Higher education, Du Bois argues, is “that part of human training which is devoted specifically and peculiarly into bringing the man into the fullest and roundest development of his powers as a human being,”<sup>2</sup> with the purpose of “furnish[ing] the power and the leverage by which the mass of people can obtain not only economic security but cultural progress”.<sup>3</sup> Embedded in his advocacy for the public purpose of higher education, was the idea of the “talented tenth” – a concept created by Reverend Henry Lyman Morehouse and promoted by Du Bois in 1903 – that the exceptional ten percent of African Americans need higher education to equip them to become leaders and elevators of the Black race.<sup>4</sup> Even as African Americans espoused this theory, over eighty years pass before at least ten percent of African Americans over the age of 25 have completed at least four years of college.<sup>5</sup> What does life look like for the children of the ten percent? What is expected of them? What do they expect of themselves?

Creating, empowering, and elevating Black leaders is an idea that prompted the creation of Jack and Jill of America – an organization founded in 1938 by upper class mothers who wanted to

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<sup>1</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Negro college and minority technique,” W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, (1942): 10-11, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pagetum/mums312-bl98-i020/#page/1/mode/1up>.

<sup>2</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Seven critiques of Negro education,” W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, (1940): 6, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pagetum/mums312-b222-i004/#page/100/mode/1up>.

<sup>3</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Benjamin F. Hubert,” W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pagetum/mums312-b098-i098/#page/1/mode/1up>.

<sup>4</sup> L'Monique King, “The Relevance and Redefining of Du Bois's Talented Tenth: Two Centuries Later,” *Papers & Publications: Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research* 2, no. 9 (2013), <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/papersandpubs/vol2/iss1/9>.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Shaw, “An Alternative View of Du Bois's Talented Tenth,” African American Intellectual History Society, February 19, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/an-alternative-view-of-du-boiss-talented-tenth/>.

provide their children with educational, social, and cultural opportunities, which due to segregation and racism, were not otherwise readily available to Black children, regardless of the socio-economic status of their parents.<sup>6</sup> This organization of approximately 40,000 parents and children is still primarily comprised of educated and upper class Black families, and membership is by invitation only.<sup>7</sup> In his youth, New Jersey Senator Cory Booker was involved in Jack and Jill.<sup>8</sup> Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, and Dorothy Nix, the wife of the first Black Chief Justice of a state Supreme Court are all members of Jack and Jill.<sup>9</sup> Children in Jack and Jill have access to a network of Black professionals and leaders. Although establishing professional connections is beneficial, the importance of providing this kind of access through formal, organized means has arguably diminished over time – my family is not a part of Jack and Jill, but I still have access to a similar network of professionals through my parents and their colleagues and friends, as well as through my church and other social circles – Jack and Jill is still an attractive networking option for many families.

Some upper class Black youth are not only exposed to networks of Black professionals through Jack and Jill, their parents, or church, but also through a popular vacation spot, commonly thought to be reserved for elite White families – Martha’s Vineyard. Given my parents’ working class background, they never thought that they would be vacationing where presidents lounge over the summer, but turn to the summer of COVID-19 and we found ourselves in the Vineyard,

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Otis Graham, *Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Coard, “Jack and Jill: Elitist, effective, either, neither, or both?,” *The Philadelphia Tribune*, Jan 18, 2019, [https://www.phillytrib.com/commentary/coard-jack-and-jill-elitist-effective-either-neither-or-both/article\\_db4eab56-14fe-55f7-9122-0d862b036118.html#/questions/](https://www.phillytrib.com/commentary/coard-jack-and-jill-elitist-effective-either-neither-or-both/article_db4eab56-14fe-55f7-9122-0d862b036118.html#/questions/).

<sup>8</sup> “America’s black upper class and Black Lives Matter,” *The Economist*, August 22, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2020/08/22/americas-black-upper-class-and-black-lives-matter>.

<sup>9</sup> Dorothy J. Gaiter, “Jack and Jill: Staying in Touch,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 1984, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/02/style/jack-and-jill-staying-in-touch.html>.

not only amongst Vineyard Vines clad WASPs,<sup>10</sup> but also amongst people who look like us. During my time there this summer, I discovered that Martha's Vineyard has over a century's history of upper class African Americans vacationing there. In the early twentieth century, an increasing number of African Americans went to the island as servants to White families with summer homes, but some of these early Black servants became property owners, year-round residents, and small business entrepreneurs, particularly in Oak Bluffs.<sup>11</sup> In Oak Bluffs, the popular town beach frequented by African Americans since their arrival to the island is called the "The Inkwell". Although the beach was pejoratively named by White people, the name is now an emblem of pride – so much so that visitors stroll through Vineyard shops donning Inkwell t-shirts. As Black families grew more prosperous during and after World War II, many of them brought their families to Oak Bluffs. Much of the property purchased by the early African American islanders continues to be owned by their descendants, and Oak Bluffs is still a popular summertime destination with Black vacationers. Oak Bluffs' population swells from 4,647 to 20,000 in a matter of weeks, a trend that year-round residents have coined "Black August".<sup>12</sup> Black August community life revolves around social activities anchored by family ties, university affiliations, sorority and fraternity networks, and professional and business relationships.<sup>13</sup> A Black USC freshman who regularly vacations in Oak Bluffs reported that August is also the time Jack and Jill hosts a large social event for the college crowd. Martha's Vineyard is more than a place for upper class Black families and youth to socialize – it is a haven. Maya Angelou described Oak Bluffs as,

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<sup>10</sup> White Anglo-Saxon Protestants

<sup>11</sup> Alison Rose Jefferson, "The Inkwell, Martha's Vineyard (1890s-)," BlackPast, February 7, 2013, <https://www.blackpast.org/African-American-history/inkwell-martha-s-vineyard-1890s/>.

<sup>12</sup> Genelle Levy, "The Real Story of Black Martha's Vineyard," Narratively, May 30, 2019, <https://narratively.com/the-real-story-of-black-marthas-vineyard/>.

<sup>13</sup> Jefferson, "The Inkwell, Martha's Vineyard (1890s-)."

“a safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.”<sup>14</sup> From the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., Madame C.J. Walker, Malcolm X and Jackie Robinson, to Senator Edward Brooke, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Spike Lee, and Black CEOs, Martha’s Vineyard is an oasis and network that some upper class Black families and youth have the opportunity to experience.<sup>15</sup> Members of Jack and Jill, scores of Black leaders and professionals, and even former president Barack Obama and his family, who own a home in Oak Bluffs, go to Martha’s Vineyard to vacation, connect, and rejuvenate from the life spent outside of this sanctuary.

By virtue of who Black upper class youth spend their life surrounded by, the oft spoken, as well as the subliminal expectation of these social affiliations and opportunities is that kids will go to college. Ninety-eight percent of the kids in Jack and Jill attend college.<sup>16</sup> In addition to Jack and Jill and vacation havens such as Oak Bluffs, students experience the expectation to attend college through another intersecting arena: The Divine Nine. The Divine Nine are the nine Black Greek letter organizations. Black sororities and fraternities are a community that continues long after college. My mother, step grandmother, cousin and “aunts” are all members of Delta Sigma Theta (“Delta”). My “aunts” are my mother’s line sisters – the women who pledged with her in college. Many of my friends’ mothers, who are also my mother’s friends, are members of Alpha Kappa Alpha (“AKA”).<sup>17</sup> My friends and I grew up knowing the sororities and fraternities of our friends’ parents because we saw them actively involved in the organization or saw insignia around the house on jackets, canes, or wine glasses. The red and white of Deltas and pink and green of

<sup>14</sup> Dominique Nadeau, “The Power of Place: An Overview of Black History on Martha’s Vineyard,” Writers Theatre, January 24, 2020, <https://www.writerstheatre.org/blog/power-place-overview-black-history-marthas-vineyard/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Black History in Massachusetts,” Visit MA, 2016, [https://www.visitma.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/blackhistoryma\\_mott.pdf](https://www.visitma.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/blackhistoryma_mott.pdf); “The Black Hamptons,” The Miami Times, June 27, 2018, [https://www.miamitimesonline.com/lifestyles/black-elites-are-flocking-to-the-historic-summer-getaway-martha-s-vineyard/article\\_d6c9c7fc-7a1d-11e8-9554-37697e187df0.html#comments](https://www.miamitimesonline.com/lifestyles/black-elites-are-flocking-to-the-historic-summer-getaway-martha-s-vineyard/article_d6c9c7fc-7a1d-11e8-9554-37697e187df0.html#comments).

<sup>16</sup> The Economist, “America’s black upper class and Black Lives Matter.”

<sup>17</sup> Vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris in a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha.

AKAs are color combinations that many members of the Black community immediately associate with these respective sororities. Growing up seeing family and friends' involvement in Black Greek letter organizations inclines us to do the same. And how do you do that, one may ask. The first step: go to college.

For Black youth whose parents and family-friends are members of the Divine Nine, educated professionals, members of Jack and Jill, or Martha's Vineyard vacationers, the question is not will you go to college, but rather, where will you go. Even that question has an expected answer. After parents pay a premium for Jack and Jill opportunities, private school education, or academic test prep, the expected answer to the question tends to be an elite institution of higher education, or an HBCU (historically black college and university). Parents' expectations lead to the reality. Although HBCUs have socioeconomic diversity amongst its Black students,<sup>18</sup> a study published in the February 2007 issue of the *American Journal of Education*, surveyed Black students at 28 selective colleges and universities and found that the majority of the students' parents hold undergraduate degrees and a quarter of them hold graduate degrees.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, more than a quarter of the Black students at these selective schools come from families with annual income over \$100,000. These statistics are about triple the national average for all African Americans. An analysis of the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study showed that there was less socioeconomic diversity than racial or ethnic diversity at the most selective colleges.<sup>20</sup> In 2013, 38 colleges in America, including five in the Ivy League – Dartmouth, Princeton, Yale, Penn

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<sup>18</sup> "Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)," *The Postsecondary National Policy Institute*, (2019): 4, [https://pnpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PNPI\\_HistoricallyBlackCollegesAndUniversities.pdf](https://pnpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PNPI_HistoricallyBlackCollegesAndUniversities.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Douglas S. Massey, Margarita Mooney, Kimberly C. Torres, and Camille Z. Charles, "Black Immigrants and Black Natives Attending Selective Colleges and Universities in the United States," *American Journal of Education* 113, no. 2 (2007): 243-71, doi:10.1086/510167.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony P. Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose, "Socioeconomic Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Selective College Admissions," *A Century Foundation* (2003), [https://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/TCF\\_US/C030320C.pdf](https://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/TCF_US/C030320C.pdf).

and Brown – had more students from the top 1 percent of the income scale than from the entire bottom 60 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Higher education is touted as a means of social mobility, especially for minorities. As a general proposition, that is probably true; however, since the students at highly selective colleges come primarily from educated and affluent families, many of these elite institutions primarily foster the continuation of generational wealth and prosperity. As the daughter of first-generation college educated parents, I am at college with the goal of creating generational wealth and prosperity for my descendants. My dad grew up in a small town in North Carolina where he was separate but not equal, and thus his parents did not have the opportunity to create generational wealth. I am thankful that college provides me with the opportunity to ensure that my kids go to college and their kids can go to college, but it is incredibly problematic that 40% of students whose parents are in the top 1 percent of the income scale attend an elite college,<sup>22</sup> while less than one-half of 1 percent of students from the bottom fifth of American families attend an elite college.<sup>23</sup> Elite schools need to prioritize racial and economic diversity because even with the generous financial aid programs for low-income students, these schools still enroll three to four times fewer Pell Grant students than less selective public colleges and HBCUs.<sup>24</sup> Elite institutions are not the great equalizer or exemplars of diversity that their brochures insinuate.

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<sup>21</sup> Gregor Aisch et al., “Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/18/upshot/some-colleges-have-more-students-from-the-top-1-percent-than-the-bottom-60.html?smid=pl-share>.

<sup>22</sup> “elite” colleges: roughly 80 of the most selective colleges in the United States, as measured by a 2009 index created by Barron’s

<sup>23</sup> Aisch et al., “Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours.”

<sup>24</sup> Michael N. Bastedo and Ozan Jaquette. “Running in Place: Low-Income Students and the Dynamics of Higher Education Stratification.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 33, no. 3: 318–39, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373711406718>.

Affluent Black students at elite institutions check the box for racial diversity, but there is more to diversity than race and checking boxes. College administrators and admissions teams need to recognize the intersectionality of race and socioeconomic status since low-income Black students whose economic station in life likely is still hindered by the vestiges of slavery, including almost a century of Jim Crow laws, are significantly less likely to be represented on campus. Black students come from different walks of life; there should be an accurate representation of this diversity on elite college campuses.

Although Black people of America are markedly different “in lineage, in education, in inspiration and in character”,<sup>25</sup> we know that society tends to see all of us as one. One check of a box. One character when a police officer pulls us over. One inspiration when someone asks the tall Black boy if he wants to play in the NBA. One education when someone “compliments” a young Black person on how well-spoken they are. Although society can tend to see all Black people as one, Du Bois understood higher education as means of communal uplift and liberation from this perception saying,<sup>26</sup> “Education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger, of dissatisfaction and discontent.”<sup>27</sup> As Black people are educated and the community is uplifted, it makes it harder to assume a Black pulled-over driver is a thug, easier to assume a Black boy wants to be an attorney, and less surprising that a Black youth is well-spoken. Perhaps the conflicting perceptions are partially a result of Black students being denied access to higher education for centuries.

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<sup>25</sup> *The People's Advocate* (Washington, D. C.), May 15 (quotation), July 10, 1880. See also *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 17, 24, 1896; *Savannah Tribune*, December 21, 1889; *Cleveland Gazette*, January 10, 1885.

<sup>26</sup> Lauren Wendling, “Higher Education as a Means of Communal Uplift: The Educational Philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 87, no. 3 (2017), doi: 10.7709/jnegroeducation.87.3.0285.

<sup>27</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The souls of Black folk: Essays and sketches*, ed. A.G. McClurg (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968), 27.

The, now considered elite, institutions of higher education were established to serve White people, before Black people were considered separate but equal, before Black people were considered three-fifths of a person, but when Black people were solely considered property. Harvard, the oldest institution of higher education established in 1636, did not graduate its first Black student until two-hundred and thirty-four years after its establishment.<sup>28</sup> It was not until 1993 that Harvard named a building after a Black person.<sup>29</sup> In 2020, it is not unlikely for affluent Black students to study in buildings adorned with the last names of their White peers. In 2020, Princeton and Duke University will name buildings after Black women for the first time in institution history.<sup>30</sup> Our affluent White peers are the people that colleges were created to serve when their families' wealth was first created generations ago. As some of my peers continue to expand their established wealth and I seek to create mine, the end game is still in their favor. Black people with undergraduate degrees are twice as likely to be unemployed than other graduates.<sup>31</sup> African Americans are paid less than White people at every education level.<sup>32</sup> And even if a Black person makes it into the top 10% of Black earners with \$343,000 in assets, the top 10% of White earners still exceed them with an average five times that.<sup>33</sup> Affluent Black students at elite colleges know that we have a relative advantage over some of our peers, but we also know that we have to work twice as hard as some students because something as trivial as our name on a resume can

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<sup>28</sup> Michael David Cohen, "Richard Greener, First Black Graduate of Harvard College," African American Intellectual History Society, October 4, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/richard-greener-first-black-graduate-of-harvard-college/>.

<sup>29</sup> Evan J. Eason, "Law School Building Named for Lewis," The Harvard Crimson, April 24, 1993, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1993/4/24/law-school-building-named-for-lewis/#.X5yexAzdGLY.link>.

<sup>30</sup> Marie Fazio, "Princeton to Name Residential College After Black Alumna," The New York Times, October 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/10/us/melody-hobson-woodrow-wilson-princeton.html>; Amir Vera, "Duke University names building after a Black woman for the first time in campus history," CNN, September 26, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/26/us/duke-university-wilhelmina-reuben-cooke-building-trnd/index.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Janell Ross, "African-Americans With College Degrees Are Twice As Likely To Be Unemployed As Other Graduates," The Atlantic, May 27, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/05/african-americans-with-college-degrees-are-twice-as-likely-to-be-unemployed-as-other-graduates/430971/>.

<sup>32</sup> Valerie Wilson, "African Americans are paid less than whites at every education level," Economic Policy Institute, October 4, 2016, <https://www.epi.org/publication/african-americans-are-paid-less-than-whites-at-every-education-level/>.

<sup>33</sup> The Economist, "America's black upper class and Black Lives Matter."



make it fifty-percent less likely that we will get an interview.<sup>34</sup> Affluent Black students grow up with the expectation that we will go to college. Once we get to college, we have motivation fueled by duty and gratitude to not let biases hinder us from achieving our goals. Although Du Bois initially looked to the ten percent of educated African Americans, he would now designate the twenty-six percent of Black individuals who hold a bachelor's degree with the moral obligation to uplift our community.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination," *National Bureau of Economic Research*, (2003), doi: 10.3386/w9873.

<sup>35</sup> Lauren Wendling, "Higher Education as a Means of Communal Uplift: The Educational Philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois," *The Journal of Negro Education* 87, no. 3 (2017), doi: 10.7709/jnegroeducation.87.3.0285; Jennifer Cheeseman Day, "88% of Blacks Have a High School Diploma, 26% a Bachelor's Degree," June 10, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/06/black-high-school-attainment-nearly-on-par-with-national-average.html>.

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