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A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois

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fresh understanding of the broad implications of white supremacy”.

Stockley’s research “adds to an evolving understanding of the Jim Crow South, Arkansas’s history, the lawyers who capitalized on this tragedy, and the African American victims”. (cover fly)

To those who see Arkansas as a place where racism and white supremacy dominated the 1950s through the 1970s, there will be ample justification through Stockley’s research to support those impressions. From the Governor Orval Faubus to the staff of the School, racism and white supremacy led to the fire and continued to affect the juvenile justice system and educational access for Negro children for decades in Arkansas.

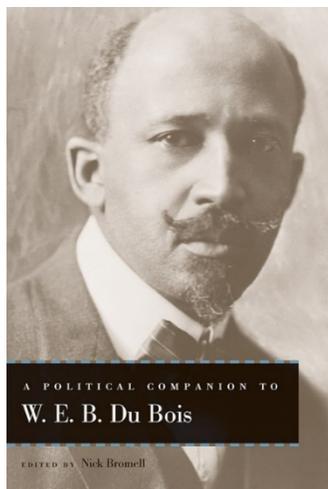
Thanks to Gif Stockley as this book is an excellent addition for any faculty or student collection on juvenile justice, Arkansas history, and white supremacy in the South. However, at times it is a painful read as it warns in the title: “Black Boys Burning..”

Imagine, it is 1959 and you are one of the mothers of the boys who were confined to that dormitory at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School. Then imagine what 69 mothers might have accomplished if they had organized and marched on the offices of Orval Faubus. Would history write the story a different way?

Recommended for academic libraries, public libraries and book clubs.

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A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois. Nick Bromell, ed. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8131-7490-7 (hardcover; al. paper), ISBN: 978-0-8131-7493-8 (epub.), ISBN: 978-0-8131-7492-1 (pdf), 364 p. \$80 all formats.



Around twenty years ago I went on a W.E.B. Du Bois reading binge. While I was, of course, aware of Du Bois as an important African American intellectual and had read a few short (probably excerpted) pieces by him, I had never actually read him in depth. As it was, I only read a fraction of his copious output but it did include his famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, one of his autobiographies, and a volume of his collected works. The experience was profound: his sociological, historical, political, and personal observations on the plight of African Americans and race relations were astute, disturbing, and still, in the twenty-first century, very relevant to our racial dilemmas of today. During his extremely long lifetime (1868-1963), Du Bois was truly active as an academic researcher, civil rights pioneer, very prolific author, and peace activist.

As editor Nick Bromell (professor of English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst) states, “W.E.B. du Bois was not in any obvious sense a political theorist” (1). However, as the eleven chapters of this book demonstrate, Du Bois’s work was indeed of a very political nature. Actually, Du Bois was, in many ways, a socialist and he frequently wrote about socialism. While not a communist, he did sympathize to some extent with communism, and this caused his some grief with government officials during the cold war era. He may not have been “a political theorist,” but du Bois was definitely a politically engaged person. *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois* consists of eleven chapters written by eleven different scholars who analyze selected portions of Du Bois’s writings in terms of political theory.

All eleven contributors to this volume are academics with five specializing in Politics, Political Science, or Government; three specializing in English (one of whom also specializes in African American Studies); and three in Philosophy. All contributions are of interest but, as is usual in a multi-author collection, the quality of writing and scholarship varies but every chapter is worth reading.

Among the best contributions is Chapter 9, “The Cost of Liberty: Sacrifice and Survival in Du Bois’s *John Brown*” by Alexander Livingston, assistant professor of Government at Cornell University. Livingston clearly identifies the significance (and political position) of Du Bois’s assessment of John Brown in American history while writing in 1909, an era when the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War was gaining traction. Says Livingston, “From within this nadir of Jim Crow revisionism, Du Bois’s conclusion that ‘John Brown was right’ rang out, as an indictment of the nation’s acquiescent acceptance of Reconstruction’s defeat and called his readers to continue agitating for racial equality” (208).

One finds another example of clear analysis of the political thinking of Du Bois in Chapter 10, “A Splendid Failure? *Black Reconstruction* and Du Bois’s Tragic Vision of Politics” by Vijay Phulwani, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Government at Cornell University. Analyzing Du Bois’s major 1935 book, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Phulwani writes, “Instead, he

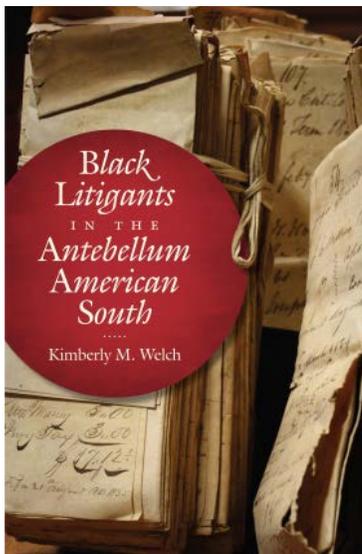
used *Black Reconstruction* to invert the tragic legend, showing how the real harm done to American democracy was not the rule of ‘black Republicanism’ but the reimposition of white supremacy, which both stymied the practical possibility of political progress and closed white Americans off to the historical self-understanding they needed to make sense of their own condition” (272).

The primary audience for *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois* is an academic one: upper level undergraduates through post-doctoral researchers and faculty members in African American Studies, Political Science, and American History. This title is recommended to college and university libraries collecting in these areas and perhaps to larger public libraries bearing in mind that the book is not really suited to the casual reader.

Having now reviewed this excellent volume, my interest in going on another W.E.B. Du Bois reading binge has been rekindled twenty years later.

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Black Litigants in the Antebellum American South. Kimberly M. Welch. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1-6496-3643-6 (hard.: \$39.95), 978-1-4696-3645-0 (Ebook; \$29.99) 328 p.



Kimberly Welch piqued my curiosity simply by her choice of a title for her research, “Black Litigants in The Antebellum American South”. Was she going to paint a picture for us of “gloom and doom” for black litigants in those years?

In the years between the War of 1812 and the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, “so called The Antebellum Years”, in the Natchez district of Mississippi/Louisiana, Welch says “black people sued white people in all white courtrooms”.

Found legal documents revealed enforcement of contracts, unpaid debts, and damages for assault were brought to the courts and judges by black litigants. Often these cases were won by the black litigants.

Welch credits the language of storytelling with the success of the black litigants. Lacking training in legal language, the litigants were good storytellers and knew the white judges and juries could relate to the concept of property, damage of property and loss of property. Swaying a jury by focusing upon the damages the litigant suffered due to lost or damaged property was a concept judges and jurors of the time understood.

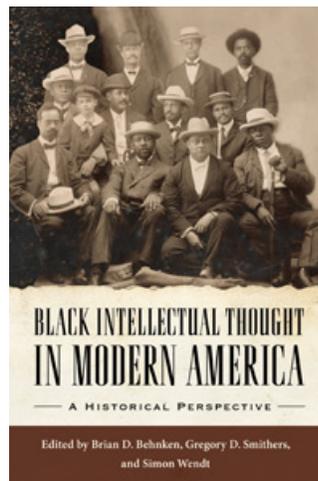
Welch uncovered in her extensive research over 1,000 court actions of free and enslaved black litigants who sought protection of their interests and redress of their damages. Welch’s research was conducted in courthouse basements, storage sheds, churches, and family histories.

Welch is an excellent storyteller and the research she provides is filled with stories of the cases she uncovered. There is very little “gloom and doom” in her stories. It is not painful to read but uplifting, highlighting the skill and ability of black litigants to express their rights to claim damages for the suffering they experienced.

This is an excellent book for academic and public libraries. I recommend it to be of particular interest to government, legal and archival societies.

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D. MLIS
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Black Intellectual Thought In Modern America: A Historical Perspective. Edited by Brian D. Behnken, Gregory D. Smithers, and Simon Wendt. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4968-1365-7. 240 p. \$65.00.



If you are a person who likes to read essays. This text brings focus and meaning to the major leaders of black