

The Soul of Black Folks

W.E.B. Dubois

It is a pleasure to see such wonderful reviews by other readers

It is also a challenge to add anything. What struck me about this collection of essays was its diversity and its humanity. Dubois was an elegant, gifted writer. He was a little bit flowery and a 19th century manner, extravagant in his use of image and metaphor. Extravagant, but successful! The writing is amazingly fresh for being a century old.

One thing that comes through clearly is the intimate relationship between black and white society in the South both before and after the Civil War. Dubois, born free in New England, saw the South both through the intimate eyes of a black person - he calls it the "veil" - and rather objectively as a person who had traveled broadly and spoke several languages. He put the situation of the black man in America in a world perspective.

His stories about the injustices suffered by black men are very poignant. Nevertheless, and adding to the poignancy, is his sympathy for the white people who are constrained by time, culture, history and their society in their relationships with black people. He has what one would call a tragic view of the situation.

The tragic view is on best display in his essay on reconstruction. Most of the people who established the reconstruction program and managed it had the best of motives. As managers, they had their human limitations. In order to be effective they needed supra-constitutional powers, which the American Republic was understandably reluctant to give. And, of course, there were the predictable constraints of money in politics. I finished this 20 page essay with a profound sense of how incomplete my education had been, and a new sympathy for all involved in this American tragedy.