



Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual

Ross Posnock

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The coining of the term "intellectuals" in 1898 coincided with W. E. B. Du Bois's effort to disseminate values and ideals unbounded by the color line. Du Bois's ideal of a "higher and broader and more varied human culture" is at the heart of a cosmopolitan tradition that *Color and Culture* identifies as a missing chapter in American literary and cultural history. The book offers a much needed and startlingly new historical perspective on "black intellectuals" as a social category, ranging over a century--from Frederick Douglass to Patricia Williams, from Du Bois, Pauline Hopkins, and Charles Chesnut to Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, and Alain Locke, from Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin to Samuel Delany and Adrienne Kennedy. These writers challenge two durable assumptions: that high culture is "white culture" and that racial uplift is the sole concern of the black intellectual.

The remarkable tradition that this book recaptures, culminating in a cosmopolitan disregard for demands for racial "authenticity" and group solidarity, is strikingly at odds with the identity politics and multicultural movements of our day. In the Du Boisian tradition Posnock identifies a universalism inseparable from the particular and open to ethnicity--an approach with the power to take us beyond the provincialism of postmodern tribalism.

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