

The Talented Tenth, Revisited

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Let's Not Get It Twisted



he following is meant to be an informative piece of work, but in order for me to

inform, we must all speak the same language. Please remain cognizant, I intend all who read this to be ambassadors of the Black man's intellect, charm, character and capability in order to counteract the effect that the media has on the masses. So, in order to be as informative as possible, let's get a few concepts and definitions out of the way.

1. Racism **does** exist.
2. Racism is a significant problem in the US, and probably the entire world, for those of the Black race
3. Racism is not even **close** to being the Black man's (woman's) primary problem.
4. Classism **does** exist. Class is defined as control over one's destiny.
5. Classism **is** the African-American's **biggest** issue in the U.S.
6. Racism is a superficial subset of classism, thus is often **confused** with classism by whites and Blacks, as well as nearly all other socio-demographic groups. Often, whites, Blacks, Asians, Jews, etc. use the term or concept of being Black as a synonym with being at the lower end of the socio-economic food chain. Many even go as far as to accuse those who are not at the bottom of this food chain as **"not being Black!"** This is **brainwashing** at its best.
7. If Blacks in this country had to choose between being on top of the socio-economic ladder and being the subject of racist policies, or being at the bottom of the same ladder absent subjugation to racist policies, the **smart ones** would choose the former.
8. The aforementioned statement proposes a **fool's argument**, since racist policies can only be instituted by those at the top of the socio-economic ladder. If one were at the top of the food chain, would one really care if the one's at the bottom of the food chain liked or respected them??? Would the one's at the bottom really have choice???
9. Those of the Black race who **really care** about accomplishment, arriving, and uplifting the race should focus much, much less on racism, and much, much more on raising their brethren and sisters out of the lower classes.
10. Of course, since racism is a subset of classism (sort of a quasi-rigid caste system instituted in the US), which appears to make it difficult for many to differentiate between race and class, there will be significant overlap and intersection in the attempt to eliminate Blacks from the lower classes. This I admit, and admit fully, but that is not an **excuse** for anyone to take their eyes off of the prize and allow themselves to be misdirected in their journey for betterment.
11. If I am accurate in my assertion that class trumps race as a primary issue for Blacks, then as Blacks rise in status and stature, there will be significant stratification between the haves and the have-nots amongst the Black race as well as without the Black race. Those in the housing projects will not be welcome in the million dollar neighborhoods of doctors, lawyers, and CEOs. Conversely, many multi-millionaires and accomplished authors will feel discriminated against

in the projects, barrios and low income areas where lower class blacks have been known to live. With this being the case, we should expect the problems associated with racism to be replicated within our race as Blacks become more and more successful. From my experience, the working and middle classes ignite from friction with the upper middle classes, and this is within the Black community wherein most of the members came from the same class just one or two generations ago.

12. In order to deal effectively with classism we need to deal with racism. And in order to deal effectively with racism, we need to deal with class.

Now that we are clear on where and how I stand, on to what it was that I started this missive for...

The Talented Tenth, Revisited...

W.E.B. DuBois asserted in 1903 that Black progress would stall until a cadre of elites —whom he called the Talented Tenth — was trained to lead the masses. Built into this strategy for Black achievement was the clear duty of Black elites to lift as they climb. The historic mandate of “uplift,” while controversial and selectively heeded, has shaped Black thought and action ever since. The following is the famed DuBois essay, heavily edited in order to reflect the reality of today.

Dubois Speaks Through Me

Men of America, the problem is plain before you. Here is a race transplanted through the criminal foolishness of your fathers. Whether you like it or not the millions are here, and here they will remain. If you do not lift them up, they will pull you down. Productive assets (wealth), knowledge and strength of character are the means to which accomplish this. Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence and knowledge. Academic education alone will do little, for look at many of our brothers and sisters who are highly degreed, yet have a lower standard of living and less inflation adjusted net wealth than their parents despite living in a less racially oppressed age. Successful education must not simply teach work — it must teach Life. The Talented Tenth of the Black race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. No others can (or will honestly) do this work and we must train agents for it. The Black race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional heroes.

W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903 revised by RCM, 2006.

Thus DuBois embarked on a mission of racial uplift that called for the most exceptional of his race to lead the lower portion by their example. He called this group "the Talented Tenth," and in an essay of the same title, he declares: "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education...is the problem of

developing the Best of this race that may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst in their own races"

What it Takes to Get There

To pursue the ideals of the Talented Tenth, we must produce a cadre of upper class

Blacks (those that follow a 100 year legacy plan – 5 generations of perpetuated wealth, knowledge and ideals), not a pervasive middle class, to lead through 21st-22nd centuries. The mere assertion that members of the middle class represent the "Elite" of the Black race is an offensive, self deprecating mentality – one that equates the socio-economic "best" of the Black race to the middling of the white race. People are people, and the skin color or social grouping of one set of people does not lend an inherent inferiority or superiority to that group.

The Hole

We must address the hole in the popular literature and more importantly, the media

that both portrays and feeds the African American child: to point, while perusing the aisles of Howard University's (my alma mater and the world's largest historically black university) newly constructed mega-bookstore, I was assailed with enough gangsta rap, video ho, and entertainment industry gossip fodder to fill any racist, Afro-American deprecating, Klan loyal white narcissists appetite. The problem is this was located in the bookstore of what is popularly thought to be the bastion of Black higher education. This lower class lifestyle fodder mirrors the image portrayed by the popular media, which is not flattering. Go to your local media outlet, or sit down in front of the TV, and pay attention to what you see, record with a pen and paper the following: the amount of images, portrayals, and stories concerning Black men and women in lower classes (below that of middle class, again see the socialclass.org model for clarification), the Blacks in the upper classes (upper middle class and higher), and the blacks in sports and entertainment. Now subtract the sports and entertainment from the total, then take the portrayal of the upper classes and divide it by the sum total of all you have collected (including the sports and entertainment. The resultant percentage is what the media thinks of the upper classes of the black race, and how they portray them. Since I am not with you to review your observations I don't know for sure what your research has unearthed, but let's take a guess... Miniscule to nothing??? Let's not get it twisted... This rant is not coming from an old man in the ivory tower. I am a relatively young man, raised through the heart of the hip hop '80's in what many would consider a "real neighborhood". My viewpoint stems from the fact that I grew up and learned the ways of the world.

What We Need, and What We Don't

We don't need an additional page, picture, sentence, or even word denigrating the image and/or the character of the Black man/woman. What we do need is literature and media to make African American children and their parents proud of their color and race, to teach them the successful reality of their race, and to offer examples of successful African Americans. There are many shining examples of successful, charismatic, interesting and upstanding Black Men and women whose lives make a most interesting read. For those who really feel a dearth of such, thus go the gangsta/ho route, start with me. I will lend myself to any who need an iconic, if not iconoclastic character. After myself, I can direct you to nearly one hundred more. And that's just a start.

Some Simply Don't Have the Luxury of Focusing on their History

Many preach that you must know your history, but considering the dire straight that many in the Black race are in, resources spent on the learning of history is a luxury that some simply cannot afford. What must be taught first and foremost is knowledge of the present, not the past. It is knowledge of the present times, not the Anglo-centric, capitalist class favoring interpretation of the present, which will give our youth and their progenitors the impetus needed to shape the future. Do not get me wrong, knowledge of the past is important and useful, particularly in the building of pride and the avoiding of repeat errors, but we are in an emergency situation here. Time has arrived for more immediate results. As the God Rakim Allah has so eloquently phrased it, "It's not where you're from, its where you're at!"

The Challenge to Our Schools, Educators, and Parents

What the Black race needs now is a system of education that does not simply teach academics and create a slave army of rule followers. We need teach rule breakers and rule makers. Teach charisma. This is how leaders are made, while a focus on pure academics is how followers are groomed. We have to teach our children about life, and the world around us. We need to teach them how the world actually works, and test these teachings in the real world regularly in order to "mark our curriculum to market". In this fashion, if any of our teachings are false or too theoretical, their failings in the world marketplace will allow us to correct course before our students are ruined by a pile of irrelevant academia, or even worse – flat out erroneous information and false knowledge. These precepts may appear somewhat applicable to children of all races, though they articulate a clear philosophy on the proper behavior of African American children: "to teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relation with other children and adults of different backgrounds; to turn their hurts and resentments into emulations, ambition and love of their own homes and companions; to point out the best amusements and joys and worth-while things of life; to inspire them to prepare for

definite pursuits of wealth and social accomplishment, not merely jobs, occupations, or careers, and to conduct these duties with a broad spirit of philanthropic sacrifice".

At the very least, have as the base of every academic curriculum:

1. *The current application of popular and nascent technologies*
2. *The definition, meaning, and pursuit of wealth*
3. *Philanthropy – what it is, and how it furthers one's cause*
4. *Legacy building and the 100 Year Plan – the creation of immortality: perpetuating one's family, family ideology, wealth, and knowledge through a minimum of 5 generations.*
5. *Modern Politics and Power Structure – what is powerful, who is powerful, and why? How did they get their? How to replace them?*

In DuBois' missive claiming that the advancement of Negroes depended on the training of exceptional men who would lead the masses, (academic) education was prioritized. I'm confident that he erred in this assessment, although in his time it appeared as if he came to a logical, if erroneous conclusion. DuBois assumed that (academic) education was the primary cause of wealth and power in the US. This has been found to be less than accurate. There is a link between education and socio-economic success, but that link is less defined and more tenuous than DuBois realized. If (academic, as was and currently is consumed by the Black race) education was the primary goal to pursue, it is painfully obvious today that it is but a tertiary goal. Wealth, followed by motivated class consciousness are the two goals that, if achieved will uplift the Black race. "The Talented Tenth," sought to define the debt owed to the Black community by its most learned and thriving members. For the betterment of the race, he called on this elite group (and by 'elite' I/we simply mean those in the higher socio-economic circles (see socialclass.org class model for more detail) to work in support of Blacks' full inclusion in American life through outside agitation, and by means of "uplift" from within. Built into this formula for Black achievement, then, was the expectation that the most educated among them—the "race leaders"—would identify with and advocate for those of their race in the "lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder." This historic mandate of uplift, while controversial and selectively heeded, has had influence in Black history ever since.

Why C. Wright Mills Likes the Dirty South, Big Butt Video Hos and All!

In his 1956 classic, *The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills explained that, "The higher circles are often thought of in terms of what their members possess: they have a greater share than other people of the things and experiences that are most valued. From this point of view, the elite are simply those who have the most of what there is to have, which is generally held to include money, power, and prestige." I find this to be most true, but at the same time it is a very dangerous message to convey. Material wealth to the unlearned, or the ignorant, is often equated to ownership of consumer goods and depreciating items. This is actually the antithesis of material wealth, for true wealth by its

very nature autonomously propagates, while the nature of highly marketed consumer goods (as taught by midtown marketing companies as the icon of wealth and achievement) autonomously depreciates and dwindles. Hence the saying, “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”. Hence, hence, the focus on diamonds, bling, near valueless (relatively) McMansions, and expensive cars in the media that focuses on Blacks in the lower classes and those of lesser financial knowledge, whose bellwether is unfortunately a media outlet formally owned by, and aimed nearly exclusively at members of the Black Race.

Try closing your eyes and picturing a BET or MTV rap music video, authentic as ever, featuring diamond-front laden emcees from the **dirty south**, those **sexy, big booty video hoes**, a slammin’ heavy bass beat (you know the one’s that the dirty, dirty get down with), the whole nine yards, with lyrics blazing “\$30 million in unrestricted stock, own every income producing building on my block, don’t own a car, but own a car dealer, late to the meeting to profit off of the Pittsburgh Steelers!” If Lil’ Kim could influence little girls to aspire to this with the same efficiency that she urges these young ladies to practice deep throat, we would have a whole lot more sisters striving into the upper class potentially in lieu of Lil’ Kim, et..al. pushing teenage fellatio experts. ‘Nuff said.

Does Being Black Mean Being Poor or Low Class? Does Race Really Mean Class?

Black people are usually poor, entertainers or ball players. There are few “special” (read more like white people) blacks who are middle class. I would not mind them in my neighborhood, even though they can be rather full of themselves, or “Bougie”. Sound familiar? Sound offensive? Many people have this mentality. Notice how I don’t say many white people, for many Blacks are just as guilty. This stereotyping needs to come to a halt if the Black man is to demand more respect, which will lead to a gain social status, and in turn a larger chunk of the socio-political resources pie from the general public. It is a stereotyping that is pervasive, particularly through the media. The strong, learned, multi-millionaire, family orientated Black man with character and ethnicity is never seen in the newspapers and magazines, commercial TV and movies, or popularly distributed books. He is a reality though and can be seen just walking down the street in Brooklyn or Manhattan. You may not recognize him, for you may subconsciously be mistaking him for that black man you see on TV, in the movies, or in the tabloid media – you know, the “Hustle and Flow” type (such a shame, good movie, self-deprecating subject matter for the Black Man/Woman, as is par for the course in Hollywood, and staple manna for the media consuming masses).

So, If Race Does Not Define Class, What Does???

The Power Elite documented the social backgrounds and career trajectories of the people who occupied the highest posts in what Mills saw as the institutional hubs of power in postwar America: the corporations, the executive branch of the federal government, and the military. While many of his contemporaries were busy singing the praises of pluralism in what they perceived to be a relatively classless society, Mills, less sanguine, dismissed as absurd the idea that there was no elite. Those who believed otherwise were uninformed or deluding themselves (and others) typically for self-serving reasons.

Having confirmed the existence of a “ruling stratum,” Mills proceeded to describe the characteristics of the people involved in decisions of national consequence. He found the members of the power elite had strikingly similar social origins. They fruitfully used vast resources and insular social ties to move across the three institutional hierarchies in both formal and informal capacities. The result was a robust web of entitlement. Mills concluded that the high and mighty at mid-century were almost all Christian white males who mostly came from the “upper third of the income and occupational pyramids.” Their fathers were “at least of the professional and business strata, and very frequently higher than that.”

The circle remained exclusive because real influence, for Mills, was located not in individuals, but in their access to the “command of major institutions...the necessary bases of power, of wealth, and of prestige.”

Simply put, the powerful can and do make use of their resources to set favorable terms by which to safeguard their position at the top. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 9.

On the uninformed: “In America today there are in fact tiers and ranges of wealth and power of which people in the middle and lower ranks know very little and may not even dream.” *The Power Elite*, 12. On the perspective of elites about their own motives: “American men of power tend, by convention, to deny that they are powerful. No American runs for office in order to rule or even govern, but only to serve....Nowadays, such postures have become standard features of the public-relations programs of all men of power.” *The Power Elite*, 17.

The Talented Tenth and Class, 101

As a target for the definition of the Talented Tenth, I advocate a minimum of a higher “upper middle class” standing, ex. a score of 23 on Socialclass.org class model, available from www.socialclass.org. By definition, this transforms the Talented Tenth, in a mathematical sense, into something more like the Talented Three, due to the

significantly increased rigor of the selection process resulting in the top three percent of the Black Race, in lieu of the top ten percent..

Simply taking characteristics that the media has popularly attributed to success such as education, or income will easily mislead today's youth (and their parents) into a false sense of both security and superiority. I personally know many highly educated people who have little in terms of productive (income producing and/or appreciating) assets other than the home that they live in and a small retirement account. I know many individuals and couples with high incomes, over \$250,000 who are also devoid of productive assets and socio-political clout. Social class, the metric of membership into that club W.E.B. Dubois coined "the Talented Tenth", and to a greater extent the metric from which Mill's tome, "The Power Elite" is far too complex to be broken down into one or two variables such as education or income. The variables that we need to ascertain class are automatically calculated in the socialclass.org class model, but one must have a firm understanding of the meaning of the inputs in order to get a valid assessment:

1. **Wealth** – the pre-eminent factor, for in a capitalistic society, capital reigns supreme. Remember, what is being preached is far from materialism, and those who confuse the pursuit of capital as materialism are erring on the side of ignorance. I consistently remind my children what money is for. When you ask many people lower on the socio-economic ladder what money is for, you frequently get in response "to buy things". This mentality and belief leads to a circular situation wherein the lack of understanding of the nature of money leads to an inherent lack of it. Capital in its purest essence - or to put it more simply, money - is used as a proxy for labor. As a result, the more capital that you have, the less you have to toil in your own labor. Once you have reached the point of equilibrium where your capital is equivalent to your labor, you no longer have to work to retain your current standard of living. All capital above this point of equilibrium can then be used to purchase the labor (hence the livelihoods) of others. The more capital you have, the more control you have over your own destiny, and then over the destiny of others. Capital is defined as property, eg. Cash, income producing assets (bonds, businesses, rental properties, mortgage notes, royalty generating intellectual property, etc.), appreciating assets (eg. Stocks, real estate, businesses, readily tradable antiquities, etc.), and to a much lesser extent in terms of value, depreciating assets (cars, jewelry, clothing, etc.). Wealth is defined as total assets (capital) minus all liabilities (debts and obligations). With these explicit definitions, we can now see the pursuit of wealth not as a material pursuit, but as a means of gaining control over the economy (notice I stated "the" economy not "our" economy), the political system, the social structure of the country and the futures of ourselves, our children, and others.
2. **Income** – provides the liquidity needed for day-to-day operations as well as long term planning. Income is often quoted as the primary determinant of class and is often mistaken as a proxy for wealth. This is patently false, for one can have high income and very little wealth, and this situation very, very prevalent. High income equates to social prestige, but is not nearly as accurate a determinate of power, influence or socio-economic standing as wealth is.

3. **Income source** – where income is derived dictates the autonomy, independence and reliability of that income. For instance, income derived from a salaried job is less secure and desirable (you can always get fired from your job, or become incapacitated due to illness) than income derived from one's own business which is less secure and desirable (you can become incapacitated due to illness in smaller companies, where the markets can move against you in larger businesses) than income from a broadly diversified portfolio of investments (which could easily include your own business) since it is virtually impossible to get fired, suffer financial distress from incapacitation, or have an adverse move in markets significantly damage your financial standing.
4. **Occupation** – while less important from an economic perspective, this factor is significant in the social purview. What you do often transcends how much you make or even how much you have in many social circles. For instance, a untenured college professor can easily make less than a prison corrections officer that works overtime, yet the college professor is deemed to be of higher social standing, even if he rents subsidized housing from his school/employer (aka social welfare, popularly thought to be only the province of the lower classes) while the corrections officer can not only own his own residence in the same neighborhood, but also own the one next to it for investment income.
5. **Education** – Academic education has traditionally been seen as the key to success in many circles. I have come to the conclusion that it is far from the key to ultimate success, but it is an important, if not necessary, component. This issue boils down to cause and effect. It is obvious that many successful people are well educated, but is that because successful families get educations or educations lead to successful families. Regardless of the chronological linkage of the occurrences, highly educated individuals are viewed with more prestige than lower educated individuals, and this prestige leads to a higher social standing. There is also significant evidence that academic education does have a connection to improved economic standing as well, but it is much more complex than popular opinion would have many to believe.
6. **Dwelling area** – basically, you are where you live. Very few powerful or wealthy people live in the ghetto unless their power is solely or derived from the economic underground (eg. Drugs, prostitution, etc.) that is forced to fly under the radar of mainstream social circles, which by default forces them into the lower classes. Conversely, very few powerless poor people live in the Gold Coast areas unless they are there as live in domestic help. People of like means tend to cluster together, so dwelling area has a high correlation to class.
7. **Housing** – highly correlated to class due to the fact that home ownership is a class marker. So is the value and size of the home. Most of those on the very low end of the SES scale do not own their own homes, while most on the very high end tend to own several homes.

8. **Class consciousness** (affiliations) – The ability to actually know where you stand and influence others in the group that you stand is a class marker, as well as the ability to know where others stand in relation to your standing and influence. Your affiliations help label your class strata. For instance, being a leader of local PTA, and being aware of that positions influence puts you in a higher standing than no group membership or just belonging to the local bowling team. The same goes to membership to a Fortune 500 or multinational not-for-profit board as compared to PTA membership. The more you know about class and class affiliation, chances are the higher you will be in the class standing.

The problem of training the Negro is today immensely complicated by the fact that

the whole question of the efficiency and appropriateness of our present systems of formal and academic education, for any kind of child, is a matter of active debate, in which final settlement seems still afar off. Consequently it often happens that persons arguing for or against certain systems of education for Blacks have these controversies in mind and miss the real question at issue. The main question, so far as the African-American is concerned, is: What, under the present circumstance, must a system of education do in order to raise the Black Man/Woman as quickly as possible up the rungs of the socio-economic ladder? The answer to this question seems to me clear: It must strengthen the privileged's character, increase their knowledge and teach them to acquire the assets of power, production and influence.

Now it goes without saying that it is hard to do all these things simultaneously or suddenly and that at the same time it will not do to give all the attention to one and neglect the others.

We could give Black boys and girls the ideals, knowledge, and mindset to motivate them to acquire economic assets through entrepreneurship and the established corporate environment, but will that alone provide the socio-political influence necessary to counteract the pervasive subset of classism, otherwise known as racism, not to mention allow them to capture the helm of capitalism which is the ownership of valuable property?

We might simply increase their knowledge of the world, but this would not necessarily make them wish to use this knowledge to the betterment of their race in lieu of the betterment of their socio-economic class;

We might seek to strengthen character and purpose, but to what end if the people have nothing to eat or to wear or be without the means to aggregate and exploit (this is the issue I found so pervasive in the black militant movements)?

A system of education is not one thing, nor does it have a single definite object, nor is it a mere matter of schools. Education is that whole system of human training within and without the school house walls, which molds and develops leaders. If then we start out to train an ignorant and unskilled people with a reflexively reinforcing cycle of self limiting or self destructive habits, our system of training must set before itself two great aims — the one dealing with motivational and inspirational character, the other part seeking to give the child the technical knowledge necessary for him to acquire and manipulate financial and social capital under the present circumstances.

These objects are accomplished in part by the opening the minds of the common schools to the precepts of socio-economic status, its true meaning and how to manipulate it to one's own benefit. We must create asset gatherers, not workers. This is true even for, no even especially for, those who are trained to teach these schools — men and women of knowledge and culture and technical skill who understand modern civilization, but most importantly Men and Women of Accomplishment, for only accomplishment can assuredly attest to the training and aptitude to impart accomplishment to the children under them.

There must be teachers, and teachers of teachers; but to attempt to establish any sort of a system of common and industrial school training, without first (and I say first advisedly) providing for the higher training of the very best teachers, is simply throwing your efforts to the winds. School houses do not teach themselves - piles of brick and mortar and machinery do not send out leaders. It is the trained, living human soul, cultivated and strengthened by long study and thought, that breathes the real breath of life into boys and girls and makes them human, whether they be Black or white, Greek, Russian, African or American, Jewish, Christian or Muslim.

SocialClass.org Calculation of Downtown Brooklyn Area Poverty Threshold Guidelines

Family of 4	Monthly
Food	\$560
Housing	\$2,000
Utilities	\$220
Education	through property taxes
Taxes	Through income taxes

Other consumable items
(clothes, etc.) \$280

Medical expenses \$242

Total Living Expenses \$3,302

Effective Tax Rate

Federal 28%

State 13%

Local 7%

Total 41%

Monthly Poverty Inc. Level \$ 5,597

Annual Poverty Inc. Level \$ 67,159

Add for every add'l person \$ 8,700

Poverty Wealth Threshold \$ 19,812

based on 6 months of living capital, not including housing equity under \$23,000

2005 Federal Poverty Guidelines

Size of Family Unit	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$9,570	\$11,950	\$11,010
2	12,830	16,030	14,760
3	16,090	20,110	18,510
4	19,350	24,190	22,260
5	22,610	28,270	26,010
6	25,870	32,350	29,760
7	29,130	36,430	33,510
8	32,390	40,510	37,260
For each additional person, add	3,260	4,080	3,750
<p>SOURCE: Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 33, February 18, 2005, pp. 8373-8375.http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/05poverty.shtml</p>			