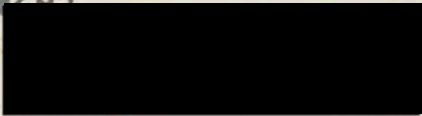


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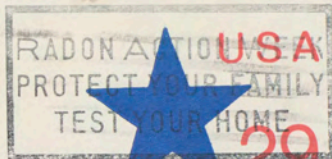
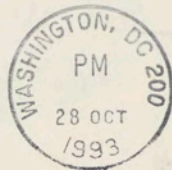
Brian Lamb,

Enclosed find article +
review of biography of W. E. B.
DuBois by David Levering
Lewis which would make
an excellent subject for
your Book Notes program

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AUTHOR GIVES W.E.B. HIS DU

Portrait of activist is framed by race struggle

Historian David Levering Lewis almost talked his way out of a career of writing books about the black experience. After getting his Ph.D. in French history from the London School of Economics, Lewis was approached in 1968 by an editor at Penguin America about writing the biography of the then very much alive Martin Luther King Jr.

"My reaction was, Martin Luther King is 38 years old," remembers Lewis. "How could a [biography] remain in any way current and not be superannuated?"

Lewis was about to post a letter to the editor saying as much when the news of King's assassination was broadcast. He took the job and the resulting book, "King: A Biography," published in 1970, became a critical and popular success.

There were no near misses for Lewis, 57, when he wrote his sixth book, the recently published "W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919." The author began reading about the controversial author, academic, civil rights activist for a segment of his 1981 book about the Harlem Renaissance, "When Harlem Was in Vogue." Upon learning that all of Du Bois' correspondence would be made available to him, Lewis decided to take on the task of chronicling Du Bois' 95-year life.

Lewis' richly detailed book, which is a finalist for the National Book Award in nonfiction, serves up a three-dimensional

portrait of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. But the biography also gives behind-the-scenes information about race issues as they developed from Reconstruction in 1868 to the day of the March on Wash-

*'I wanted
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ton in 1963.

"Du Bois is really suited now for the times because he was in many ways one of the architects of multi-culturalism," says Lewis, who will begin writing the second volume of the biography, which will appear in 1994, in three months. "I really wanted to write something that would show us how we got here."

A Guggenheim Fellowship in 1986 allowed Lewis to take off a year from Rutgers University, where he is the Martin Luther King Jr. Chair in history and devote his energy

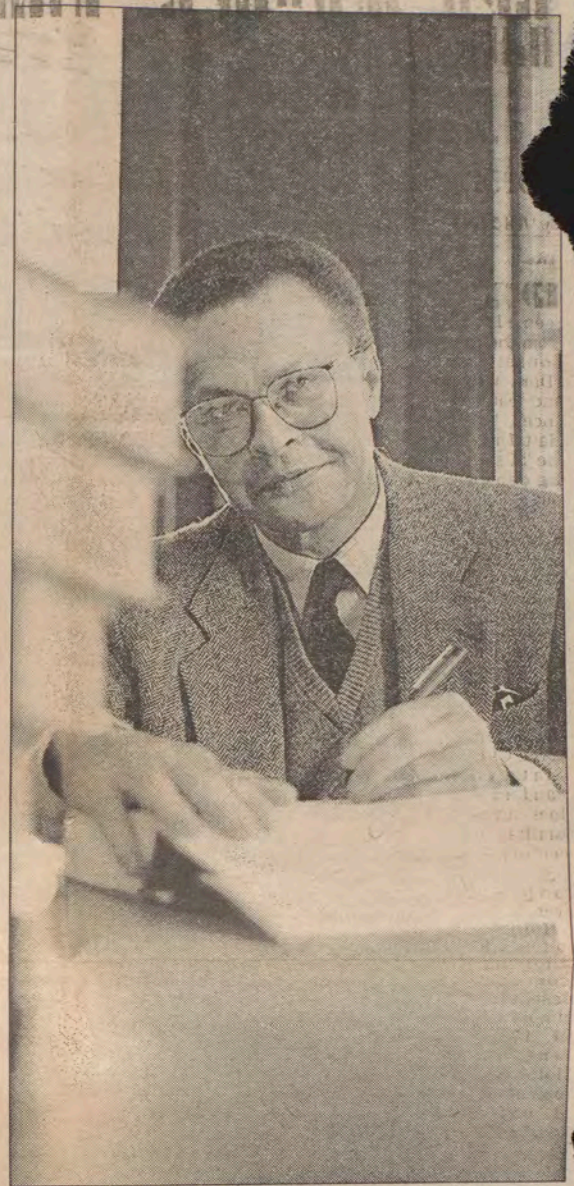
to the book. What kept Lewis going for the next eight years — he kicked off his research with a visit to Ghana in 1985 for the reburial of Du Bois — was his admiration of the activist as a person.

"Unlike 90% of us, [Du Bois] became more radical the older he got," says Lewis, who currently splits his work week between Washington, D.C., and Rutgers in New Brunswick, N.J. "He had any number of opportunities to make his peace with society. Honors were just waiting for him ... and he walked away from those opportunities without exception. It's that courage of consistency, whatever the cost, that I found admirable."

Du Bois' comments about Marxism (he was for it) and corruption in the African-American church earned him a certain wariness from many quarters.

"Every constituency got thumped and bumped by Du Bois," says Lewis, who was too young to remember a visit by Du Bois to his family home in Atlanta when his father was president of Morris Brown College.

The author says that one of his biggest challenges was rendering Du Bois' life in a way that was academically valid yet inviting to general readers. "I think it's a professional decision that you make as an academic ... to write not only for your colleagues but for the larger public," says Lewis. "Journalists are becoming great historians and historians are in a sense being left behind ivy walls, and that's a pity."



DU BOIS ACHIEVEMENT: David Levering Lewis spent eight years researching his subject's 95 years.

SUSAN STAVA

Powerful testament to an immense man

W.E.B. DU BOIS: BIOGRAPHY OF A RACE

By David Levering Lewis
(Henry Holt, \$35)

The subtitle of this monumental work is no empty boast. Born three years after the Civil War ended, Du Bois died the night before Martin Luther King's triumphant March on Washington. Though this volume covers Du Bois' life only through World War I, it leaves little doubt that before Lewis is done, we will have the finest account yet of this middle passage in the American black experience.

Lewis begins his story in the Berkshire town of Great Barrington, Mass., where Du Bois was born into a small black community that lived relatively unshaded by prejudice. Not entirely, though — the small and early wounds that presaged the descent of what Du Bois would come to call "the veil" of discrimination are carefully chronicled, with the author generously but firmly correcting the stories Du Bois told in his several autobiog-

raphies.

The meteoric chronology of Du Bois' personal achievement — his rocket rise through Fisk, Harvard and Berlin, his friendships with William James and other greats — are seen here in contrast to the emerging sense of "twoness" that Du Bois felt in himself and his race — the sense that he was both black and an American, "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings."

But though he battled courageously with lynch mobs and quiescent government officials, his vision of the African place in America was defined most sharply in his fight with Booker T. Washington, leader of the Tuskegee Institute and its nationwide political machine.

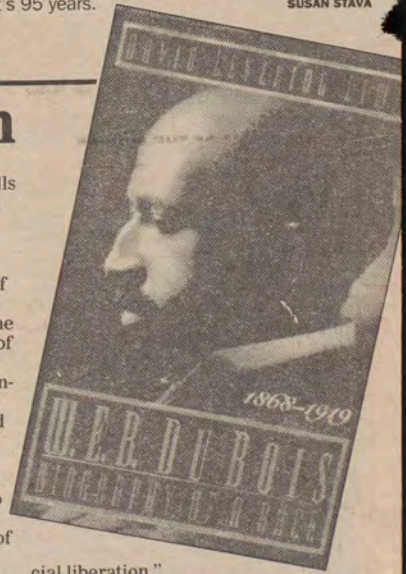
Their historic confrontation — retold here with tremendous power and concision — spanned several decades. Washington, darling of Northern philanthropists and Southern conservatives, surveyed the hostile post-Reconstruction landscape and offered, in essence, a bargain: Blacks would forget about social equality and lose the ballot. In return, they would be left "free" to develop

economically, concentrating on the skills like farming and carpentry that Tuskegee taught.

Young Prof. Du Bois — though grudgingly admitting the value of practical education — saw his race differently. In his 1903 classic, "The Souls of Black Folk," he showed some of what Lewis called "the moral and creative energies that lay hidden in the conditions of its very alienation." A black consciousness — a vision that stretched into the glorious African past, and into an equally glorious future — had been damped by the psychological horror of racism, and Du Bois was determined to bring it out.

The rest of the story — the founding of the Niagara Movement, and the guidance of the newborn NAACP, the fiery rhetoric, the icy demand that he be treated with respect — all plays out his belief in militance as psychic liberation.

To Du Bois, Lewis writes, "the violence of ideas, the insurgency of attitudes, the rupture of deference ... were the essential pre-conditions of black ra-



cial liberation."

Booker T. Washington was routed, and though racism persisted and persists, it has never since gone unchallenged. This is an enormous legacy; this is a mighty book. (McKibben is the author of "The Age of Missing Information.")

WANDERLUST OF THE SOUL

1. Scott Peck points the way toward another leg of the pop spiritual trip

FURTHER ALONG THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

By M. Scott Peck
(Simon & Schuster, \$21)

By LARRY KLEPP

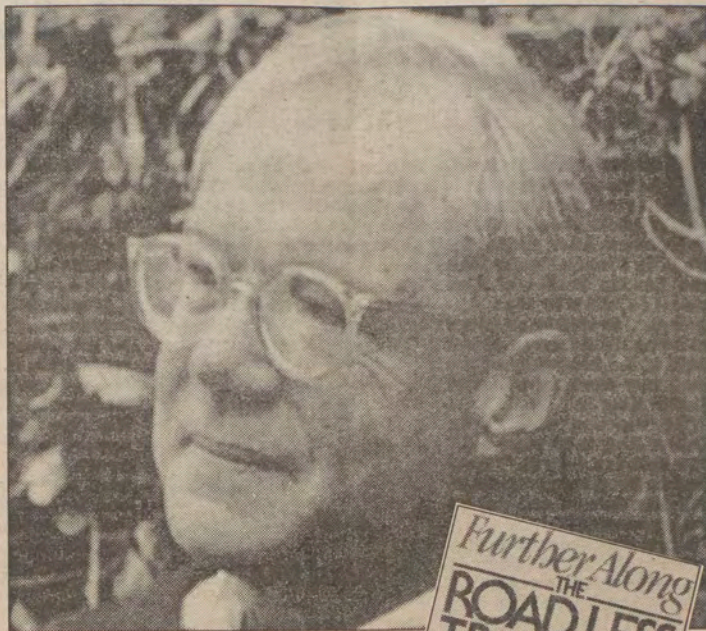
"The Road Less Travelled," M. Scott Peck's first book, has drawn as much traffic as the Cross Bronx Expressway. It has been on the paperback best-seller list for 515 weeks now and has sold more than 4 million copies. His new book, a collection of lectures on assorted topics — self-love (good) vs. self-esteem (not so good), addiction, myths, Christianity and heresy, the New Age movement, the need for a spiritual dimension in psychiatric treatment — is in every sense an extension of the original road, paved with good psycho-spiritual intentions and full of theological potholes.

Peck, who used to practice psychiatry and now preaches personal growth fortified with his nondenominational version of Christianity, begins this book by telling us that he has discovered, to his "absolute horror," that his vocation is to be an "evangelist." Not the pomaded, preening TV kind, he hastens to add, but one in the original sense of a bearer of good news. "But I must warn you," he portentously continues, "I am also a bringer of bad news. I am an evangelist who brings good news and bad news."

The bad news? "I don't know any-

thing," he says, taking a stab at Socratic modesty. It doesn't last: "We are guaranteed winners once we simply realize that everything that happens to us has been designed to teach us what we need to know" (for "spiritual growth"). This will be reassuring to the casualties in Bosnia and Somalia, but it seems a little overconfident for someone who doesn't know anything and a little simple for someone who has written this book to "assist you in thinking less simplistically" and to cure your craving for "formulas and easy answers."

Like other positive thinkers, Peck has no room in his designer universe for tragedy or irony. Yet here, as in his previous books, he is quite capable of being bracing and tough-minded — about, for instance, American adult childishness, curiosity and mental health, courage and fear, pain and paradox. He's sharp on the fundamentalist preference for the letter over the spirit and the cultishness and obliviousness to evil of certain New Age adepts. When he's in a tentative mood about his religion — defining it as a quest or exploration that can approach but never reach God or "complete faith" ("there is no such thing") — one can only murmur amen. But on the next page he's touting God as an "efficiency expert." And Rube Goldberg, apparently, is his prophet: "Very probably, God deliberately created the disorder of alcoholism in order to create alcoholics, in order that



ON THE ROAD, AGAIN: M. Scott Peck gives us more to reflect upon.

these alcoholics might create AA," launching "the community movement which is going to be the salvation not only of alcoholics and addicts, but of us all." If Voltaire were around to update "Candide," he might call his obtuse metaphysical optimist M. Scott Peck.

(Larry Klepp reviews books on a freelance basis.)



PAPERBACK READER

BONES

HARPER, \$5.99

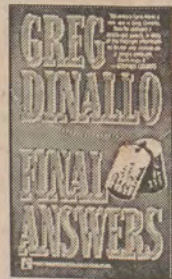
Everything anybody could ever want to know about forensic anthropology, by Douglas Ubelaker, one of its stars, with the help of writer Henry Scammell. Some great sleuthing by a man inevitably called "Sherlock Bones," with a generous sampling of grand, sometimes grisly, cases.



FINAL ANSWERS

POCKET, \$5.50

Vietnam vet is shocked to find his own name engraved on the memorial wall in Washington and stumbles onto a scandal after bureaucrats stonewall him. With the help of the wife of an MIA, he learns the truth. A fine, tough finale in the jungles of Laos by author Greg Dinallo.



THE RED, WHITE, AND BLUES

HARPER, \$4.99

Set in Detroit, a hot current date-line for dysfunctional private eyes, this lulu of a hardboiled crime story, by Ben Perkins, starts with a search for a baby missing from a hospital and leads to something very gruesome. Plenty of punch.

— Bill Bell



She's an irony-willed ruler

Prose's 'Kingdom' is full of subtle beauty

THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

By Francine Prose

(Farrar Straus Giroux, \$20)

By SUE HALPERN

There is little emotional peace in Francine Prose's new collection of stories, **THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM**.

True, the lion does lie down with the lamb, and the leopard dwells with the kid, but the result is not gentleness but quiet misery. This is the kingdom of divorce and adultery and childhood losses. It is our world, with its pathos and ironies beautifully rendered.

"That year it came as a great surprise how many sad things could happen at once," Prose writes in "Talking Dog," a story that is nominally about teenage lust. "At first you might think the odds are that one grief might exempt you, but that year I learned the odds are that nothing can keep you safe. So many concurrent painful events altered our sense of each one, just as a color appears to change when another color is placed beside it."

These stories work the same way. They are so different, and so unexpected, connected merely by a single melancholy chord that plays softly in the background. It is a triad composed of mistrust, distrust and deceit.

In "Ghirlandaio," a very young girl who is taken to an art museum every week by her father becomes obsessed with a painting of a person with a bulbous nose. The nose resembles the nose of her fourth-grade teacher, a woman she is convinced hates her. But like the painting, which only appears to be about

a nose and not a face, the girl's story is less about looking at things closely than about not seeing their actual dimensions. She does not know it then, but her father will soon leave her mother, and their fixed world will come undone. And so she says at the end of the story, "... he had been wrong about El Greco, that if something was straight and you saw it curved, you would actually paint it straight; your hand would correct what your eye had seen wrong, so it finally came out right."

Prose, too, paints things straight, knowing they are curved. In her story "Imaginary Problems," a woman whose husband is having an affair tells him she is pregnant, then calls to tell him she has miscarried, and it's never quite clear if she was or wasn't, just as it is unclear what their marriage is made of. In "Cauliflower Heads," a young woman newly married to a somewhat older man comes to the realization that she has made a mistake and that she will rectify it.

Prose, herself, sees so clearly that she shows how life — and fine writing — really is in the details. When Susanna, the disaffected newlywed in "Cauliflower Heads," first realizes she does not love her husband, she is sitting with him in a café looking enviously at another couple. "Watching, Susanna felt something inside her chest go soggy and expansive, like that trick when you plect a drinking-straw wrapper and then drip water on it." One feels something similar, reading this book.

(Halpern is the author of "Migrations to Solitude.")