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IN 1954, THE BRILLIANT SOCIAL HISTORIAN W.E.B. DU BOIS OF MASSACHUSETTS penned an apologia upon the republication of his seminal 1896 work *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870*. He wrote:

If the influence of economic motives on the action of mankind ever had a clearer illustration it was in the modern history of the African race, and particularly in America.

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INTRODUCTION xxix

I still saw slavery and the [slave] trade as chiefly a result of moral lassitude. . . . But apparently I did not clearly see that the real difficulty rested in the willingness of a privileged class of Americans to get power and comfort at the expense of degrading a class of black slaves, by not paying them what their labor deserved.

Early Americans needed cheap labor. Coming to a wild and hostile continent in search of religious freedom, they had to find their way and then, eventually, try to compete with much older and established European nations. How could they not have been in a hurry to settle this wilderness, put together a workable way to govern themselves, and, both as a nation and as individuals, earn a living?

Slavery has long been identified in the national consciousness as a Southern institution. The time to bury that myth is overdue. Slavery is a story about America, all of America. The nation's wealth, from the very