THE GROUND OF EMPOWERMENT

W. E. B. Du Bois and the Vision of Africa’s Past

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Scholars have examined many aspects of W. E. B. Du Bois’s project of empowering oppressed peoples in the United States and around the world. However they have treated in only a fragmentary way one of the principal strategies that he used to counter hegemonic ideologies of African and African American inferiority. That strategy was to turn to the evidence of history. Here I argue that Du Bois, alerted by Franz Boas to Africans’ historical attainments, confronted claims made by European Americans that Africans and a fortiori African Americans lacked any achievement independent of European or other foreign influence. Du Bois linked African Americans to Africa and laid out repeatedly and in detail a narrative of autonomous African historical accomplishment. I demonstrate that his approach to the history of Africa constituted a radical departure from the treatment of Africa presented by scholars located in the mainstream of contemporary anglophone academic thought. I argue that while his vision of Africa’s history did not effect any significant shift in scholarly orthodoxy, it played a crucial role, at a grave juncture in race relations in the United States, in helping to equip young African Americans with the psychological resources necessary to challenge white supremacist systems. I contend that his vision of African civilizational achievement situates him in a tradition of ideological struggle waged by African Americans from the 1800s through the twenty-first century and that in regard to utilizing Africa’s past as the ground of empowerment the relationship of his approach with that of Afrocentrist scholars is marked by both disjunctures and continuities.
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Dedication

To my mother and my father, now ancestral spirits, who gave their whole lives that I and every child of our country might have that opportunity to study and think and speak which they had been denied.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I met a little blue-eyed girl –
She said she was five years old;
“Your locket is very pretty, dear;
And pray what may it hold?”

And then – my heart grew chill and sick –
The gay child did not flinch –
“I found it – the tooth of a colored man –
My father helped to lynch.”

“And what had he done, my fair-haired child?”
(Life and Death play a fearful game!)
“Oh, he did nothing – they made a mistake –
But they had their fun, just the same!”

When I set off for college thirty-odd years ago, I took with me a question that had planted itself in my mind from my early teens. What did it mean to be black in the world? What exactly were those harsh realities hinted at in glossy photographs of Civil Rights marches and Martin Luther King’s face in coffee-table books? The question arose because I was curious about my blackness. I knew that it was problematic. Television and radio programs and toys and games from the United States and Britain as well as colonial and metropolitan school curricula told me plainly that my skin, unlike my height, or my nationality, was a world issue. I also felt that I did not know the rigors of the experience of being black. I felt deeply my need to know. Without that knowledge I could not settle on a political and moral philosophy that I could ground my choices in as

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1 Bertha Johnston, “I Met A Little Blue-Eyed Girl,” The Crisis Vol. 4 No. 3 (July, 1912), p. 147
time carried me out of childhood towards having to function independently in the world. In the face of that need, I was keenly conscious, and frustrated, that I had been protected, by being born into a society whose political leadership had changed from white to black before I was ten years old and whose colonial status had changed to political independence only a few years thereafter. Severities challenging black people were being experienced by people in other societies but not by me. I fancied myself living in South Africa for a while. I fancied myself living in the Deep South in the United States for a while. I also knew that there was no chance whatever of my going to South Africa. My parents, having grown to adulthood in Nassau in The Bahamas before Majority Rule, knew full well what black people had to face, and they were entirely conversant with the politics of South Africa. They had celebrated the music of Miriam Makeba; they had entertained her in our home when she had visited The Bahamas in the mid-1960s; they had followed the trajectories of black peoples at various locales around the Atlantic basin. They would not let me live in South Africa. Time passed; college lay on the horizon; and my father expressed a preference that I should go to the United States. And so I did get there, although not to the Deep South. I did learn something about racial politics, although not what I had expected to learn; but I completed college, and further studies, still feeling as if I did not have the existential understanding that I was searching for of the full meaning of being black in the twentieth century. Much more time passed, and my question lay adrift. But about the year 2003, answers to my question began to find me. They did so in a way that I did not expect. They came to me through reading, not through living. They arrived through my studying for my comprehensive examinations in History. I chose for my three fields of study African history, Caribbean history, and
African American history. In making those choices I had no idea of the spiritual assault that awaited me. By then the scholarship in those fields had reached a volume, a level of detail, a consistency of theme, and a charity of perspective that gave me many of the answers that I had been searching for without my having to live them in my own flesh. I read; and the reading changed me. The window into the mind of an exploitative and oppressive caste that the literature afforded me first depressed me, then angered me, and charged me with reworking those emotions into a force for healing and wholeness first for the one who suffers on account of others’ hostility and then for the one who hates. That project continues. In the meantime the awareness that gave rise to it is one of two spiritual spaces out of which I wrote this manuscript.

The other spiritual space out of which I wrote this manuscript was my struggle to break the metal chains and locks of a still and blanketing silence. In the literature that I read as a child, the community into which I was born, so full of simplicity and dignity and humility, seemed to be unnamed and unspoken to the world and to me. Where was Auntie who had ‘minded’ my sisters and cousins and me at nights on Nassau Street? Where were Aunt Naomi and Aunt Blanche who had also helped with watching over us? Where was my grandfather who had brought brown crocus sacks of crabs from Exuma which my mother had used to make boiled crab and crab soup? Where was my great-aunt, Aunt Aggie, whom we had gone to ‘hail’ from time to time off Soldier Road? Where was my other great-aunt, Aunt Evie, the headmistress at the St. Agnes Day School, who had talked to me and my sisters and other cousins about our family? Where was the active and continual conversation about changing the social order facilitated by
my father, a man of rare vision and intellect and an historian and raconteur extraordinaire, which made our home a meeting ground for ‘organic’ intellectuals who were committed to social transformation regardless of sacrifice? This literary silence left me aimless, adrift, unable to orient myself politically or even cognitively – unable, even, to say what was, because unable, in this unarticulated and undifferentiated expanse, to say what it was not. Where could I go to see reflected back to me in words and images and voice the world that I knew in my corner of The Bahamas? I knew that I was not alone in feeling distressed by gazing into a mirror so conspicuously free of me and my world. I knew it intuitively, but confirmation came too in an email message forwarded to me by a friend in the late 1990s, as I recall. The writer, a young Bahamian woman, said that she had been researching the history of Bahamians and had come upon relatively little information. Then came the question – a cry whose anguish penetrated through the sterility of bits and bytes: “Is that all there is?” An article entitled “Terra Incognita: Research on Modern Bahamian Society,” which had appeared in 1981 and had alleged a severe dearth of scholarship concerning The Bahamas, added to my conviction that my world was too little spoken.\(^2\) I had not yet divined why the silence was so broad and thick; I had not yet linked its scope and strength to the political economy of Bahamian society and the partisan interests of a market-dominant ruling class;\(^3\) but I understood that the unrelenting burden pressing my spirit down would not lift and that I could have no peace until I had found a way to formulate my world, to utter it, to bring it into spoken being; until I had found or created a history in which my parents and aunts and other family members – in

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sum, the African-descended Bahamian person and aspiration – stood as the subject of the narrative rather than as a piece in a chess game of British imperial or local elite planning and initiative and control; and until the Bahamian lay integrated explicitly and securely in the wider context of hemispheric and world history. My preoccupation became: how did one give birth to a voice out of silence and so become able to utter, from the deep, such a narrative? How did one come into naming the elements of one’s reality and the relations among them from one’s own perspective? By what means did one – could I – acquire the tools to . . . speak what was authentically m- m- me? What was the story that the spirit within me felt so heavily burdened to find words to form? Oral history became my passion, pursued professionally and avocationally, as I tried to flesh out my understanding of the history of my world. Much later, I began to be able to connect my experience with an existing language. Even as the Trinidadian writer V. S. Naipaul discovered one day that the actual scent of jasmine, long familiar to him in Trinidad, was the referent of the word “jasmine,” also long familiar to him, but each long kept apart in his mind from one another through ignorance, so too I discovered one day that my Aunt Aggie and Aunt Evie and Granddaddy were referents of words like ‘peasants’ and ‘working class persons.’ A fund opened up for me of concepts which I could draw on if I wished to name the entities and relationships of my social milieu, and which I could reshape whenever representing that milieu with integrity required me to do so.

Coincidentally, I encountered an ‘organic intellectual’ who offered me a model of

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4 Maulana Karenga, writing on “The Creative Character of Speech” in his *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt – A Study in Classical African Ethics* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 2006) and Georges Gusdorf, writing in his *Speaking (La Parole)* (Paul Brockelman, trans. [Evanston, Ill.:] Northwestern University, 1965) affirm to me the transformative power, and the difficulty, of speaking creatively

authentic sp- sp- speaking and at the same time alerted me to realities on the ground in my own society that gave immediate content to language like ‘strategies of exploitation.’ But before this process of bringing language and experience together had gotten underway, I had long felt prompted to investigate the work of an historian who had accomplished what I was trying to do: to contend for the value of the story of the people who had cared for me and who had sacrificed their lives to defend the weak in my country. The historian whose work I settled on in time was William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.

W. E. B. Du Bois spoke at length about the practical meaning of being black in the ‘modern’ world both before and during the twentieth century. His many articles, newspaper columns, and other publications rehearsed for his readers the historical and contemporary challenges confronting people of colour in the United States and around the globe. What enabled him to speak as he did was that he grounded his consciousness in his own reality. He embraced as his identity being a man who was black and who was a citizen of the United States and of the world. In order to do that, and as a result of doing that, he rearranged historical knowledge that was available to him in such a way that black people became the subject of the narrative and that the content of the narrative was constituted on the basis of their concerns. A major area of focus for Du Bois was Africa’s past, for example, and in his treatment of Africa he made what Africans had done in Africa, not what Europeans had done in Africa, the governing theme. In taking up African history, Du Bois integrated himself and African Americans into currents of world history, by the move of linking them to Africans and then making clear the centrality of
African initiative to the human saga. Doing all of this constituted a breaking of silence, moreover; for while he was not the first African of the diaspora in the United States to center analysis on the African at home and abroad – George Washington Williams, for one, had preceded him in that project\(^6\) – his voice was distinctive in proclaiming so clearly, trenchantly, and consistently the significance to everyone everywhere of what his African ancestors had wrought. For the soul that yearns to speak, as marginalized souls do, Du Bois exemplified how to formulate an authentic, sustained, and wide-ranging voice. Where such speaking involves risk, Du Bois is there too: his intervention exposed him to conflict and censure. By his account, *The Crisis*, the monthly magazine that he edited and that carried a message of black self-assertion, was denounced in the United States Congress; the state of Mississippi passed laws against it; some of the agents who were circulating it were driven from their homes; many respectable blacks were afraid to be seen reading it; and one issue was judged to be so inflammatory that it was held up temporarily by the Post Office.\(^7\) Where such speaking wrestles with anger and works to keep its impact constructive, Du Bois is there again: he created a magazine for children, called the *Brownies’ Book*, to insulate black children from a message that was true and that had to be shared but that could lead young children to hatred.\(^8\) Where such speaking aims to open a wider space of freedom for oppressed people, Du Bois stands at the forefront: he is arguably the premier activist intellectual of the post-slavery era in the United States. Furthermore, even as our understanding of Du Bois’s treatment of


\(^8\) See *The Crisis* Vol. 18 No. 6 (October, 1919), pp. 285-286
Africa’s past does invite concerted attention, and even as Du Bois is inescapable if one is trying to understand African American or African Diasporic intellectual life in the first half of the twentieth century, examining a portion of his work also permits an apprenticeship at the feet of one who crafted a voice, and – in a world still needing to draw on cultural resources to liberate people into fuller ideological and material freedom – a relevant one.

I came to Du Bois generally, and to the particular question about his work that I ask in this manuscript, serendipitously. In the mid-1980s I stumbled on a book that lay cast alone and out of place on a library table in Butler Library at Columbia University. It was Chancellor Williams’s *Destruction of Black Civilization*. As I read Williams’s work, at first I could not accept his argument that Africans had erected sublime civilizations, immersed as I was in media- and curricula-inspired notions of white dominance that were reinforced by the relations of power inhering in my socioeconomic environment. However I embraced its rendering of the African person as the subject of the narrative. That reading was followed by gradually increasing exposure to Afrocentric approaches to analyzing Africans’ continental and diasporic historical experience. As I dove deeper into that literature, I became intrigued by its presentation of Africans’ past. I decided that I wished to explore both that literature and African history more formally. With that goal in mind, I used the framework of a master’s programme in History to extend my exposure to ancient languages and to begin to explore ancient Africa. I continued the journey in the context of my doctoral coursework by continuing to study languages and by taking up fieldwork and library research relating to Africa in antiquity. I decided, after some
hesitation, to use the doctoral dissertation for the same purpose. Already captivated by the sense of mission so close to my own and by the talent and vision of William Leo Hansberry, I determined to carry out doctoral research on his life and work. That choice would afford me, I thought, the opportunity to learn more about a scholar whose work I respected and to learn more about ancient Africa itself. After discovering that another historian, Kwame Wes Alford, was in the process of developing a full-fledged biography on Hansberry, I decided to undertake instead an analysis of the perceptions of ancient Africa advanced by Hansberry, Du Bois, and Carter G. Woodson, all of whom put forward an historical vision featuring the African as subject. What emerged, however, was that I could not gain access to the bulk of the Hansberry Papers. At the same time, the Du Bois papers proved to be extensive and accessible. I tackled them – grudgingly, because prepared to find a personality that was haughty and proud; and found that whatever the nature of the personality, so much fell to be said about Du Bois and Africa’s past that tackling Woodson’s vision as well would carry me farther than I needed to go. In this way my dissertation question acquired the content and the boundaries that it did.

What follows is an exploration of the nature, origin, impact, and legacy of Du Bois’s vision of Africans’ historical experience. I begin with ranging through the climate of intense hostility towards the concept of Africans’ value as human beings into which Du Bois and others in the United States spoke in the early 1900s. I situate that climate in a social milieu in which intimidation, assassination, lynching, and riot aimed to breathe into relations between whites and blacks a floating spirit of terror so wanton as to paralyze blacks from seeking to take part in public decision-making in the American
South and so from retaining a larger share of the prosperity that they contributed to the region – thus enabling whites to batten down a dominance and control, political and economic intermingled, that civil war had placed into question after more than twenty decades of white racial supremacy. I then introduce W. E. B. Du Bois the committed scholar and educator, the social visionary, and the intellectual activist and go on to explore the origin and development of his vision of African history, pointing in particular to what prompted him to write at length on Africa’s past and what approach he used to build his narratives. I follow with explicating his conclusions regarding the nature of Africans’ experience and achievement over time and I take note of the vehicles through which he presented those conclusions. I then comment on how the mainstream academy received his narratives and the impact which they exercised upon African Americans. Finally I take cognizance of the longer reach of his thinking on Africa’s past, by glancing over illustrative work of a successor generation of African American historians who share with him a continuity of endeavour.

The historical logic that I advance in this intellectual exercise builds on a platform of assumption about the relation of historical consciousness to stability of existential orientation and so to efficacy in social struggle. Roberto Gambini’s luminous explication from a Jungian analytical perspective of the needs of our souls lent me confidence in my conviction that awareness of one’s history is central to building a stable psyche. Gambini affirmed that “in order to develop a clear identity” people have a critical need to locate themselves in a “stream of time” such that they are able to say “‘I come from these roots,
which in turn come from other roots.’” The results are fundamental to personal stability and success: ⁹

I can locate myself historically. I know where I came from. I know my unique ways, and because I know my origins I can love and work and envision a future. You cannot do it if you do not know from where you came.

Gambini’s declaration, coupled with my own experience that whatever one’s historical location one’s ancestors must feature as agents rather than as an objects of others’ agency if the process of identity construction is to be fully positive, left me assured that Du Bois’s approach to excavating African history was essential to buttressing the self-confidence of young African Americans. My conclusions also build on a platform of assumption about the relation of ideas to the maintenance of power. Here the theorist of ideology and power whose thinking I turned to was Antonio Gramsci. His analysis of how it was in Western societies that a ruling class maintains its control over a population that it exploits and oppresses made me aware of deeper implications of Du Bois’s writings on Africa’s past with regard to destabilizing a social order. ¹⁰ Put summarily, Gramsci contended that utilizing organs of state power such as laws, courts, police, and a military apparatus to force people to conform to their will was only one way in which ruling groups maintained control over everyone else. Another way in which they maintained social control was by manipulating institutions of ‘civil society’—institutions, that is, such as political parties, privately-owned media, private schools, and the church, all of which organized political and social life without the direct involvement of the state—to disseminate ideas that functioned to bring people into voluntary accommodation with

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⁹ Roberto Gambini, *Soul and Culture* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), p. 49
a political and economic status quo. This maintenance of control by means of securing the consent of those exploited and oppressed Gramsci termed ‘hegemony’. Reading Gramsci encouraged me as I wrestled with how Du Bois’s narratives on Africa’s past might have contributed to transforming the social order prevailing in the South at the dawn of the twentieth century. With Gambini and Gramsci in mind, I argue in this study that the vision of Africans as possessing no creditable history had attained hegemonic status among Americans by the early twentieth century; that this vision, internalized by many although not all African Americans, had impoverished the psychological resources that they could marshal to meet the challenge posed by white supremacist praxis; that Du Bois’s work on Africa’s past constituted a counter-hegemonic move, because by asserting that black people had an accomplished history and so had value it undermined the possibility of uncomplicated consent to the exploitation and oppression of black people; and that his work replenished the psychological resources available to young African Americans to mount a concerted challenge to the social order at mid-century by challenging the diminution of selfhood of the black person which was attempted by white supremacist narratives about Africa’s past.

My recollection of a number of historical treatises lent me inspiration as I embarked on this research journey. Marcus Rediker’s The Many-Headed Hydra and The Slave Ship encouraged me in trying to bring into sympathetic focus that person of the past who, in the solitude of his being and in the silence of the encounter, stood face to face with the deadly gaze of a cruel, contemptuous oppressor. Garrett Mattingly’s The Armada, which I first encountered some thirty years ago, unveiled to me early the allure
of dramatic narrative as a literary style, what with its vividness and momentum. Gordon Lewis’s *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought* kept me humble in the contemplation of research that is thorough, knowledge that is comprehensive and sifted, judgment that balanced, and sensibility that is humane. Rebecca Scott’s *Slave Emancipation in Cuba* showed me how a young scholar might insert herself elegantly into an ongoing conversation about a particular subject – in her case, what the principal factors were in bringing an end to slavery in Cuba. The talent of William Leo Hansberry, displayed in his discussion of the material culture of sovereign Nigeria and in his analysis of Greek and Roman perceptions of Africans, continued to enchant me. His acuity of intellect, the conscious and respectful transparency of his logic, his emotional discipline, his thoroughness in research, his precision of expression, his concern to understand, his quiet authority – all those strengths continued to speak to me of his personal humility and commitment to social justice and of his habit of seeking excellence in the craft and art of writing history.\(^{11}\)

If my project has been to develop in detail an exposition of how it was that Du Bois came to an awareness of Africa’s civilizational past; of why it was that he thought it necessary to devote so much time and energy to deepening his knowledge of that history and then sharing that knowledge with the widest possible audience; of what the content of

that knowledge was; of some consequences of his undertaking; and of the extent to which his program has found resonance among some later African American historians – if this has been my project, I have not yet come upon the work of anyone who has embarked on the same adventure. Prologues to my project have made their appearance. The contextual situation which motivated Du Bois to challenge the claim that Africans had no past is discussed in a wide literature that probes race relations in the United States after Reconstruction. The epiphany in Atlanta in 1906 that specifically prompted him to study and write about Africa’s history is routinely noted in treatments of his life and work. His vision of Africa’s past was a theme that Robin Law touched on in “Du Bois as Pioneer of African History” although Law limited his field of reference to *The Negro*. Charles Wesley registered the appearance of both *The Negro* and *Black Folk Then and Now*, although in attempting to survey all of Du Bois’s major historical works in just fifteen pages he could do no more than summarize their individual purpose, content, and reception. Kenneth Potts hazarded a similar task, limiting himself, however, to reviewing just six books and several articles. In regard to Du Bois’s work on African history Potts drew attention to Du Bois’s objective in writing *The Negro*, the logical arrangement of the work, and historian George Shepperson’s evaluation of it; and he argued that in *Black Folk Then and Now* Du Bois folded the African continental and Diasporic historical experience into a Marxist conceptual framework of capital, labor, and class struggle that had not marked Du Bois’s treatment of that experience in *The Negro*. Absent again, however – necessarily so, in Pott’s seventeen pages – was detail in discussion of context and content. The question of the influence that Du Bois exerted upon professional students of Africa’s past, particularly himself, and upon African nationalists was taken up
by William Leo Hansberry even though Hansberry did not address a wider sphere of impact. All these studies are prologues only because none of them targets squarely and fleshes out expansively, as I do in the pages that follow, what motivated Du Bois to produce a detailed narrative of Africa’s past and the origin and development, nature, impact, and continuing legacy of that narrative.12

In view of the energy which Du Bois devoted to writing on Africa’s past, the paucity of detailed attention given to this aspect of his admittedly wide-ranging work comes as something of a surprise. Jessie Guzman, in her “W. E. B. Du Bois – The Historian,” trained her attention on Du Bois’s histories relating to slave trading and Reconstruction rather than on his publications on African history. In his Black Historians: A Critique, Earl Thorpe did not achieve – nor did he aim to – a detailed, fully contextualized exposition of the works of any of the authors whom he focused on, including the work of Du Bois. Like Thorpe, W. D. Wright did not concern himself in his Black History and Black Identity with close analysis of individual works and with explication of their origin and impact. In Living Black History: How Re-Imagining the African American Past Can Remake America’s Racial Future, Manning Marable explicitly pointed to connections between historical consciousness and political and social change, which connection is, I argue, the core significance of Du Bois’s attention to Africa’s past. However Marable did not lay out Du Bois’s ideas on Africa’s history or


By contrast, not fifty years after the death of Du Bois the literature regarding the general currents of his life and thought already constitutes, virtually, an academic industry. Reasons that extend beyond his towering presence on the landscape of African-American thought and activism in the twentieth century are not far to find. Fully aware of how to draw the sustained attention of historians and other scholars, Du Bois preserved a

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huge body of personal papers and entrusted them to the care of Herbert Aptheker, an astute and loyal custodian of his legacy. Correspondence, speeches, articles both published and unpublished, newspaper columns, poetry, fiction and non-fiction books, book reviews, pamphlets, leaflets, petitions, essays, student papers, and other paraphernalia, all accompanied by a detailed index, are available to the researcher, and not only at the Amherst, Massachusetts site where the bulk of them are housed but nationwide, through the aid of microfilm and internet technology. Overlapping with this treasure trove of papers, Du Bois left a body of published work available for dissection by intellectual and social historians that is massive: Aptheker’s annotated listing of Du Bois’s published writings runs to some five hundred and sixty pages. Aptheker helpfully facilitated scholars in gaining access to the actual texts, moreover, by republishing them in an extensive collection. Adding to the seduction of papers and publications is the availability of Du Bois’s own reflections on his long life, presented first in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, then in *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of A Race Concept*, again in *In Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday*, and finally in *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*.  

exploring Du Bois’s life, his thought, and his times is enviable. The response has been unsurprising.

The banquet began before Du Bois passed away in 1963. Francis Broderick sounded the dinner bell in 1959 with a full-length monograph focused squarely on Du Bois: *Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis*. Then followed at the banquet table a series of appetizers introduced through the 1960s by Elliott Rudwick which set the stage for a full array of offerings served decade by decade from the 1970s through the turn of the century. During the 1970s, for example, biographical surveys came from Leslie Lacy, from Du Bois’s second wife Shirley Graham Du Bois, from Emma Gelders Sterne, from Rayford Logan, and from Virginia Hamilton, and there also appeared specialized studies by John Henrik Clarke and Arnold Rampersad. In addition *William Du Bois: Scholar, Humanitarian, Freedom Fighter* journeyed all the way from Moscow to the table. The 1980s welcomed a new round of fare, with emphasis now shifting to specialty concoctions. A biography by Jack Moore aside, the decade witnessed explorations of Du Bois’s ideas carried out by Joseph DeMaro, William Andrews (and, through him, a cohort of other scholars), Manning Marable, Gerald Horne, and Aptheker himself.  

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1990s featured a continuing emphasis on specialty items: here Kwadwo Pobi-Asamani, Keith Byerman, and a cluster of scholars offering critical essays in edited collections led the way. Standard cuisine did continue to appear: David Levering Lewis attempted a robust and definitive overview of Du Bois’s life, the first portion of which appeared in 1993, with the remaining portion being presented on the cusp of the millennium. However, the trend in the first decade of the 2000s continued to run to delicacies, typically monographic in form although punctuated by edited collections of essays. Ronald Judy, Zhang Juguo, Shawn Michelle Smith, Edward Blum, Shaun Gabbidon, Amy Kirschke, Mary Keller in concert with Chester Fontenot, Brian Johnson, Derrick Alridge, Gerald Horne once more, and Jonathon Kahn illustrated the rich array of themes, ranging from Du Bois’s spiritual and religious evolution to his attention to political art to his contributions to criminological thought, that could be harvested from the Du Bois evidentiary cornucopia. Particular treats accompanied the twenty-first century menu: a companion prepared by Shamoon Zamir and an encyclopaedia edited by the tenacious Gerald Horne in partnership with Mary Young. All these submissions appearing over a
span of fifty years took as their direct focus the life and thought of Du Bois. Other works – side dishes served along with the principal fare – placed Du Bois in relation to other prominent thinkers and activists of his era\(^\text{18}\) or situated his intellectual positions within wider currents of thought.\(^\text{19}\) To add to the abundance, piled on sideboards lay book chapters and articles galore: as testament to their quantity, Joan Nordquist’s bibliography of works by and about Du Bois, published eight years ago, presented eight and a half pages specifically devoted to chapters about DuBois appearing in books written in English.\(^\text{20}\) In the kitchen, meanwhile, prepared in North America and France during the past ten years alone and awaiting serving, lay more than twenty unpublished dissertations


and theses. Closing desserts appear to be nowhere in sight. The ongoing feast has made W. E. B. Du Bois probably the most familiar African American intellectual of the twentieth century.
CHAPTER TWO

Why Empowerment? The Souls of Black Folk

What then do we learn from the man himself and from his biographers? The chronological outline of his life is clear. W. E. B Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1868, the son of a “rather silent but very determined and very patient” mother who took in boarders and occasionally had opportunity to do “day’s work.” In 1884 he graduated from the Great Barrington High School and in the Fall of 1885 he travelled south to matriculate at Fisk University, a black college located in Nashville, Tennessee. There he entered the sophomore rather than the freshman class owing to the quality of his high school preparation. He was graduated from Fisk, after three years of study there, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1888. At Fisk certain extracurricular experiences proved to be important to his developing social outlook. In particular, through teaching in rural schools in Tennessee during summers he came to appreciate and respect the beauty and value of African Americans and of their spiritual and cultural forms of expression. In 1888 Du Bois entered Harvard University, where in June, 1890 he earned a second bachelor’s degree, cum laude, in philosophy. He pursued graduate study at Harvard from 1890 to 1892, followed by graduate study at the University of Berlin from 1892 to 1894 and then two years of teaching at Wilberforce University in Ohio from 1894 to 1896. He completed his doctoral thesis during his first year of teaching and received his doctoral degree in the field of History from Harvard University.

21 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, pp. 11-13
in 1895 – the first black man to attain a doctoral degree from that institution. Then came one year, from 1896 to 1897, of sociological research based at the University of Pennsylvania. An appointment at Atlanta University beginning in 1897 permitted him to teach and to carry out sociological studies. In 1910 he left Atlanta University to take up the position of Director of Publications for a new organization of which he was a founding member: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He remained at the helm of the organization’s principal publication, *The Crisis*, for more than two decades. In the summer of 1933, as his relations with the NAACP grew strained, Du Bois returned to teaching at Atlanta University, and in June, 1934 he relinquished his platform in the NAACP and based himself squarely at the university, chairing the sociology department there, until 1944. From 1944 through 1961 he involved himself primarily with the NAACP once more, with the Council on African Affairs, with the Peace Information Center, and with the American Peace Crusade. In 1961 he left the United States permanently to take up residence in Ghana and to oversee the publication of an *Encyclopedia Africana*. On 27 August, 1963 he passed away in Accra, Ghana at the age of ninety-five years – ninety five testing years of ferocious ideological battles affecting African Americans.  

What also is clear from biography and autobiography is that the times in which Du Bois reached maturity as a man, as a scholar, and ultimately as an activist were challenging for African Americans indeed, particularly those living in the American South. The Civil War had shaken the grip of slaveholders during 1861 to 1865. Over the following decade, Northern legislators had tried to empower the freedmen in their struggle to win a foothold in the new social order that fell to be constructed in the South. At law that effort had resolved itself primarily into amendments to the national constitution which had invested freedmen with the right not to be enslaved, the right to be a citizen, and, for male freedmen, the right to vote. On the ground it had taken the form of military occupation of all of the former Confederate states except one, of conventions to ratify new constitutions for states, and of steps undertaken by the Freedmen’s Bureau to meet the varied needs of a vulnerable population. Against the freedmen stood white supremacists who used every tool at their disposal, including terror and murder, to nullify the possibility of black men’s participation in the economy, polity, and society of the South on anything approaching a basis of fairness, respect, and equality. What emerged from the confrontation, materially, was sharecropping: a working compromise between freedmen’s efforts to own their own land and so to secure their independence, on one hand, and, on the other, efforts by landlords and merchants to wrest from them all options but that of laboring for other people. Politically the outcome of the confrontation was the silencing of black men wishing to exercise their franchise. Socially, lines separating the races deepened, with endorsement by the judiciary. What also emerged was an ideology which claimed in no uncertain terms that persons who were black were radically inferior intellectually, physically, and morally to white persons and indeed might not be persons
at all. Such was the world into which a young W. E. B. Du Bois sought to make his mark beginning in the 1890s.

Consider the question that Charles Carroll posed regarding the ontological status of a Du Bois and of every other African American. Did Negroes have souls? To put the matter forthrightly, were Negroes in fact human beings or were they, instead, beasts? The question was one serious enough, thought Carroll, to lend fifteen years of reflection to developing his ideas before sharing them with the reading public – or so, at least, his publishers warranted. In 1900, his project complete and his publishers satisfied that his views held substance, he presented *The Negro A Beast, or, In the Image of God*. With that work he consciously stoked the embers of a controversy that had flared in the preceding half-century. Some two years after the close of the Civil War, the Reverend B. H. Payne, writing under the pseudonym “Ariel”, had inquired into the proper ethnological categorization of the Negro and had determined that the Negro had no soul. One of the arguments that he had advanced in support of his claim was that while the Negro had indeed been present in Noah’s ark along with Noah and his family, yet God had saved from the flood only eight souls – Noah, his wife, their three sons, and the sons’ three wives – and therefore the Negro, soulless, fell within the category of the beasts present in the ark. Payne had given notice as to why he had taken the time to mount his investigation. Addressing the defeated South, he had pointed out that the bestiality of the Negro, taken together with other realities, implied that the region ought not to acquiesce in equality for the Negro but ought instead to re-enslave him or send him back to Africa
if it would escape God’s wrath.\textsuperscript{23} Robert Young, rising to reply to “Ariel”, had countered that in fact the Negro was a human being, not a beast, and was a descendant of Adam and Eve, and had a soul, as common practice, science, and Scripture, all affirmed.\textsuperscript{24} By his own description a Southerner of English and German stock who opposed social equality and the franchise for the Negro, Young had explained that what had drawn him nonetheless into sparring with “Ariel” was his conviction that “[s]omebody ought to answer [“Ariel” ’s book],” given that “[t]housands have read it. Some believe it. A few have been damaged by it. If the negroes read it and believe it, they are ruined.”\textsuperscript{25} Carroll, now reviving the question some three decades later, took “Ariel” ’s part, contending that Negroes were in fact beasts, not humans. The Bible, he insisted, together with science and reason, all affirmed the bestiality of a W. E. B. Du Bois and every member of his race.

In support of his thesis, Carroll urged argument after argument. To begin with, he claimed, the Bible was right and the theory of evolution wrong: man came into being as man from the start, rather than developing from an ancestral ape. Then the timing of the creation of the Negro demonstrated that the Negro was a beast, for God fashioned the Negro at the same time that He created all the animals, doing so by combining matter and consciousness, on day five of the creation; it was only later, on day six, that God added spirit to the mix and created Man. Again, the lineage of the Negro set him apart from human beings, because the person whom God created was Adam; the white man was a

\textsuperscript{23} [B.H. Payne], \textit{The Negro: His Ethnological Status, or, Is The Negro A Beast?} (Austin, Texas: Harpoon, [1867?])
\textsuperscript{24} Robert A. Young, \textit{The Negro: A Reply to Ariel} (Nashville, TN: J. W. M’Ferrin & Co., 1867)
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 3
descendant of the Adamic line; and science attested that the Negro was too different from
the white to have also descended from the Adamic line. Still further evidence of the
Negro’s true nature lay presented in the Bible’s conception of the Beast. The Bible
envisaged the Beast as being a two-legged creature, not a four-legged one; it saw the
Beast as having hands, the ability to speak and think, and the ability to have sexual
relations with Man and produce children who were fertile and capable of ‘civilized’
conduct; and it used the term ‘Beast’ to refer, precisely, to the Negro. More could be said,
Carroll felt, and he did say more, much more – for example, that the serpent who tempted
Eve was a Negro, and that the phrase ‘beasts of the field’ referred to Negroes’ having
been assigned to grasp the handles of the plow and direct the team of oxen; but where did
it all lead? The meaning of it all lay summed up on the title page of his thoroughgoing
analysis. “The Negro a beast, but created with articulate speech, and hands, that he may
be of service to his master – the White man.”

Carroll’s vicious inquiry into whether Negroes were “man” or “beast” emerged
from a wider conversation among European Americans as to the ethnological character of
men and women such as Du Bois. Through the 1800s, a number of influential members
of the white American intelligentsia inscribed the black person in ink of difference,
degradation, and threat. The black, claimed Samuel George Morton, for example –
Morton was a physician, a natural scientist, and professor of anatomy at the University of
Pennsylvania – was indeed a species that lay wholly separate from the European species
and radically inferior to it. Morton’s thesis drew enthusiastic support from Josiah Clark

26 Charles Carroll, *The Negro A Beast, Or, In the Image of God* (St. Louis, Missouri: American Book and Bible House, 1900)
Nott, who practiced medicine and surgery in Mobile, Alabama. Both men found a willing ally in Louis Agassiz, a biologist from Switzerland who became professor of zoology and geology at Harvard University.²⁷ Daniel Garrison Brinton, a medical doctor and professor of linguistics and folklore at the University of Pennsylvania, judged that physically the African Negro stood “midway between the Orang-utang and the European white.”²⁸ In the hands of essayists, novelists, and other authors like Edward Gilliam, Charles Loring Brace, John W. DeForest, Dr. Eugene Rollin Carson, Frederick Hoffman, and professor of medicine at the University of Virginia Paul B. Barringer, the black figure represented intrinsic weakness in the Darwinian sense of being unable to survive when placed in contact with a stronger, superior race, and so could be expected to deteriorate and ultimately fade away; but until it did, it stood in permanent antagonism to the interests of whites and a ‘struggle for supremacy’ between black and white loomed inevitable.²⁹ In the minds of some white Americans, the image of the black took on the likeness of horror, and blackness was made to stalk the land hand in hand with biological bankruptcy, cultural inferiority, and moral infamy.

What racial blackness stood in opposition to, in the nascent years of the new century, was racial whiteness. Among an American working class that in the 1800s was culturally highly diverse, the development of a sense of being white, and the functioning of that consciousness as a glue which bound working-class persons together, took place

²⁸ Quoted at p. 91 of Baker, “Columbia University’s Franz Boas: He Led the Undoing of Scientific Racism.”
²⁹ Fredrickson, *The Black Image*, Chapter 8
largely during the first sixty-five years of the 1800s.\textsuperscript{30} Over the course of the early 1900s whiteness and blackness became the only racial identities permitted: other options as to racial identity were squeezed away.\textsuperscript{31} What, then, did whiteness signify? The image of the white, in the mind of the European American, lay beyond reproach. For Carroll, for example, while the Negro displayed “mental indolence and incapacity,” the white displayed “flashing intellect . . . restless energy, and . . . indomitable courage.”\textsuperscript{32} Other observers too, noted Carroll, recognized the high distinction of racial whiteness. The white man, he reported Theodore Parker as saying, was “humane,” “civilized,” capable of progressing, and intellectually gifted – and exclusively so; and as for cultural achievements, no other race could lay claim to his talents in government, science, invention, and literature.\textsuperscript{33} For some white Americans, so far elevated above the man of colour sat the man with white skin, indeed, that his whiteness imposed on him both the opportunity and the obligation of lifting the man of colour some little way out of the depths of his barbarity.\textsuperscript{34} What emerged was a relationship of polar opposition between the two concepts black and white, with the ascent of one made dependent upon the descent of the other. Working in tandem with the assault on the value of being black, and constituting a corollary of it, was the elevation of whiteness to the ideal of human being.

One of the key stereotypes about the Negro’s personality and history which established itself in the popular consciousness of Americans in the early decades of the

\textsuperscript{31} See Matthew Pratt Guterl, \textit{The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940} (Cambridge: Harvard, 2001)
\textsuperscript{32} Carroll, \textit{The Negro A Beast}, p. 99
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 99 -100
\textsuperscript{34} Fredrickson, \textit{The Black Image}, pp. 308-311
new century, as Melville Herskovits pointed out, and which drew a determined and protracted response from W. E. B. Du Bois the Harvard-trained historian, was that the Negro was a man without a past. He had lived in ‘savagery’ in his African home and had in any event lost his African heritage upon his transplantation to and socialization in the Americas.35 That vision of Africans had not always gone unchallenged; for even as ‘Ariel,’ in keeping with his conclusions on the lineage of the Negro, had insisted in the mid-1800s that the creators of the illustrious civilizations of Egypt and Carthage in Africa were white and that the Negro had nothing of culture of which to boast – “[w]e defy any historian, any learned man, to put his finger on the history, the page, or even paragraph of history, showing [that the Negro] has ever [performed feats of legislation, statesmanship, government, arts of war and of science]” such as those carried out by the white race, he wrote36 -- his rhetoric fell in the wake of a portrait of Africans painted by advocates of colonization in the early 1800s as being people of the same leadership and intellectual capacities as whites and as being people who, indeed, had first brought into being arts and sciences and continued to display the ability to excel.37 But by the early 1900s, everyday opinion mouthed slanderous stereotypes about a cultural deficit among African peoples. Americans exhibited an ‘insatiable appetite’ for cultural material relating to or inspired by Africa, an appetite reflected in and stoked by journalists’ and tourists’ travel accounts, films, museum artifacts, and circus presentations; and the profile of the African that emerged in that material was of invisibility and irrelevance in a

36 [Payne], The Negro: His Ethnological Status, p. 17. See also pp. 18-19, 59-60
37 Fredrickson, The Black Image, pp. 13-15
wondrous and beautiful land or of regrettable primitiveness and stasis. Africans, to the extent that they mattered at all, had, it appeared, no history.

Films made of Africa and Africans by American filmmakers in the first half of the new century played a central role, albeit by implication, in popularizing the thesis that Africans had no culture and no civilized past. *African Hunt*, a 1912 film produced by sportsman Paul J. Rainey and run for ten months in New York, invited American audiences to imagine Africa and Africans in a way that soon became standard. “Several American filmmakers who worked in Africa between the [World] wars,” writes Andrew Roberts, “regarded it primarily as a zoo,” although, he continues, “[a] few cine-travelers presented Africans as more than varieties of wildlife” and “a few professional anthropologists” including Herskovits shot films touching on a number of topics. American and British feature films centering on Africa and Africans which circulated widely in the West in the 1930s and enjoyed notable box office success, including the *Tarzan* series and *Stanley and Livingstone*, constructed for sixty million viewers in the United States flocking to cinemas each week highly prejudicial images of Africa and of Africans. In their treatments, Africa sat in a natural state, as an untamed wilderness, an ‘open zoo’ that was at once vacant of people and “waiting to be filled, named, and settled by the white man,” yet, coincidentally, inhabited by Africans. As they portrayed it, Africa was like a paradise: peaceful, with vegetation that was lush and open spaces that were

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40 Major *Tarzan* movies of the 1930s, produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, included *Tarzan, the Ape Man* (1932); *Tarzan and His Mate* (1934); *Tarzan Escapes* (1936); and *Tarzan Finds A Son* (1939). *Stanley and Livingstone* was produced by Twentieth-Century Fox and released to cinema screens in 1939.
beautiful, teeming with animals to the hunter’s delight, and marked by great wealth in minerals and wildlife. At the same time it was a cruel land, harsh, “inhospitable to the white man,” a jungle, with fauna that were dangerous and brutal. The Africans who inhabited this beautiful and cruel land were by nature savage, brutal, untrustworthy, heathen, warring, murderous, cannibalistic, given to torturing prisoners, lying, evil, wicked, violent, criminal, and lacking in religious conviction. The colonized African, tutored under the white man, behaved in a less degenerate way, to be sure. The tutored African could be made to fear and respect strong harsh authority exercised by white men. His place in relation to the white man was that of servant and subordinate. However, though much improved, he was still incompetent, lazy, worthless, superstitious, and fearful of his own surroundings. Furthermore, even though he had been tutored, he remained at heart ‘natural’. Ultimately, whether au naturel or tutored, the African was always and forever fundamentally different from white men. Africa and Africans, both horrific in their natural states, both physically and psychologically challenging, invited conquest by white men, for the potential of Africa as a paradise could be realized only when it had been conquered and controlled by white men. Thus in Stanley and Livingstone, points out Kevin Dunn, Livingstone could say to Stanley that prior to the arrival of the white man “Africa ‘never before in all its history had heard one single syllable of kindness or hope’.” Such comment made film a powerful ally of the narrative that American Negroes descended from an odious and savage lineage, and helped to provoke Du Bois’s adamantine response.

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43 Ibid. p. 169
Perceptions of the black person which ordinary Americans held took their cue from members of the intelligentsia and leaders of public opinion as well as from film. Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry, general agent for the Peabody Education Fund and the John F. Slater Education Fund and an influential leader in the South, compared the white American to the African American in terms decidedly unflattering to the latter. “With the Caucasian,” he reflected, “progress has been upward. Whatever is great in art, invention, literature, science, civilization, religion, has characterized him.” By contrast, he mused, “[i]n his native land the negro has made little or no advancement for nearly four thousand years. Surrounded by and in contact with a higher civilization, he has not invented a machine, nor painted a picture, nor written a book, nor organized a stable government, nor constructed a code of laws . . . . He has no monuments or recorded history.” The black man was incapable of advance. “For thousands of years there lies behind the race one dreary, unrelieved, monotonous chapter of ignorance, nakedness, superstition, savagery. . . .”  

Such sentiments seemed unremarkable in coming from Curry, who had been one of the organizers of the Confederate government of the South during the Civil War and could not be expected to acknowledge accomplishment and dignity in African Americans. But even white observers who were comparatively sympathetic to black persons remained persuaded that nothing worthy of note had come out of Africa. Thus the relatively progressive Alabama clergymen Edgar Gardner Murphy, in his *The Basis of* 

45 George Shepperson, in “Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism,” *Journal of African History* Vol. 1 No. 2 (1960), pp. 299-312, comments at page 300 that Edgar Gardner Murphy was ‘a white sympathizer of the Negro in America.’ George Fredrickson places Murphy at the forefront of white moderates in the South who at the turn of the twentieth century rejected the militant racism of Curry and others. See Fredrickson, *The Black Image*, Chapter 10.
Ascendancy, published in New York in 1909, judged that “at the background of every Negro, however wise, or well educated, or brave, or good, is contemporary Africa which has no collective achievement. . . like other nationalities.”  

Popular and views and educated opinion aligned closely with one another.

Popular and educated opinion together found sanction for their prejudices, in turn, in the conclusions of home-grown and foreign-born scholars. In the United States in the 1800s and into the early 1900s, Daniel Brinton, along with the ethnologists John Wesley Powell, Frederic Ward Putnam, and Nathaniel Southgate Shaler and the historian Joseph A. Tillinghast, declared that Negroes, and a fortiori their ancestors in Africa, were culturally vacuous. Shaler, born in Kentucky, tutored by Louis Agassiz, and professor of paleontology at Harvard declared black people in the United States to be savages clothed but precariously with European culture. “[T]he negro is not as yet intellectually so far up in the scale of development as he appears to be,” he judged; “in him the great virtues of the superior race, though implanted, have not yet taken firm root, and are in constant need of tillage, lest the old savage weeds overcome the tender shoots of the new and unnatural culture.”  

Negroes had never, implied Shaler, even tried, over the course of their whole history, to achieve anything culturally: they were a people “bred first in a savagery that had never been broken by the least effort towards a higher state . . .”  

Tillinghast, the son of a South Carolina slaveholder and descended from an old Rhode Island family, felt

46 Quoted in Shepperson, “Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism,” p. 300
that West Africans had produced “no great industrial system, no science, and art.”  

Brinton for his part viewed the African Negro as being culturally lost. Thus in *Races and Peoples*, a series of lectures on the science of ethnography which he delivered to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia in 1890, he presented the following evaluation:  

The low intellectual position of the Austrafrican [black] race is revealed by the facts that in no part of the [African] continent did its members devise the erection of walls of stone; that they domesticated no animal, and developed no important food-plant; that their religions never rose above fetishism, their governments above despotism, their marriage relations above polygamy. It is true that many of them practice agriculture and the pastoral life, but it is significant that the plants which they especially cultivate, the ‘durra’ or sorghum, millet, rice, yams, manioc, and tobacco, were introduced from Asia, Europe, or America. The cattle and sheep are descended from the ancient stocks domesticated by the Egyptians, and differ from those represented on the early monuments of Assyria and India. The brick-built cities of the Sudan were constructed under Arab influence, and the ruins of stone towers and walls in the gold-bearing districts of South Africa show clear traces of Semitic workmanship.  

The African, upon scholarly scrutiny, had thought and had done nothing.  

American scholars were emboldened in their views by the outlook of some members of the European intelligentsia and by the image of Africans propagated in some currents of European popular culture. Respected European voices claimed that Africa had no creditable past to speak of, and certainly no historical progression. Already in the 1700s David Hume had sounded the note of disregard when he wrote: “I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or  

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speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences.” The German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argued in his lectures on history at Berlin in the 1830s that Africa was “no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit.” Africans, as he painted them, had no knowledge of “an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self. . .” “The Negro . . . exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state . . .” “[T]here is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character . . .” “The undervaluing of humanity among them reaches an incredible degree of intensity. Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper. . .” “[T]he devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race. . .” Intellectually the African was bereft: Hegel spoke of “African stupidity.” Popular culture echoed this narrative of the African. In the second half of the 1800s and into the early 1900s, wildly popular adventure stories which shaped the understanding and imagination of at least two generations of English as well as American boys etched in deeper tones the image of the African as being ugly, dirty, superstitious, cowardly, lazy, immoral, limited in intellect, and more akin to animal than to human. Even though exhibitions mounted in England by missionary societies in the first decade of the 1900s put forth more elevated representations of the African, the dominant narrative remained deeply hostile to the human character of the African. In Germany in the late 1800s and early 1900s, exhibitions, historical and fictional accounts

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54 Annie E. S. Coombes, “‘For God and for England’: Contributions to an Image of Africa in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century,” Art History Vol. 8 No. 4 (1985), pp. 453-466
of German colonial occupation of African societies, colonial adventure novels, and ethnographic photography resolutely constructed African terrain as being physical space available for exclusively European occupation and Africans as being anatomically primitive, aesthetically ugly, and culturally inferior.\textsuperscript{55} Western European intellectual and popular discourse represented Africans as having failed to make any significant contribution to the development of human societies.

Ominously, and to the decided agitation of a young W. E. B. Du Bois, the resources of the state, not merely those of civil society, joined in the American consensus that the African had no history. Policymakers enjoying the platform and visibility and speaking with the authority of public office reaffirmed the evaluations of African cultural achievement advanced by intellectuals anchored in private institutions. John T. Morgan, Senator from Alabama from 1877 to 1907 and a former Confederate Army general, expressed the view that “[t]he negro race, in their native land, have never made a voluntary and concerted effort to rise above the plain of slavery; they have not contributed a thought, or a labor, except by compulsion, to the progress of civilization. Nothing” he continued, “has emanated from the negroes of Africa, in art, science, or enterprise that has been of the least service to mankind.”\textsuperscript{56} James K. Vardaman, Senator from Mississippi from 1913 to 1919, echoed Morgan’s sentiment. Speaking on the floor of the Senate on 6 February, 1914, Vardaman offered an extended lament on the African and his progeny in the United States. The African American, he maintained, “has never

\textsuperscript{55} Lisa Marie Gates, “Images of Africa in Late Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Literature and Culture.” (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 1996)
risen above the government of a club. He has never written a language. His achievements in architecture are limited to the thatched-roof hut or a hole in the ground. No monuments have been builded by him to body forth and perpetuate in the memory [of] posterity the virtues of his ancestors. For countless ages,” Vardaman averred, “he has looked upon the rolling sea and never dreamed of a sail. In truth, he has never progressed, save and except when under the influence and absolute control of a superior race. He is living in Africa to-day, in the land where he sprang, indigenous, in substantially the same condition, occupying the same rude hut, governed by the same club, worshiping the same fetish that he did when the Pharaohs ruled in Egypt.” In all truth, judged Vardaman, the African “has never had any civilization except that which has been inculcated by a superior race. And it is a lamentable fact that his civilization lasts only so long as he is in the hands of the white man who inculcates it. When left to himself he has universally gone back to the barbarism of the jungle.”

Beyond the Senate chamber the presidency also sounded a note of contempt for the African. In 1895 Theodore Roosevelt, soon to be president of the Republic, summed the matter up in what was, by comparison, a word. “A perfectly stupid race,” he commented, “can never rise to a very high plane; the negro, for instance, has been kept down as much by lack of intellectual development as by anything else. . .”

Official voices, then, as well as popular, intellectual and scholarly ones rose in pronounced and powerful consensus.

Beyond popular rhetoric and its scholarly legitimation and political reaffirmation,

educational curricula and recreational material bent their energies to persuading young Americans, white and black alike, that Africans and their descendants in the Americas were a people without a past worth the telling – even a past within the United States. The text on the history of the United States which he had used in elementary school in Washington, D.C. had made no mention whatever of blacks, recalled William Benson Bryant, an African American who became a trial lawyer, Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, and a professor of law at Howard University and who had been born in 1911.59 In the public schools and in colleges, recalled Du Bois himself, by then a seasoned observer of American society and culture, students “were taught that Africa had no history and no culture. . . .” 60 Education taught the African American, wrote Carter Woodson, a black historian and educator from Virginia who penned a classic work on the subject, to admire the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Germans, and to despise Africans: students were advised that studying the history of black people was a waste of time. Expanding on his theme, Woodson noted that whether the curricula had to do with geography, science, languages, literature, fine arts, law, medicine, or history, by design they presented whites and other races in the best light but blacks in the worst light – if they included blacks at all. As for the teaching of history, specifically, “the Negro had no place . . . . No thought was given to the history of Africa except so far as it had been a field of exploitation for the Caucasian.”61 Meanwhile, from the 1880s through the 1930s play objects such as toys depicted African Americans in ways which gave no intimation that they and their forebears in Africa had a history, or

59 Interview, Tracey Thompson and William Benson Bryant, 1 June 2004
61 Carter G. Woodson, The Miseducation of the Negro (1933), p. 21
even contemporary dignity. Toys representing African American men, for example, portrayed them in caricature and frequently carried highly pejorative labels such as “Alabama Coon Jigger,” “Jolly Nigger,” and “Chicken Snatcher.”

Formal and informal education alike taught children that Africans had no past.

Curiously enough – and this was why Du Bois contended so strongly for the value of the African – the actual men and women of black skin whom the dominant culture sketched in so unlovely a way bore small affinity to the portrait intended to sum up their character and potential. The gap between actuality and image stretched so wide, indeed, as to render the image a caricature. Had one searched out these men and women and their children at the opening of the twentieth century, one would have found them residing across the country by 1920, notably in cities, although still heavily concentrated in the South. In the first two decades of the new century they were working in a range of occupations: as farm workers, as stevedores, as coal miners, as railroad workers, as factory workers in the meatpacking, shipbuilding, vehicle, and war materiel industries, and as household servants. They served in the military and fought with honor and distinction. They owned and managed businesses, from grocery stores to drug stores and general merchandise stores, from restaurants to construction firms, from cotton mills to carpet factories, cemeteries, foundries, hotels, and cosmetics companies. They came together to build or strengthen a host of institutions to provide them with protection in the marketplace, widen the scope of their economic opportunity, ease their adjustment to urban life, help persons who were especially vulnerable, and supply avenues for

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recreation: labor unions, fraternal organizations, mutual benefit societies, insurance companies, orphanages, hospitals, homes for elderly persons, church organizations, sports leagues, and more. Henry Tanner painted while Meta Warrick Fuller sculpted. Eubie Blake produced musical revues while an array of African American spirituals and jazz and blues artists came into their own. The brothers George and Noble Johnson produced films; Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson took to the dramatic stage; Charles Chesnutt and Paul Lawrence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson wrote poetry and prose, as did Claude McKay and Jean Toomer and Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes and Jessie Redmond Fauset and Zora Neale Hurston; Bert Williams and George Walker performed vaudeville; Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson produced musical comedies; journalists published newspapers; and Jan Matzeliger and John Parker and Elijah McCoy and Granville Woods made their mark with inventions.\(^6^3\) As for their presence and impact in history, they had pioneered in developing arts and sciences, had built political structures of the smallest scale and the largest, had wrought art unsurpassed in richness of imagination and skill in execution, and had institutionalized norms of human conduct that bore the highest mark of civility. The image of the black etched by mainstream American society at the turn of the century belied the truth of his present and his past.

In point of fact that image seemed a better fit for the visage of the artist, not the visage of the subject. For what was striking and chill about those men and women and their children, what offended the heart, what gave play to outrage and hurt, what angered the maturing Du Bois, was not their own nature but rather the astonishing burdens which

whites draped over them. For their labors and contributions they received neither fair compensation nor elementary respect. Instead, in addition to demonizing them explicitly as being inferior in every way, whites branded them implicitly with the same message by forcing them to participate in what Grace Elizabeth Hale has perceptively described as being a regional spectacle intended to hold in check any challenge that an emerging black middle class might pose to the claim that blacks were inferior to whites. The script of the play required blacks to perform rituals of absenting themselves from voting, from holding public office, and from sitting on juries, as well as rituals of studying in inferior schools, working at inferior jobs, entering through inferior doors marked ‘Colored,’ sitting in inferior waiting rooms and cars and seats, using inferior restrooms marked ‘Colored,’ watching movies from inferior balconies marked ‘Colored, and eating at inferior tables. The Supreme Court placed its stamp of legitimation on the stage drama in 1896 in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson, and until the 1930s white supremacists succeeded in controlling the interpretation that Americans placed on this social orchestration.64

Materially, meanwhile, white Americans in the South locked blacks, who had been left uneducated, illiterate, lacking in occupational training, and lacking in land or other material assets in the aftermath of the Civil War, into abusive credit arrangements with local merchants which rendered them impoverished, dependent on merchants for securing even basic foodstuffs, and vulnerable to sustained exploitation.65 To make sure that the theft of the value of their labour should continue undisturbed, furthermore, white Southerners firmly shut them out of participating in making political decisions: in 1890

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Mississippi minted a template for dispossessing blacks of the franchise in fact while keeping it in name. Should blacks protest, or even if they should not, white Southerners burned them, hanged them, mutilated them, women as well as men, children as well as adults, at will. To the vexation of W. E. B. Du Bois, black men and women and children suffered in their destroyed lives the burdens of a steely regime of caste disability that many white men routinely enforced with tools of terror and that many white women actively approved.

Consider the violence meted out to blacks as the sun gradually set on the old century and contemplated rising on the new. Social relations between whites and blacks lay stained in streams of blood. Publications by the African-American newspaperwoman Ida B. Wells, by the Chicago Tribune, by Tuskegee Institute, and by Du Bois’s The Crisis documented a trail of outrage. Georgia, Mississippi, Texas and Louisiana led the South, and the South led the nation, in that distinctive form of violence labeled lynching. Recorded incidents mounted year by year. Between 1889 and 1918, white vigilante mobs lynched at least 2,522 blacks – more than one each week on average. Hanging was standard practice. Sometimes torture accompanied or replaced it. Cheering, dancing crowds, sometimes numbering in the thousands, branded victims with hot irons, even to thrusting the metal down their throats; knifed them repeatedly; dragged them on the ground; flayed them alive; burned them alive; riddled them with bullets; kicked them to death; whipped them; raped female victims before murdering them; cut off toes and fingers and other body parts; and cherished those body parts as keepsakes or as items to sell as souvenirs. Lynchings, furthermore, did not exclude a more wholesale approach to
crushing black people. In the first decade of the new century white mobs launched a
drumbeat roll of attacks on whole communities of Blacks. Rioting whites shook
Statesboro, Georgia and Springfield, Ohio in 1904; Atlanta, Georgia and Greensburg,
Indiana in 1906; and Springfield, Illinois in 1908. Whites attacked blacks
indiscriminately, bathing black communities in havoc and blood and provoking large
numbers of blacks to flee their homes permanently and to start their lives over in other
places. The violence continued in the following decade even as black soldiers fought
overseas on behalf of the United States. After the war the summer of 1919 witnessed
twenty-five race riots in cities from Chicago to Knoxville, Tennessee to Omaha.66 White
lawlessness made a mockery of the notion of physical safety for black people.

If the full story be told, it was not the case that whites reserved violence for black
persons only. The NAACP reported that in addition to black persons some seven
hundred and two white persons had also suffered lynching in the three decades between
1889 and 1918. Nor was it the case that decency and moral standards had fled white
communities entirely. At serious risk to himself and to his men, the mayor of Roanoke,
Virginia called out the militia to protect a jailed black man – who in any case was
innocent of the charge against him – from the attentions of a lynch mob which,
unfortunately, overwhelmed the small band of defenders. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the
leading citizens of the community insisted on honoring the right to trial of a black man
who stood accused of raping a white woman and they made sure that he was guarded
while the trial took place. In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the mayor and governor
called out the local militia, the fire department, and troops to stop a mob seeking to lynch

66 Franklin and Moss, Jr., From Slavery to Freedom, pp. 345-350, 379-380, 385, 387-388

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a jailed black prisoner, and a judge actually sentenced white men to prison terms for their conduct. Furthermore, some white individuals, public officials, newspapers, and institutions did lodge protests against the barbarity. However such exercises of decency on the part of officials were unusual, according to the Providence, Rhode Island Tribune: “[n]ow and then some unusually determined official has been able to prevent a lynching by a display of great energy and personal courage. But such cases can be counted on one’s fingers, while the unprecedented and unpunished lynchings are uncounted and uncountable.” The judgment of a white observer writing in distress at the inclinations of his race captured the behavior that was typical rather than exceptional. Mobs would seize a jailed prisoner, he wrote painfully, and “take his life, often with fiendish glee, and often with acts of cruelty and barbarism which impress the reader with a degeneracy rapidly approaching savage life.” In spite of a spirit of conscience and justice among some whites, by the testimony of its deeds the collective mind of the caste which envisaged itself master ran to barbarism.

Why the ferocity? Was it simply for thrill, for sport, for spectacle? Was the consciousness that W. E. B. Du Bois felt compelled to challenge merely a continuation of the easy resort to violence characteristic of antebellum Southerners in town and

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countryside alike – the duelings, the fighting with guns, knives, fists, canes, the pistol-whipping, the “burning alive, cutting the heart out, and sticking it on the point of a stick, and other such diabolical deeds”?

Not at all. Nor was it practiced for one of the reasons frequently advanced by its proponents. Lynching, claimed some white apologists, was the necessary instrument for stopping black men from raping their mothers, sisters, and daughters. “The Southern white man has easily lost confidence in the negro,” regretted the Reverend Charles Dowman, a former president of Emory College, for example; “. . . the menace to the safety of the home and of innocent women from the rapist have turned the feelings of many white men from sympathetic helpfulness to strained toleration.”

Wild rapine called for an uncompromising response. “Nothing but the most prompt, speedy, and extreme punishment can hold in check the horrible and bestial propensities of the Negro race,” urged a Memphis newspaper.

But that justification for license and butchery rang hollow. What was “rape”? In the white man’s conception of it, retorted Ida Wells, by no means did the term necessarily refer to forced intercourse: on the contrary, “rape” referred as well to consensual intercourse. Indeed, noted Walter White, executive director of the NAACP, the range of meaning of “rape” extended even to entering the room of a white woman, or brushing against her, with no thought of sexual contact.

Even in cases of alleged rape where sexual intercourse had indeed taken place, Wells pointed out, everyone very well knew that some white women,

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far from being raped by black men, fully embraced having sexual relations with them.\textsuperscript{74}

Reasons other than protecting white women from rape prompted white men, women, and children to make the black person a living sacrifice.

Another rationale which whites touted even more frequently for lynching black people – wanting to stamp out homicides, robbery, and other crimes – also failed to account for the savagery of their treatment of blacks.\textsuperscript{75} Whites routinely lynched blacks whom they knew to be innocent of any wrongdoing. Mobs lynched a boy and a girl, aged sixteen years and fourteen years respectively, for no offense other than that their father stood accused of killing a white man.\textsuperscript{76} Vigilantes executed the pregnant wife and thirteen-year-old son of a man acknowledged to be mentally ill, as well as the father himself, because the father had injured a constable. They kicked to death a man who happened to live in the neighborhood where they were searching for a black man who had killed a white judge. They lynched a black man for raping a white woman even though the woman herself said that the rapist was white. They lynched a man, indeed, after a panel of jurors, who were white, had just acquitted him of any crime. A black man quarreled with a white woman over the change which he had received after making a purchase – and was lynched.\textsuperscript{77} In Roanoke, brooded the \textit{Crisis} magazine, “a black boy and a white girl were crossing a bridge, in opposite directions. Just as the girl was opposite the boy, she slipped and fell. The boy stretched out his hand to help her. He was promptly lynched by a mob, despite the vehement protest of the white State’s

\textsuperscript{74} Wells, “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all Its Phases,” pp. 7-12
\textsuperscript{75} Franklin and Moss, Jr., \textit{From Slavery to Freedom}, pp. 345-346
\textsuperscript{76} Wells, “A Red Record,” p. 20
\textsuperscript{77} Wells, “A Red Record; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, \textit{Thirty Years of Lynching}; Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., \textit{From Slavery to Freedom}; Wells, “Southern Horrors
Attorney.” Lynching often had nothing to do with punishing or pre-empting crime. On the contrary, the situation was quite as Wells described it: black men, women, and children were “more sinned against than sinning.”

The truth of lynching lay elsewhere, not in thirst for entertainment, for avenging or deterring rape, or for controlling crime, and that truth opened another window onto the mind of the master caste. What lay revealed there were weakness, greed, and a demand for dominance at any price. Lynching offered shelter to the unscrupulous and dishonorable. Thus a mother and grandmother, not wanting to pay a black man for a winter’s season of work, falsely accused him of raping their four-year-old daughter and granddaughter fully knowing where such a charge would lead. Lynching served to keep black individuals from securing material self-sufficiency. Thus whites in Memphis lynch three peaceful, law-abiding, energetic young black entrepreneurs who in 1892 had started a grocery enterprise called the People’s Grocery because, claimed Wells, they stood in competition with a nearby white grocer. Lynching aimed to chill black men’s appetite for seeking a voice in community decision-making. “Never, never in a thousand years will the negro, North or South, be allowed to govern in this republic, even where his majorities are plain,” declared the Honorable John Temple Graves of Atlanta, Georgia to an audience at the University of Chicago. “No statute can eradicate, no public opinion can remove, no armed force can overthrow, the inherent, invincible, indestructible, and, if you will, the unscrupulous capacity and determination of the Anglo-Saxon race to rule.”

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79 Wells, “Southern Horrors,” Preface
80 Wells, “A Red Record,” pp. 66-67
81 Wells, “Southern Horrors,” pp. 18-19
The point of lynching black people was to reintroduce, in the wake of the military defeat of the white South, a comprehensive “subjugation of the young manhood of the race,” as Wells perceptively explained. For any law-abiding black person, including a Du Bois, at the turn of the century there could be no assurance of safety in the South.

Why the need for subjugation? Reasserting white rule and black subjugation had as a major objective securing the continued transfer of wealth from black hands to white hands in the South. Black men and women had largely built the economies on which rested the wealth of the planter and merchant elites of the region. They were descendants of African adults and children who had survived transportation to the shores of the North America over a span of some two hundred and fifty years, from the early 1600s through the middle of the 1800s. Those ancestors were part of a wider westward diaspora of Africans whom European and American slave traders and their African commercial partners had plucked from civilizations across Africa in order to cut forests, mine gold, plant rice, harvest tobacco, boil sugar, and forge iron on plantations in the Americas, under conditions of compulsion and terror, so that Europeans on both sides of the Atlantic might live lives of leisure, privilege, and influence. Thus in South Carolina it was they whose unrewarded expertise and labour had laid the foundation of the economy of the 1700s; who more than likely had taught the planters of the colony how to cultivate and process the rice that made the Low Country elite the richest segment of the population of the thirteen break-away colonies on the eve of the War of Independence; and who, in all likelihood, had, through the wealth with which they empowered...
colony’s planter class, invested them with that self-confidence that enabled them to press for a separate destiny some four generations later.\(^{84}\) Now the Civil War and the destruction of slavery in the 1860s had made real to Southern whites the possibility that no longer would blacks be as readily available for radical exploitation. Lynching blacks, with fanfare or without it, constituted war by another means, without the formality of army uniform, with a view to establishing systems to perpetuate the transfer of wealth produced by blacks into white hands.

This successful reconstitution of racial dominance in the second half of the century which Du Bois and African America as a whole faced amounted to another phase in a cycle of waxing and waning spaces of freedom that marked the fate of blacks in the lower half of the North American mainland. The outlawing of slavery, the acquisition of rights of citizenship, and the grant of a political voice, all of it backed up by federal legislation and military occupation, had intimated to blacks that a new social reality might emerge in the South. Now their hopes and expectations collapsed with crushing abruptness as white Southerners regained control of statehouses across the region and as the North withdrew its army of occupation in 1877. This shrinking of a space for autonomy and initiative had taken place before. The early years of colonial settlement, in which the enslaved population had counted among its members significant numbers of multiracial, multilingual, multicultural, Christian “Atlantic creoles” who were permitted to function in a wide range of roles, to farm and trade independently, to acquire skills and

social connections, and themselves to hold others as property, had all given way, with the rise of plantation slavery in the South in the late 1600s, to a new and harsher dispensation in the early 1700s. Thereafter the War of Independence of the late 1700s had brought in its wake a widening space of manoeuvre for blacks in the North and in the Chesapeake arena, but the expanding demand for cotton and the emergence of the cotton gin had led plantations in the South to gain new strength in the 1790s and early 1800s, and blacks in the Low Country and in the Lower Mississippi Valley had found themselves subjected to a tightening grip of control.\textsuperscript{85} Now, after nearly thirty decades during which the scope of freedom available to blacks had grown and shrunk under the impact of changing economic, political, and ideological pressures, and after the 1860s and 1870s had intimated an expanding horizon, the closing of the nineteenth century brought with it another, and brutal, contracting phase of the cycle.

Keeping pace with the narrowing of space for physical, material, political, and social manoeuvre was the narrowing of the space of psychological freedom. For formally educated blacks, the claims made explicit in ideological battle – that black people might not be human, and that they had no worthy past – together with claims of the same nature which lay implicit in physical assault, in material exploitation, in political exclusion, and in social rejection all added up to a concerted attack on anchors of self-esteem. For those who came into contact with it, that hostile narrative undermined the serenity of contentment with self and introduced a deep note of confusion and self-doubt into interior

conversation, as Edward Blyden pointed out—Blyden of the Danish West Indies and Liberia whom Du Bois labeled as being “[p]erhaps Liberia’s greatest citizen,” and “a prophet of the renaissance of the Negro race.” Such, in the view of black intellectuals of the era, was the intention of the narrative. Woodson judged that the curricula and pedagogy used in schools intentionally taught blacks to despise themselves: “[t]he thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies,” and teachers belittled black people to black students.

Hubert Henry Harrison, a black public intellectual originally from the Danish West Indies who settled in Harlem, mused that black boys and girls came to see themselves as having little value for the reason that “[t]hey know nothing of the stored-up knowledge and experience of the past and present generations of Negroes in their ancestral lands, and conclude there is no such store of knowledge and experience. They readily accept the assumption that Negroes have never been anything but slaves and that they have never had a glorious past as other fallen peoples like the Greeks and Persians have. And this despite the mass of collected testimony in the works of . . . a host [of authors], Negro and white.” To be sure, some blacks, as had long been the case in the United States, understood the manipulation to which they were being subjected and celebrated their race in spite of the dominant culture’s assault on its value. However, typically, and predictably, young minds came to attribute to whites alone, and particularly

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88 Woodson, Miseducation of the Negro, pp. 2, 6, 21
to Anglo-Saxon whites, all the major achievements in world civilization, and so to view themselves as being diminutive in comparison. Many educated blacks absorbed at least some of the effects of the limiting conceptions of themselves that mainstream curricula peddled at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The hostile and contemptuous treatment of Africa, in the closing decades of the century and into the early 1900s, not only bred deep insecurity among African Americans but also deep alienation from their ancestral origins. It also rendered them eager to reject all association with the African continent. Du Bois noted that the effect upon African Americans of the teaching about Africa conducted in the public schools and colleges was that “they became ashamed of any connection with it.” Others agreed. “There are Negroes and colored men in America,” declared John Edward Bruce in the closing years of the century, “who hold with white men – alleged scholars – that no good thing can come out of Africa, or has come out of it.” Du Bois expanded on his point. “Among the Negroes of my generation,” he mused, “there was not only little direct acquaintance or consciously inherited knowledge of Africa, but much distaste and recoil because of what the white world taught them about the Dark Continent.” Interestingly, by more than one report it had not always been so. As Du Bois saw it, in the 1600s and 1700s African

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Americans had expressed a sense of respect for, and kinship with, Africa. The early 1800s had introduced political complications into the question of whether a return to Africa ought to be advocated; and at the same time a large mulatto population located in the West Indies and in the American South, educated and propertied, had come to dismiss Africa as being where they had come from originally and where they might make a future home and instead to see their past and future as being in the Americas. However there was not the flight from any association with Africa that now made itself felt at the close of the 1800s. “It would appear,” noted a later student of the era, “that it became common opinion among American Negroes that only racial fanatics flouted their jungle ancestry, or formed back-to-Africa movements.”96 The pride in African ancestry which had marked the outlook of their forebears lay deeply compromised among many blacks by the close of the 1800s.

A trenchant example of the lack of esteem for self that was invited by the fin de siècle devaluation of the black person and the African made an appearance in print in 1901. William Hannibal Thomas, a black man who by his own account had pursued a varied career as farm labourer, tradesman, educator, soldier, journalist, lawyer, and legislator published in that year his *The American Negro: What He Was, What He Is, and*

See C. A. Chick, “The American Negroes’ Changing Attitude Toward Africa,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 31 No. 4 (Autumn, 1962). Horace Mann Bond also agreed that initially African Americans had viewed Africa in a positive light, and then had developed a sense of shame about being African. To be sure, however, he disagreed with Du Bois as to the cause and the timing of the pendulum swing. In regard to timing, as he saw it the sense of shame arose much earlier, in the early 1800s, as a result of the exploitation of the Negro in the expanding cotton industry of the South; the revival of pride began as early as the 1850s; and the defeat of the aspirations of blacks in the later 1800s after the collapse of Reconstruction actually played a significant role in reviving the idea of Africa as a homeland. Horace Mann Bond, “The American Negro and Africa: From Pride to Shame to Pride.” (Horace Mann Bond Papers. University of Massachusetts Library. Record Group 411 Series 6 Box 172 Folder 11)

96 Chick, “The American Negroes’ Changing Attitude Toward Africa,” p. 531
What He May Become. The work’s prefatory remarks – “I early discovered the absolute untrustworthiness of self-interested negro statement,” for example; or, again, “I have beheld the transition of the negro from chattelism to freedom, to enfranchisement, to legislative power, to dominating insolence, to riotous infamy; and through it all I have beheld his accredited leaders impervious to every thought or care for race, government, civilization, or posterity” – foreshadowed claims concerning the intellectual and moral stature of the black person which drew a firestorm of criticism from contemporaries of his race. In an analysis constituted – rather than merely marked – by insult, Thomas contended that black people were not like other races of people. One of the differences between the black and the non-black was that the intellect of the black person was severely limited. Specifically, “the supreme difficulty of the negro mind,” as Thomas saw the problem, was “its inability to parallel internal with external environing phenomena, because there is no apparent intelligent apprehension and adjustment of its internal mental states to external facts.”  

Beyond purely intellectual incapacity the black person lay challenged on other fronts. The black person lacked judgment, stability, true affection and sympathy for others like himself, the ability to set priorities – he operated on impulse – and the ability to maintain a household, and the capacity to endure deprivation and to accept criticism. His moral character, in particular, was compromised. He was an inveterate liar, “an adept in deception;” he was insincere, false-hearted, lazy, vain, obstinate, shallow, and steeped in “cowardice, folly, and

98 Thomas, The American Negro, pp. 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 130
99 Ibid., p. 121
idleness;” 100 and he viewed “refinement, truth, and honor” as being “acquirable vestments that may be put on or off as occasion requires, but which in no sense work a reconstruction in the nature of man.”101 Physical brutality gratified him, as did dominating others. 102 All told, the black person presented a deeply unfortunate spectacle, as was widely acknowledged: “[t]here is, of course, broadly speaking, a common agreement in the public mind that the negro represents an accentuated type of human degradation.” 103 Was there hope? “We do not despair, for, while we know that the supremacy of racial instincts assures continued degradation, we believe the freedmen can be regenerated, and will be whenever they are physically and ethically dealt with as they ought to be.” 104 And how was it that the freedmen ought to be dealt with? “What agency,” that is, in Thomas’s words, “can effectively eradicate the admittedly vicious traits inherent in the negro people?” 105 The solution was bracing. 106

“[I]t is our conviction that, when appeals to conscience and reason fail of response, it is our duty to back up such commands for right-doing with force. We are, moreover, seriously inclined to the belief that, in a social organism of fixed ethical standards, all in-dwelling, non-conforming inferior types of mankind should be excluded or exterminated. Is this a barbarous suggestion? Assuredly not, so long as we absolve ourselves for summary executions by the plea that the good of society justifies them. It is far better to have individual extermination than national extinction.”

Thomas’s argument, that of a black man commenting on black men, laid bare a visceral and committed disgust with self. Such was the depth of alienation from self which a Du Bois rose to confront. 107

100 Ibid., p. 112, 117, 137
101 Ibid., p. 114
102 Ibid., p. 133
103 Ibid., p. 106
104 Ibid., p. 138
105 Ibid., p. 140
106 Ibid., p. 141
Keenly cognizant of the corrosive impact of the mainstream narrative concerning Africans on the continent and in the diaspora upon the self-image and self-esteem of black people, and intent on holding open that closing space of psychological freedom, a number of individuals, white and black alike, confronted openly the claim made by Charles Carroll and others that Negroes lacked souls. Zachary Winfree, boldly acknowledging his identity as “a native Texan, a Southern white man, and the son of a former slave owner” as well as a veteran of the Confederate Army, in 1902 declared the Negro to be a man and not a beast, of descent from Adam, and in possession of a soul.\footnote{Zachary T. Winfree, \textit{The Negro Not A Beast; but a Human Being, of Hamitic Origin, Possessing A Soul} (Nashville, TN: McQuiddy, 1902), pp. 3, 36} Wilson Armistead registered a spirited protest to Carroll’s attack upon any presumption of human character in black people. Armistead, also white, stepped forward in 1903 with \textit{The Negro is a Man: A Reply to Professor Charles Carroll’s Book “The Negro Is A Beast; Or, in the Image of God.”} There he argued vigorously that Adam was a red man and not a white man; that the Negro was indeed a descendant of Adam through Ham and Noah and as such was a human being and had a soul; and that Biblical references to beasts of the earth and to serpents were not references to the black.\footnote{W. S. Armistead, \textit{The Negro Is A Man: A Reply to Professor Charles Carroll’s Book ‘The Negro Is A Beast; Or, in the Image of God’} (Tifton, Georgia: Armistead and Vickers, 1903)} William Edward Burghardt Du Bois too stepped forward, at the same time as did Armistead, to meet Carroll’s lunge. Du Bois published in 1903 \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}. The title of the work implied his position – black people \textit{did} have souls – while the content of the work limned the shape of those souls.\footnote{W. E. B. Du Bois, \textit{The Souls of Black Folk} (New York: Simon & Schuster, [1903] 2009)} Du Bois’s rejoinder won a considerable audience and blunted in some measure the force of Carroll’s move: the sale of nearly ten thousand
copies within five years of its publication was an impressive record for the time. But *Souls* did not snuff the flames of the controversy entirely. M. B. Thompson thought the embers still sufficiently warm to need a further dousing. Three years later, in 1906, he contributed his views on the question of the ethnological status of the Negro in *The Negro Not A Beast, But A Descendant of Adam: A Reply to Prof. Chas. Carroll’s Work, “‘The Negro A Beast or ‘In the Image of God’.”* All told, Carroll’s claim provoked a sharp response.

Du Bois’s text *The Souls of Black Folk* parried Carroll’s thrust in part by what it said and in part by who it was who said it. The argument of the work, grounded in sociological research and in reflection on personal experience, sensitively pointed up the humanity of the black man and teased out the systemic difficulties that hobbled his progress after slavery. Blacks were a race of people of true promise, argued Du Bois. Their spirituals, “the most beautiful expression of human experience,” were the only music that American society had produced. Their religious heritage had shaped American religious expression in a profound way. Their young people had demonstrated considerable mettle: in but one generation after slavery a cohort of college-trained black men had emerged who displayed high character, careful leadership, and deep commitment to service. If the race as a whole did not excel, it was not because of lack of ability: it was because of barriers, material and psychological, erected against it. Black men struggled in systemic poverty and were unable to rise economically and to function as good citizens because ruling opinion in the South denied them the protection from

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exploitation provided by a voice in making political decisions, by access to quality education, and by opportunity for sympathetic interaction with white persons. If they turned to deception to protect themselves, they did so because no other tool, whether physical, political, or economic, lay available to them for defending themselves. Deception and other spiritual perils – frustration, corruption of ideals, despair at not being able to pursue their dreams, hatred of white people, doubt as to the destiny and capability of their race, uncertainty as to the purposes of their own lives – continually tempted young blacks because of the circumstances thrust upon them. Their social environment, not some deficit of human sensibility, accounted for why the black man in the United States thought and acted as he did – so ran Du Bois’s argument. That a case so compelling in its substance and its craftsmanship should have come from a black man was itself part of the lesson regarding the abilities of black men which spectators to the contest between Carroll and his antagonists drew from the publication of Souls. One observer, the editor of The Southern Atlantic Quarterly, put the point squarely. “Can a beast,” he asked, “write a book like [The Souls of Black Folk]?” The answer appeared to be no.112 Souls refuted Carroll’s claims, and it also raised up a standing challenge to William Hannibal Thomas’s acid assessment of the intellectual capabilities of black people.

Even as Du Bois and the other members of that band of stalwarts challenged the notion that blacks were not human beings, a number of African, African American and Afro-Caribbean amateur historians and public intellectuals and university-trained

historians opened up a battlefront against the idea that the African and his children abroad were culturally naked and brutish. At the turn of the century and in the first two decades of the nineteen hundreds, before the movement organized by Marcus Garvey carried forward to a new level the struggle to force recognition of the historical accomplishments of Africans and their progeny in the Americas, in the United States individuals such as Carter Woodson, John Edward Bruce, Hubert Henry Harrison, and, again, W. E. B. Du Bois worked strenuously to educate African Americans about Africans’ manifold historical accomplishments. As the new century strengthened its footing, in the West the project of racial affirmation in regard to history drew powerful adherents such as Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association; William Leo Hansberry who taught African history at Howard University; Joel Rogers whose World’s Great Men of Color shone circles of light upon the attainments and exploits of black men and women the world over, from Imhotep to St. Benedict, from Terence to Chaka; and C. L. R. James, whose Black Jacobins established that Africans of the San Domingue Revolution, far from being witless drudges incapable of understanding the world around them, could and did function as master strategists who planned and carried out against overwhelming odds the world’s only revolt by enslaved persons which was known to have succeeded. In the first half of the twentieth century, these and other champions of African accomplishment and advocates of African empowerment, mounting an assault explicitly designed to crack the hegemonic grip of white American self-congratulation, presented in rebuttal an extensive revisionist narrative about Africa.\footnote{Joel Rogers, World’s Great Men of Color (New York: Simon & Schuster, [1946] 1996); C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution (London: Penguin, [1938] 2001)}
Du Bois was an unrelenting and influential warrior on that field of battle. He spoke out early, consistently, and in great detail on Africa’s past. He succeeded in reaching a national and even international audience, and he brought to the project of affirming that Africans and their descendants in the Americas had a past the full weight of his credibility and skill as a trained scholar in the discipline of History. Alerted by a distinguished fellow academician to the accomplishment of Africans, he drew upon a variety of media – pageant, book, oral address – to present a tableau of the humanity and achievement of the African in every region of the continent and to argue for the central place of the African in the history of the world. His voice, raised to combat the pervasive influence of racist narratives of world history, affected the paths of three important African American educators at early stages in their intellectual development. In addition it played a role in rehabilitating the image of the African in the consciousness of African Americans generally in the first half of the century. In so doing, it helped, at a time when African Americans stood embattled on every side, to bolster the cultural resources that underlay their psychological resilience and by doing so to strengthen their readiness for struggle. Furthermore his example offered inspiration to a further generation of scholars who carried forward in the second half of the century his programme of drafting history in the service of making a better world. What, then, were the commitments of W. E. B. Du Bois as he rose to meet his purpose? What was his vision of society in the United States that yielded this record of involvement in the crucial arguments of his time? How did he become aware that a counter-narrative lay available to him which could serve to undermine a hostile and hegemonic discourse?
CHAPTER THREE

Whence Empowerment? The Question of Africa’s Past

W. E. B. Du Bois’s commitments over the course of his long life centered on teaching, producing scholarship and literature, and educating a national and international audience. His teaching extended to classics, modern languages, sociology, history, and economics. His scholarship, which secured him fellowship in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, ranged in subject matter from sociology to history to political economy. Notable among his monographs were *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*, which was the published form of his doctoral dissertation and which became, with its appearance in 1896, the first volume of the Harvard Historical Studies series; *The Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1899, which emerged from research conducted through the University of Pennsylvania; *The Souls of Black Folk*, which appeared in 1903; sixteen of the nineteen *Atlanta University Studies of Social Conditions among Negroes* to appear between 1896 and 1916, co-edited with Augustus G. Dill; 114 *The Negro*, a 1915 text; *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, published in 1935; *Black Folk Then and Now*, which appeared in 1939 on the threshold of war; *Encyclopaedia of the Negro: Preparatory Volume with

Reference Lists and Reports published in 1945; Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace, published in 1945; and The World and Africa, a treatise which appeared in 1946. His literary corpus included The Quest of the Silver Fleece, published in 1911; Dark Princess: A Romance, published in 1928; and the trilogy entitled The Black Flame, which appeared over the course of 1957-1961. His social critique, prodigious in volume, appeared in magazines and newspapers ranging from the Mark Twain Quarterly to the Journal of Negro Education, from Foreign Affairs to The Fort Valley State College Bulletin, from The Aryan Path of Bombay, India to Cahiers d’Haïte of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, from the Atlantic Monthly to Social Forces, from the Chicago Defender to Current History. Du Bois made educating others through whatever media lay available his lifelong endeavor.

Another important activity to which Du Bois devoted extensive energy, beyond his academic and broader intellectual pursuits, lay in building or strengthening institutions. Two of those institutions were journals. He founded the NAACP’s Crisis and edited the journal from its inception in November, 1910 to June, 1934. He founded as well the quarterly journal Phylon: The Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture, whose systematic distribution began in 1940. He edited Phylon from 1940 to 1944. Apart from establishing successful journals, he helped to cultivate and maintain networks of persons in the United States and abroad who were committed to the cause of liberating black peoples. In the United States his outstanding success in that regard was his contribution to the establishment of the NAACP in 1909 and to the further development

of the organization, on whose founding board of directors he was the sole African American. Other organizations in the United States that he helped to build included the American Negro Academy, the Council on African Affairs, and the Peace Information Center. On the international stage he played a pivotal role in developing the institutional Pan-African movement. At the first Pan-African Conference, which had been organized by barrister Henry Sylvester Williams of Trinidad and which had taken place at Westminster Hall in London, England in July, 1900, Du Bois had served as Secretary. In 1919 he was instrumental in bringing into being the Pan-African Congress in Paris which, according to historian George Shepperson, was “often credited with setting in motion the modern movement for Pan-Africanism.” He remained involved in the succession of Congresses which met thereafter, in 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945. His institution-building activities yielded results some which endure today.

Du Bois’s teaching, his scholarship, his literary production, his advocacy, and his institutional investments all centered around one project: advancing his vision of a better society. He questioned early that conception of civilization which celebrated brutality over decency and self over community. He brought to bear an enduring faith in the value and dignity of all people rather than a small proportion of them. He envisioned a world that was egalitarian, one which offered to all people peace and access to the resources that would give them the opportunity for a decent life no matter what their

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117 Shepperson, “Introduction,” p. 22
physical or cultural inheritance.\textsuperscript{119} Spurred by conviction and seasoned by years of experience and reflection, the mature Du Bois criticized social attitudes and practices which lay athwart his vision. He attacked the subordination of all women and the contempt accorded by white society to black women.\textsuperscript{120} He challenged class exploitation and oppression, embracing the labor movement and socialism at home and condemning colonialism and imperialism abroad. So strongly, indeed, did he feel about issues of justice and of peace that in 1950 he ran on the Progressive Party ticket as a candidate for the United States Senate. Viewing war as being both a method of unrestrained capitalist appropriation and an outcome of it,\textsuperscript{121} he embraced pacifism, standing his ground no matter the price – which included being indicted and tried in the United States in 1951 as an officer of the Peace Information Center – in the quest (the ‘battle’, as he termed it, aptly) for peace.\textsuperscript{122} In 1961, shortly before moving to Ghana and at the height of McCarthyite denunciations of persons sympathetic to Communism, he joined the Communist Party of the United States, declaring that Communism and socialism were the only real vehicles for achieving world peace. His viewpoints did not go unacknowledged. He was a Lenin Peace Prize laureate.\textsuperscript{123} In China his birthday was celebrated as a national holiday. He received the International Peace Prize from the World Council of Peace.\textsuperscript{124}

However, while Du Bois fought the insults and inequities suffered by persons falling within a number of social categories and championed their several claims for

\textsuperscript{120} Du Bois, \textit{Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil}
\textsuperscript{122} See Aptheker, “A Life Dedicated to Freedom.”
\textsuperscript{123} Lewis, \textit{W. E. B. DuBois: Biography of A Race}, p. 3
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid.}
justice, in his early years he directed his energies mainly to closing the gap between his vision of society and the social, economic, political, and psychological realities which routinely confronted African Americans in the United States and African peoples around the world. The invidious assumptions and claims, the indignities, the abusive practices which Africans and people of African descent were made routinely to suffer infuriated him, as did the tactics, ranging from violence to psychological manipulation, which white supremacists employed to suppress black peoples. “The problem of the twentieth century,” he declared in response to his awareness of the outrageous burdens and the “insult, insult, insult” heaped on black peoples, “is the problem of the color line, the question as to how far differences of race – which show themselves chiefly in the color of the skin and the texture of the hair – will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization.” In the contemporary United States, he thought, the problem displayed its cutting edge in the question of what was to be done with those blacks who “by any measurement [were] the equal of the whites.” He launched a frontal challenge to racial discrimination, seizing every opportunity to upbraid advocates of white superiority and supremacy. Discrimination based on race commanded the center of his attention.

Consider for example his engagement with public officials. Southern officeholders who espoused racist views, such as Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama, Senator Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina, and Governor James Vardaman of Mississippi were long-time adversaries of his. He recalled as much when he described wrestling with English composition during his college years at Harvard.\textsuperscript{129} “I knew the Negro problem,” he reflected, “and this was more important to me than literary form. I knew grammar fairly well, and I had a pretty wide vocabulary; but I was bitter, angry and intemperate in my first thesis. Naturally my English instructors had no idea of nor interest in the way in which Southern attacks on the Negro were scratching me on the raw flesh,” he explained. “Tillman was raging like a beast in the Senate, and literary clubs, especially those of rich and well-dressed women, engaged his services eagerly and listened avidly. Senator Morgan of Alabama had just published a scathing attack on ‘niggers’ in a leading magazine, when my first Harvard thesis was due. I let go at him with no holds barred….” From college student to political activist, Du Bois carried on a spirited campaign. He challenged racist public policies, criticizing Vardaman, for example, for refusing to permit funds proposed for the education of black students to be used for that purpose, and for opposing the appointment of blacks to public office.\textsuperscript{130} He excoriated prejudices as well as policies. Tillman and Vardaman, along with author Thomas Dixon, were heirs of a long Southern ideological tradition of advocating the


\textsuperscript{130} “Deplores Act of Vardaman,” \textit{Milwaukee Sentinel}, 19 March 1904, p. 6 (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. University of Massachusetts Library. Record Group 312 Series 21 Box 361 Folder 42); “Tillman et al.,” \textit{The Crisis} Vol. 6 No. 5 (September 1913), pp. 226-227
enslavement of black people, he explained in the *Central Christian Advocate* in 1905, for instance; and now at the opening of the twentieth century they were facing a predicament: they were being confronted with the reality of a cadre of “intelligent, thrifty, aspiring” black men who were demanding to have all their rights as citizens, and they were looking for a way out of that predicament. Tillman’s answer, he charged, was that the black man should not vote; Vardaman’s answer was that blacks should remain as “serfs and servants”; and Dixon’s response was that the races should not mix. Adamantly opposed to those political, economic, and social solutions, he assailed claims advanced by Vardaman and his ideological *confreres* that African Americans were dying out, would not save their money, could not be educated, were not efficient workers, and – because they were receiving more education – were indulging increasingly in crime. His attacks on the racism of public officials typified his focus on eradicating inequity and injustice based on race.

Where the ideology of racial supremacy came from in the United States was no mystery, Du Bois pointed out. Racism, he explained, in a luminous and sober treatment of the question, stemmed directly, in Georgia anyway, from the conscious, premeditated investment of industrial and commercial capitalists in fomenting race hatred in order to generate profit. The mob violence practised by the Ku Klux Klan which was a rabid expression of that race hatred had its roots, he concluded, in fear on the part of

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133 Du Bois, “Georgia: Invisible Empire State”
white Americans of English descent that they might lose their ability to earn a respectable
living and to maintain their class status; that blacks and others posed a threat to their
economic and social ascendancy; and that all the other methods which they had deployed
to keep blacks down – caricature, contempt, rape, insult, murder, burning at the stake,
labeling as inferior – were not succeeding. 134 Certainly racism could not claim any origin
in any actual inferiority of blacks to whites. On the contrary, the pretensions of those
white persons who believed that whiteness was inherently superior to blackness were
laughable. The proof of whites’ mediocrity was there to see: white people were weak and
pitiable, very few white persons put Christian principle into practice, white people were
famously cruel – the carnage of World War I was characteristic, not atypical – they
abused and exploited whomever they could to a radical degree, and they had never
excelled Asians or Africans in any area of endeavor. Black people were not better than
were white people – they too were weak, pitiable, and cruel – but neither were they any
whit worse. 135 Indeed Africans in West Africa were hospitable, courteous, dignified, with
manners better than those of American elites, and their villages were free of prostitution
and poverty. 136 Racism was a creature not of human difference but of human greed. As
for its impact, that greed which deliberately fomented racial fear wrought, in the end,
catastrophe. Elevating whiteness wrought tragedy for black people – that much was
obvious – but not for black people alone: white supremacist consciousness in the United
States subverted the moral leadership abroad of the whole nation and corroded the whole

society at home. It undermined democracy, encouraged the economic and social abuse of individuals and families, gave scope to political corruption, invited vicious treatment of criminals, cheated whites as well as blacks of genuine education, compromised the integrity of American science, crippled and deformed the souls of white people, and rendered Christians hypocrites in their professions of brotherly love. The human possibilities of everyone, not just of black people, argued Du Bois, were stifled by the ‘color line’.

If racism was such a poison to the individual of whatever race, and to the body politic, then what was to be done? The solution, at least in the United States, thought Du Bois, was to fight. Black people in the United States were never to acquiesce to political and social marginalization and educational inequity in the American South in exchange for opportunity to make a living: as people, whatever their race, they had value, and they were entitled to enjoy all the fruits of full citizenship in their own country. Their agenda should be to challenge tactics of political exclusion and social rejection and material exploitation and ideological oppression, take frontal aim at the practice of lynching, and mount scholarly attacks on stereotypes of inferiority draped over black peoples. They should insist on their right to speak for themselves, whether they were in the Diaspora or on the continent of Africa. Africans, for example, should represent themselves in the newly emerging United Nations, rather than acquiesce to claims that Europeans were the


better spokesmen for them. The fight for equality of access, opportunity, and power would require leadership, and so a cadre of leaders would have to be moulded. The most talented ten percent of the black population would provide the pool from which the black race would draw its leadership, as would any other race. By teaching the masses of ordinary black people the highest ideals of life and by providing them with intellectual training, that group, “an aristocracy of talent and character” educated at colleges and universities, would play its critical role in guaranteeing the liberation of black people.

Viewing himself as being one of that aristocracy of talent and character, Du Bois took up his pen to practise what he preached. *The Crisis* in particular among his publications is an enduring testament to his relentlessness, his fearlessness, and his commitment in the service of a beleaguered people. The magazine, so Du Bois explained, was the outcome of his abiding wish to found a critical periodical for African Americans. It was an instrument for expressing his deepest passions. It was “[his] dream and brainchild; [his] garden of hope and highway to high emprise,” he later recalled. The central purpose that he outlined for the magazine when he launched it in 1910 was that it should foster human brotherhood, peace, and goodwill. It would do that by combating bigotry, prejudice, “emphasized race-consciousness,” and force. The combat would take the form of setting forth facts and arguments showing how dangerous racial prejudice was, particularly as that prejudice expressed itself towards colored people. Short articles,

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141 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, pp. 92-93, 226, 258, 270, 313

142 Du Bois, “Editing the Crisis,” p. 213
news stories bringing to light events bearing on race relations, excerpts from and commentary on books and articles, and expressions of opinion in the press on racial issues would all be the vehicles for conveying those facts and arguments. The magazine’s editorial page would stand for ‘the rights of men . . . the highest ideals of American democracy, and . . . attempts to gain [those] rights and realize [those] ideals.” With admirable consistency the magazine fulfilled the mandate that he set forth. Under his direction it did more than keep a watchful and confrontational eye on the activities of racist officeholders and on what other newspapers and magazines had to say about those officials. It kept up a drumbeat roll of protest against lynching and rioting. It documented the resulting migration of blacks from South to North. It explained the deep springs from which welled whites’ dedication to oppressing blacks. It decried inequity in every form and lived up to the adage emblazoned on the cover of its March 1917 issue: “To sin by silence when we should protest makes cowards out of men.”

How Du Bois dealt with the issue of mob violence against blacks illustrates what he did with the pages of The Crisis to advance his plan for social change. The magazine presented images portraying lynched victims and highlighting the hypocrisy of whites in claiming to stand on moral high ground while yet murdering defenseless persons. It kept a yearly tally of what it called ‘the standard American industry of lynching colored men,’ laying out statistics on the number of persons known to have been lynched, their

143 Ibid., p. 151
144 “Vardaman,” The Crisis Vol. 2 No. 5 (September 1911), pp. 188-189
race and gender, whether they were adults or children, the crimes which they were alleged to have carried out, and the means by which they were killed.\textsuperscript{146} It described with pointed sarcasm the circumstances which led to some of the lynchings, declaring for example that “[a]ttacks on property are most irritating, and one boy who stole a pair of shoes suffered the same fate as a man who stole a couple of mules. Mules are quite valuable in Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{147} It spotlighted particularly heinous instances of injustice or barbarism, as when in Abbeville, South Carolina a group of storekeepers lynched a wealthy black farmer and evicted his family from their large cotton acreage because the farmer and the merchant with whom he was dealing had exchanged words with one another; when in Waco, Texas a crowd of local citizenry burned a black man alive in broad daylight in the public square before thousands of enthusiastic onlookers, some of them hanging from windows to get a better view; and when in Shubuta, Mississippi a rabble lynched four innocent persons, two of whom were pregnant young women, one of them within two weeks of giving birth.\textsuperscript{148} It catalogued instances of the eviction of blacks \textit{en masse} from places of employment, of the dynamiting of homes of blacks, of assault upon a representative of the NAACP, of intimidation of black professionals and businessmen; it noted South Carolina’s introduction of a bill to legalize lynching; it reported the revival of the Ku Klux Klan; and it drew a direct line between the murderous violence routinely meted out to blacks and the view among Southern whites that the


\textsuperscript{147} “The Lynching Industry,” \textit{The Crisis} Vol. 9 No. 4 (Feb. 1915), p. 198

African American was “less than human.” It exposed to national view how blacks’ subjection to humiliation, intimidation, fear of violence, brutalization by officers of the law, and casual murder brought about tragic results for individual whites, debased whole communities of whites, and provoked blacks to question whether it was worthwhile to work to build a future in the South. Riots in North and South called forth similar condemnation. Articles documented the carnage that took place in East St. Louis, Illinois in July, 1917 and its interlocutory, judicial, and Congressional aftermath. Riots occurring as well in Washington D. C., in Chicago, and in Texas drew equal ire from The Crisis as it pressed for radical change in American society.

Du Bois’s handling of black migration from the South to the North again illustrated his courage, habit of thoroughness, and talent for advocacy. Under captions such as “Escaping Slaves,” “The Hegira,” “The Exodus,” and “The Migration of Negroes,” The Crisis reported that between 200,000 and 300,000 blacks, according to the Department of Labor, had left the South during the Great War. It argued that the migration was a mass movement driven by ordinary blacks rather than a development

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stimulated by black leaders and drew not only those who were impoverished but also those who had property and position. It pointed to the Department of Labor’s assessment that railroads, packing houses, foundries, factories, and automobile plants in the North provided the greatest opportunity for employment for migrants, and described how labor organizations in the North viewed the immigration of black workers. It relayed concern expressed by a variety of white-owned Southern newspapers about how the departure of black workers was undermining the solvency of white industrial, commercial, and agricultural enterprise in the region – although, to be sure, remittances from black emigrants to family in the South sometimes buoyed commerce. It transmitted commentary, sometimes ironic in nature, from Northern observers, who mused that “[t]he Negro problem in the South has changed somewhat in the last fifty years,” for “[i]t is not so much now a question as to what shall be done with them as it is what shall be done without them,” and who reflected on how blacks’ migration threatened to leave many whites in the novel position of having to do their own work. It disputed charges that the fundamental reasons why blacks were leaving the South were that Northern industrialists sought to recruit them to destroy unions in the North, or that Republicans sought to mobilize their votes against Democrats in close electoral contests in states outside the South, or that the boll weevil’s ravages of the cotton crop and the destruction of other crops by floods left black workers in the South unemployed and willing to move north in search of work. It emphasized, often through citing views expressed by black readers and black-owned newspapers, that the underlying reason for black emigration was that in the South blacks met with poverty, political exclusion, segregation, continual harassment and expressions of contempt, and wholesale violence. Making use of poetry and art as well as
prose to carry its argument, it told in verse of the round of toil, the emotional scarrings, and the physical atrocities that provoked the black man to gather himself and move north, and it depicted in cartoon format the Southern black man, dressed in coat and tie, suitcase in hand, fleeing the specter of being lynched. It argued that Negro migration to the North was proving a considerable success, with Negroes largely content, earning good wages, living in good housing, saving money, and with Northern employers satisfied at the high level of efficiency of Negro workers. It left its audience in no doubt as to the determination of black people to be free.\(^{152}\)

Du Bois made penetrating social analysis the hallmark of his writing in *The Crisis* and the heart of his strategy for educating his readers and effecting social change. Refusing to be distracted, he trained his audience’s eyes on the fundamental dynamics of Negro empowerment: the struggle between black and white over the black man’s political and economic advance. The vote, declared *The Crisis*, was the crucial matter in contention. “Make no mistake: the greatest Negro problem is Votes for Negroes. Everything else is secondary.”\(^ {153}\) Here was a right which the black man insisted that he should have and the white man insisted that the black man did not want or need.\(^ {154}\) *The Crisis* laid out how disfranchisement, economic impoverishment, violence, and

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ideological manoeuvering walked hand in hand. Thus it teased out the conditions of financial abuse of black tenant farmers and political disfranchisement of a black majority which culminated in sweeping arrests, indictments, and intimidation along with premeditated murders in Phillips County, Arkansas. It dissected conditions of corruption in city government and scapegoating of blacks which underlay a lynching in Omaha, Nebraska. Brief, intimate portraits of relations between industrial capitalist and worker and agrarian landlord and tenant exposed the underlying realities of manipulation and evasion that helped to perpetuate exploitation. Thus “Dives, Mob and Scab, Limited” explained how white working men in both the North and the South forced the black man, by denying him every other option, to cross a union picket line, and how industrial capitalists embraced antagonism between black and white workers with a view to perpetuating their own fortunes. “Of Giving Work” exposed the tactic of labeling as Communist any move on the part of laboring people to right economic wrongs.155 “From A White Laborer” told of how labor laws in Alabama maintained the black working man in conditions of neo-slavery to serve the interests of owners of coal mines and lumber camps and plantations.156 The Crisis made clear that Negroes were not interested in forcing their presence on white people as they pursued their private social lives; that what they were interested in was abolishing segregation in public transportation, bringing an end to lynching, gaining access to education, enjoying civil rights – and being free to exercise their vote.157

156 “From A White Laborer,” The Crisis Vol. 5 No. 6 (Apr. 1913), p. 300
Trenchant critique of injustice was but one arrow in Du Bois’s editorial quiver as he worked to draw America to a closer embrace of his own vision of a more humane future. Another arrow, again consistent with his goal of educating the public, lay in celebrating accomplishments of people of color at home and abroad. Thus *The Crisis* presented notable individuals of African ancestry and explained their African genealogy, such as the celebrated Afro-English composer and violinist Samuel Coleridge-Taylor who had an African surgeon from Sierra Leone for a father. 158 Both during and after the Great War it trumpeted the valor displayed by black soldiers and black stevedores who took part in the conflict. The magazine drew to readers’ attention the presence in France of hundreds of thousands of black fighting men from French colonies. Sketches and photographs depicted African soldiers at drill, during a hard-fought encounter at the Marne, after helping to bring victory at Douaumont, and honouring a celebrated general under whose command they had fought. 159 Du Bois quoted at length accolades showered upon African and African American officers and servicemen by generals of the French armies, pointed to military honors accorded to African American officers and soldiers, and highlighted the effectiveness of African American stevedores engaged in supplying Allied forces in France with food and materiel. He defended the honor of the African American soldier against what he called “falsehoods and half-truths” appearing in the American press and recommended texts which in his view provided readers with

interesting and instructive information about African participation in the war. The meaning of the heroism of African soldiers did not escape his commentary. “The black soldier saved civilization in 1914-1918,” he declared. At the same time that *The Crisis* deplored racist brutality the magazine showed its readers that black people both in the United States and beyond were human and worthy and that therefore racism had no legitimacy.

Du Bois, pan-African in his outlook, gave considerable play to matters relating to Africans even as he kept a close watch on domestic social developments, as his treatment of the subject of African servicemen suggested. *The Crisis* kept a running report on contemporary developments in societies across the continent, but particularly in southern Africa. Topics ranged from academic accomplishments of Africans studying in Britain and the United States to the launching of a trades union publication in Accra, Ghana, and from military revolt in Angola to steps taken towards growing cotton in ‘Western French Africa.’ As well, the magazine devoted considerable space in its “What To Read” section to Africa. Issue after issue commended to readers works on the continent and its peoples such as Harry Lukach’s *Bibliography of Sierra Leone, with an Introductory Essay on the Origin, Character and Peoples of the Colony*; Frederick Starr’s *The Congo Free State and Congo Belge*; Rev. W. L. Ferguson’s *The Present Situation in the Congo*; George McCall Theal’s *The Yellow and Dark-skinned People of Africa South of the

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Zambesi; H. S. Stannus’s “Notes on Some Tribes of British Central Africa;” M. S. Evans’s *Black and White in Southeast Africa: A Study in Sociology*; Solomon Plaatje’s *Native Life in South Africa*; and Jesse Page’s *The Black Bishop, Samuel Adjai Crowther*. The magazine drew attention as well to works of European imperial history touching Africa such as Sir Harry Johnston’s *Britain Across the Seas – Africa: A History and Description of the British Empire in Africa* even though it frequently took a position critical of imperialism. Narratives and photographs introduced uplifting themes such as African royalty, African heads of state, and African diplomats, notwithstanding an occasional note of condescension such as reference to precolonial kings of Uganda as being ‘wild’. African folklore, in the form of folktales and proverbs, exposed readers to African culture. As Du Bois saw it, raising awareness of Africans and encouraging a sense of solidarity with their struggles was an important part of empowering blacks in the United States, and therefore he made education about Africa part of the *Crisis*’ agenda.

A principal part of DuBois’s campaign to highlight accomplishments of Africans lay in overturning the claim that Africa and Africans had no past worth the telling. If

African Americans would walk a path to a future that was successful, he judged, they had

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166 “A Black Boy Who Is King,” *The Crisis*, p. 277
to embrace rather than ignore their culture – a culture that was, he argued “distinct and unique”. Their experience in Africa formed a key element of that culture, for a culture was “a careful Knowledge of the Past out of which the group as such has emerged: in our case a knowledge of African history and social development – one of the richest and most intriguing which the world has known” – and a knowledge of the history of African peoples in the Americas.\textsuperscript{168} A proper appreciation of the African’s true place in relation to other human beings would strengthen the self-esteem of African Americans. Without an appreciation of the African’s actual historical record it would be difficult for African Americans to throw off the “widespread inferiority complex” which tactics of violence and intimidation by whites had seeded in them\textsuperscript{169} and to maintain their self-confidence in the face of trenchant assaults by white supremacist ideology upon the notion that people who were black were fully as capable as were any other of honor, beauty, integrity, justice, and intelligence.\textsuperscript{170} Educating African Americans about their African historical inheritance became a major thrust in Du Bois’s strategy for ideological revolution.

As he faced the project of educating Americans, white and black alike, about African history, Du Bois understood his audiences. The task of educating even well-disposed whites was daunting, he well knew. That was because, he acknowledged in 1915, “we face to-day a widespread assumption throughout the dominant world that color

\textsuperscript{169} Du Bois, “Race Relations in the United States,” p. 9
is a mark of inferiority.”¹⁷¹ That assumption arose from two historical developments. One development was that in the modern era the black person was known mainly as a slave in the West Indies and in America. The second development was that people of color had lagged behind Europeans over the course of the preceding four centuries. Be that as it might, the result of that assumption was trenchant resistance to acknowledging that the African had a history. “[O]ne faces astounding prejudice” in writing of Negroes, he reflected in 1915. “[T]hat which may be assumed as true of white men must be proven beyond peradventure if it relates to Negroes. One who writes of the development of the Negro race must continually insist that he is writing of a normal human stock, and that whatever it is fair to predicate of the mass of human beings may be predicated of the Negro. It is the silent refusal to do this which has led to so much false writing on Africa and of its inhabitants.”¹⁷² It was not possible in the second decade of the twentieth century to write a history of the “Negro peoples” that was complete partly because “racial prejudice against darker peoples is still too strong in so-called civilized centers for judicial appraisement of the peoples of Africa.”¹⁷³ Du Bois grasped just as well that bringing African Americans to embrace their true story would be equally daunting. He understood that the African American elite, having been taught that Africans had no history and no culture, did not want to be associated with Africa.¹⁷⁴ Intrepid, he choreographed, wrote, and proclaimed unequivocally his own vision of Africa’s past once he had himself become persuaded that people who were black did indeed have a past.

¹⁷¹ Du Bois, The Negro, p. 12
¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 12, 138-139
¹⁷³ Ibid., p. vi.
But how, in point of fact, did Du Bois come to acquire a vision of Africa’s past that stood at odds with mainstream discourse on that theme? The origin of his vision has not had to be left to speculation. He himself spoke clearly and repeatedly about how the seed that yielded his vision of Africa’s history had been planted. It was not, he wrote, in his home or school environment in his early years in Great Barrington that he had learned of the contours of Africans’ historical experience. At home the sum of his contact with African culture and history had consisted of an African melody which his great-grandmother had used to sing. At high school the curriculum had taught him that Africa had no past. Nor was it through his formal higher education that he came upon that knowledge. His program at Fisk University had centered upon subjects such as Greek and Latin literature, ancient history, mathematics and science, modern languages and literature, philosophy, and political economy. While his two years of graduate study at Harvard had focused on history and political economy, and while his program of study at the University of Berlin had included courses in history, nothing in his training in history at those two institutions had suggested to him that Africans had possessed a history. Indeed, at the time that he was pursuing his graduate education, he later recalled, the view taken of Africa’s past in the academy in the United States and in Germany had

175 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, p. 114
176 W. E. B. Du Bois, Black Folk Then and Now, p. vii
reaffirmed the judgment of his high school curriculum. “In the graduate school at Harvard and again in Germany,” he reflected, “. . . race became a matter of culture and cultural history. The history of the world was paraded before the observation of students. Which was the superior race? Manifestly that which had a history, the white race; there was some mention of Asiatic culture, but no course in Chinese or Indian history or culture was offered at Harvard, and quite unanimously in America and Germany, Africa was left without culture and without history.” 180 Prior to 1906, to be sure, he did have, it would seem, some awareness that peoples of Africa and the African Diaspora had a history worthy of value. He wrote in 1900, in the Report of the Pan-African Conference, that while people of colour were then “the least advanced in culture, according to European standards,” “[t]his has not, however, always been the case in the past, and certainly the world’s history, both ancient and modern, has given instances of non-despicable ability and capacity among the blackest races of men.” 181 To hear Du Bois tell it, however, his awareness of African achievement must have been general rather than detailed, and based on fragments of knowledge rather than a coherent understanding of Africans’ accomplishments and the seminal role which they had played in the history of the world. It was not until an encounter in 1906 that his outlook on the question changed.

The encounter emerged out of Du Bois’s scholarly investigations of African American life. In October, 1905, Du Bois, then in charge of the annual conferences sponsored by Atlanta University which yielded the Studies of Social Conditions Among

180 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, p. 98
181 Quoted in Contee, “The Emergence of Du Bois as an African Nationalist,” p. 56
Negroes, wrote to Franz Boas regarding the conference planned for May, 1906.\footnote{Letter, W. E. B. Du Bois to Franz Boas, 11 October, 1905. (Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia)} Franz Boas was then professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. In the letter, Du Bois had asked Boas to guide him to literature relating to the physical characteristics of the African American. That request reflected the theme of the planned conference: the physique of the African American. Du Bois also asked Boas to consider attending the conference in person and addressing its participants, who would include not only students but also a significant number of African American physicians. He proposed as well that Columbia University, if it were interested, consider carrying out research in physical anthropology among the African American population in Atlanta. It developed that Boas did travel to Atlanta in May, 1906. There, on the 31st day of the month, he delivered a commencement address to graduating students of the University. By Du Bois’s account, in the course of the address Boas also reshaped Du Bois’s intellectual life.

Du Bois described on more than one occasion the transformative nature of that encounter with Boas in Atlanta. In a column that he wrote for the *Pittsburgh Courier* in December, 1937, he explained the genesis of his passionate advocacy of the truth of Africans’ history. His words are worth quoting in full.\footnote{*Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 December, 1937}

Benjamin Stolberg’s ‘Majority Jingo’ in the ‘Nation’ . . . not only added to the gaiety of the nations, but brings . . . criticism which American Negroes cannot ignore. Un[like?] so many of the criticisms which we must continually [face?], it is the word neither of an outsider who does not [know us, nor?] of an insider who misses the forest for the [trees]. Stolberg is a Jew and knows prejudice; and he also [has some?] intimate Negro friends. He may err by assuming too broad knowledge of all Negroes; but even this leaves . . . judgment one to be heeded.
His main indictment is that because of the veil of race . . . feeling of inferiority, the narrowed opportunity . . . Negroes are all too apt to substitute racial loyalty for [standards?] of real accomplishment. Stolberg does not realize [how?] often this same criticism has been voiced by Negroes. [I can?] remember in my own career how contemptuous I was [as an?] early graduate, of what I considered then the wholly unwarranted claims of accomplishment for Negroes. I came [to?] my teaching career even more convinced than Mr. Stolberg of the essential mediocrity of most things that Negroes [claimed?] to have done in the world, and I buttressed that [conviction?] by an extraordinary faith in what we could and [would?] accomplish when once we had the chance.

Out of that complacent dream I remember distinctly [my?] first awakening. Franz Boaz came to Atlanta University about 1900 and said to a graduating class: ‘You [are?] not called upon to be ashamed of what Negroes have accomplished in the history of Africa.’ Then I heard for [the first?] time of Ghana, Melle and the Songhai. I literally [fell?] upon Boaz’ neck when I could get to him to ask where [this] history had been hidden from me.

Two years later, Du Bois reiterated how deeply Boas’s remarks on African history had affected him. In *Black Folk Then and Now*, which appeared in 1939, he reflected: 184

Franz Boas came to Atlanta University where I was teaching history in 1906 and said to a graduating class: You need not be ashamed of your African past; and then he recounted the history of the black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years. I was too astonished to speak. All of this I had never heard . . . .

What was it that Boas had said that had left so deep an imprint upon Du Bois’s spirit? In remarks which exhibited deep sympathy with the aspirations of African Americans, Boas had asserted that the African race was not inferior to other races either physically or culturally; that the African in antiquity was culturally innovative and energetic; that the contemporary African was also skilled and capable; that the African who came into contact with a foreign culture had also achieved a great deal; and that there was no reason to think that Africans would remain in a subordinate position in the

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184 Du Bois, *Black Folk Then and Now*, p. vii
future just because they stood in a subordinate position in the contemporary world. In the context of illustrating his claim that Africans influenced by a foreign culture could prosper, he spoke of African kingdoms lying south of the Sahara in the western Sudan. In that region, he pointed out, there were old African kingdoms which had early been conquered by Muslims. Then, under the guidance of the conquerors at first, but later through their own initiative, the Africans had organized kingdoms which had survived for centuries and which had featured flourishing towns, annual fairs, public buildings, systems of laws and judges to apply them, and the keeping of official histories and of archives. To support others of his claims Boas pointed to specific examples of African accomplishment such as the likelihood that it had been Africans who had made the crucial discovery of how to smelt iron; the demonstrated capacity of Africans for effective military and political organization; and the creation by Africans of art of the highest level of development, expressed in royal regalia, in basketry, in military weaponry – “axes inlaid with copper and decorated with filigree” – and in bronze castings. With few exceptions, Boas’s statements struck hard at assumptions of African inferiority.

The subject of Boas’s commencement remarks – the question of Africa’s past – was of a piece with his wider intellectual preoccupations. African historical achievement was not a topic of casual interest for him. He was fully aware of the subversive potential of his historical knowledge regarding Africa and he had developed a particular concern to

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186 Boas, “The Outlook for the American Negro,” p. 313
share that knowledge with African Americans. In 1906 the issue was very much on his mind. He indicated as much to Booker T. Washington, founding principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and the leading African American of the age, some months after he had given the commencement address: he explained to Washington that he was “particularly anxious to bring home to the American people the fact that the African race in its own continent has achieved advancements which have been of importance in the development of civilization of the human race.”

He reiterated the point shortly thereafter in the context of proposing the establishment of an African Institute, pointing out that one reason why it would be “highly desirable to disseminate knowledge of the achievements of African culture, particularly among the Negroes” was that “[i]n vast portions of our country there is a strong feeling of despondency among the best classes of the Negro . . . and the knowledge of the strength of their parental race in their native surroundings must have a wholesome and highly stimulating effect. I have noticed this effect myself in addressing audiences of Southern Negroes, to whom the facts were a complete revelation.”

Early in the following year he wrote to banker and philanthropist George Foster Peabody that “[a]t Atlanta last year . . . I tried to make the point that racial inferiority of the Negro has never been proved to exist . . . [I]t is very commonly assumed as proved that the Negroes are destined to remain an inferior race . . . . [T]he point I made should be brought clearly and forcibly to the attention of our people.

In the hope of easing antagonisms between blacks and whites he wanted all

188 Letter, Franz Boas to Starr Murphy, 23 November, 1906. (Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia)
Americans, particularly African Americans, to understand that Africans had a distinguished history.\textsuperscript{190}

For Boas to advance such a thesis was not a surprise. Boas holds a seminal place in the overthrow of claims of blacks’ alleged mental and physical inferiority.\textsuperscript{191} In the early 1900s he championed the view that blacks had the same mental capacities as did whites.\textsuperscript{192} At first, to be sure, as Vernon Williams has pointed out, Boas stood uncertain as to whether blacks stood on par with whites intellectually: he had first to satisfy himself that physical anthropology was wrong in contending that anatomical differences between the two racial groups implied differences in mental powers; but even at the beginning his independence of viewpoint was apparent. His cautious declaration before the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1894 merely that no clear scientific evidence had emerged to support the view that different races had different mental capacities formed a clear departure from received wisdom, and was accorded a reception that was, in Williams’s words, “almost hysterical”.\textsuperscript{193} In time, research led him consistently to argue not simply that evidence of difference in capability was lacking but that evidence indicated that the mental capacities of the two racial groups were substantially the same. His \textit{Mind of Primitive Man}, published in 1911, claimed that how people behaved was a product of their culture, not of their biological ‘race’. His conclusions informed his politics: he actively supported the endeavors of blacks. Thus he

\textsuperscript{193} Vernon Williams, Jr., \textit{Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries} (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), p. 23
opened up the discipline of anthropology to blacks. He lent early support when Du Bois launched *The Crisis*: he contributed an article for the second issue.\textsuperscript{194} He assisted Alain LeRoy Locke after the latter had been fired by the administration of Howard University. He sought funding for a Museum on the Negro and the African Past.\textsuperscript{195} He encouraged one of his daughters, a talented dancer, to use the arts to fight cultural and racial prejudice. Ultimately he himself would become an activist in the fight against racism and intolerance in the United States and abroad. In that connection, he joined the Council on African Affairs, an organization which was committed to dismantling colonial rule and imperial control in Africa and whose membership included Du Bois and Paul Robeson. It was very much in keeping with his intellectual and political program that he should use the opportunity of an address to African American students at Atlanta University at the opening of the twentieth century to declare that Africans had a history.

Boas’s position on race reflected the political culture in which he grew up and fit with his inclinations regarding class difference and his views on cultural difference. Born in Minden, Germany, on 9 July, 1858, he was raised in a political milieu that was humanitarian, liberal, and active in the struggle against repressive government in Europe in the mid-1800s. As a young man he expressed a horror of elitism. Writing to his future wife in 1884 he remarked: “What I want, what I will live and die for, is equal rights for all, equal opportunities to [work] and strive for poor and rich!” Early on in his endeavors as an ethnographer he developed a respect for persons regardless of cultural difference and an aversion to cultural imperialism. He disliked the practice followed by a number of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[195] Williams, Jr., *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries*, p. 106
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European and American adventurers, for example, of replacing indigenous names on the landscape with foreign names. Again, he valued highly the languages of indigenous peoples. One of his major reasons for recording indigenous languages, indeed, was the likelihood that if they were not soon recorded they would be lost irretrievably. He developed a major collaboration in scientific research with a Native American, and he counted at least one Native American among his graduate students. He publicly challenged assumptions of cultural hierarchy that were implicit in museum exhibition practice. He made known his conclusions that cultural differences among societies rested on differences in historical experience (including interaction with a particular physical environment), not on innate mental endowment. His activist stance regarding African history was the fruit of an early skepticism about hierarchy.

For Boas’s audience in Atlanta, including Du Bois, the fact that it was he who spoke so highly of Africa’s past was a point of no small importance. The independence of his views notwithstanding, Boas was a scholar whose voice commanded respect and esteem in the academy. As a young man he had translated a passion for nature into an interest in a range of scientific disciplines. Investigating mathematics, physics, physical and cultural geography, and psychophysics while in university in Germany, securing his doctorate there in 1882, and supplementing that training thereafter with studies ranging from astronomy to ethnology and from meteorology to photography had enabled him to spearhead a series of important research expeditions in various parts of North America and in the Caribbean. The results of his expeditions had enabled him in turn to build a successful career in research and teaching in the United States after he had moved there.
in 1886. His career included affiliations with Clark University in Massachusetts, the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and Columbia University in New York City. His appointment in 1899 as professor of Anthropology at Columbia was the first such professorship in the United States. Over the course of thirty-seven years he trained a cadre of graduate students which included such influential builders and promoters of the field as Elsie Clews Parsons, Melville Jean Herskovits, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. His own research focused initially on the indigenous peoples of North America and their cultures, and later came to rest on the ethnography of African Americans. Ultimately he published some six hundred and fifty books and articles, including *Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants*, issued in 1910; *The Handbook of American Indian Languages* and *The Mind of Primitive Man*, both 1911 publications; and *Race, Language and Culture*, which appeared in 1940 when he was more than eighty years old. In addition he founded and edited scholarly journals. By the time he passed away in 1942, he had served as a moving spirit in the effort to record indigenous languages and cultures before they were lost, had helped to define the science of anthropology, had started and helped to develop journals and associations in the discipline, and had established graduate training in anthropology on a firm footing in the United States. Although some of his achievements lay ahead of him rather than behind him when he spoke in Atlanta in 1906, he was already recognized as being a leader in anthropology and related fields.\(^{196}\) His stature surely helped a skeptical Du Bois to let go of that early contempt with which, by Du Bois’s admission, he had viewed claims of African historical accomplishment.

\(^{196}\) Boas, *Franz Boas, 1858-1942*
Du Bois was not alone in being enlightened by Boas. A much broader audience than that in Atlanta was influenced by Boas’s views on race and his views on African history. Vernon Williams has explored the impact of Boas’s thinking upon the African American intelligentsia of the early twentieth century. By Williams’s account, Booker T. Washington took cognizance of Boas’s arguments on the intellectual capabilities of blacks and on Africans’ historical accomplishments and under their influence “grudgingly moved from identification with antiblack stereotypes” to a more flattering understanding of Africans. 197 Other African Americans whose views on race and on Africa’s past were informed by Boas’s conclusions included William Henry Ferris, whose African Abroad quoted liberally from Boas’s pronouncements on race to contend that “the race of black men [had] done something in the past;” 198 Monroe Nathan Work, who became a scholar of Africa; George Washington Ellis, an attorney, diplomat, and author of Negro Culture in West Africa; Carter Woodson, the ‘Father of Black History;’ George Haynes, the founding executive director of the National Urban League and professor economics and sociology at Fisk University; Alain LeRoy Locke, who chaired the Department of Philosophy at Howard University; Charles S. Johnson, who edited the National Urban League’s Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life; Charles Thompson, professor of education at Howard University; and Abram Harris, an economist at Howard University. Young African Americans like Willis N. Huggins also read and drew inspiration from Boas. Huggins oversaw the Harlem History Club which drew together African American and African history enthusiasts and future political activists and

197 Williams, Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries, p. 2
leaders ranging from John Henrik Clarke to John Jackson, Kwame Nkrumah, and Nnamdi Azikiwe. Williams concludes that Boas’s influence on the African American intelligentsia was “of monumental significance.” Beyond that audience, influential whites such as Horace Bumstead, the white president of Atlanta University, also took note of Boas’s conclusions. The wider public, too, felt their impress, for Boas published his views in news media such as the *New York Times* and students of his such as Melville Herskovits, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Otto Klineberg, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ashley Montagu carried his message beyond the academy into the public sphere. He was the major personage of the era who was likely to speak with respect of African history.

The impact of Boas’s voice upon Du Bois was lasting. Inspiration flowing from discovering that Africa had a notable past redirected Du Bois’s research interests. In 1907, the year after hearing Boas’s presentation, Du Bois declared to Franklin Jameson, who directed the department of historical research at the Carnegie Institution in Washington, D.C., that, having spent more of his time carrying out sociological rather than historical investigations, he now wished “very much to do some more work and work on a larger scale in the history of the Negro people.” History had held most of Du Bois’s attention during his two years of graduate coursework and research at Harvard from 1890 to 1892. However, under the influence of his studies at the University of Berlin between 1892 and 1894, sociological investigation had then won precedence.

199 Williams, *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries*, p. 37
200 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 23, 32, 33
From 1899 to 1909 much of his energy had been devoted to *The Philadelphia Negro*, to a study of the Negroes of Farmville, Virginia, and to his Atlanta University analyses of aspects of contemporary Negro life.\(^{202}\) Now he returned to research in history, and within history he gave considerable attention to the history of Africans in Africa. Time saw him only deepen his interest in Africa’s past. He became sufficiently convinced of the historical reality of Africans’ accomplishments to publish in 1915, against the contemporary tide of virulent sentiment directed by white bigots towards blacks, a detailed narrative of the history of Africans extending back five thousand years. Hearing Boas’s address was what brought him back to history, and to African history in particular. As he later put the matter to an interlocutor, “I did not myself begin actively to study Africa until 1908 or 1910. Franz Boas really influenced me to begin studying this subject and I began really to get into it only after 1915.”\(^{203}\) The encounter with Boas in 1906 reoriented Du Bois’s intellectual trajectory.

While it comes as no surprise that contact between Boas and Du Bois should enrich Du Bois’s understanding of Africa’s past, what does come as a surprise is the seeming lack of influence upon Du Bois’s turn to Africa’s past of African American and Afro-Caribbean intellectuals. Du Bois was hardly the first among Africans of the western diaspora to announce a positive vision of Africa. In taking up the history of Africans he entered a strong tradition of writing on Africans’ role in history which African American, African, and West Indian writers had maintained in the 1800s. When he spoke of what first set him on a course of research on and writing about African civilizations, he made


\(^{203}\) Quoted at page p. 207 of Harold R. Isaacs, *The New World of Negro Americans*
no mention of African or Diasporic writers as having lent him guidance or inspiration.
That silence is arresting. Given his thoroughness in argument and his training in research,
his silence regarding the work of other members of the African American and Afro-
Caribbean intelligentsia who had done yeoman’s service in working to hold open the
space of psychological freedom and who might have helped him to arrive at his new
understanding of Africa’s past or helped him to flesh it out is conspicuous. It is an
intriguing question, for example, whether Du Bois, prior to hearing Boas’s lecture in
1906, was entirely ignorant of the existence of civilizations of the western Sudan. One is
tempted to reflect upon the comment by African American author and Du Bois
contemporary William Henry Ferris that Du Bois, if he would be a great man, must rise
above the tendency – exemplified in Booker T. Washington, thought Ferris – to try to
diminish the achievements of other Black men of character and intellect; and one is
tempted as well to glance a second time at Marcus Garvey’s characterization of Du Bois
as being “the man who never had a good word to say for any other Negro leader, but who
tried to down every one of them.” Could Du Bois have been quite as uninitiated as he
implied that he had been?

The puzzle of Du Bois’s silence lingers when we consider how closely some of
the preoccupations of his predecessors aligned with the historical themes to which he
would turn his attention. The questions of the racial makeup of ancient Egypt and of
Egypt’s civilizational accomplishments and influence had received comment from

African American author David Walker in 1829. The theme of Africans’ place in world history, including their pivotal role in introducing other peoples – notably the Greeks of antiquity – to elements of civilizational culture was taken up at greater length by the African American author Robert Benjamin Lewis in 1844 in his *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History, Containing the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Race, from the Creation of the World to the Present Time.* The famed African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass had also spoken directly to the issue of Egypt’s fundamental civilizing role in world history and its African racial character. James Africanus Beale Horton, a Sierra Leonean of Igbo ethnicity, had commented on Greece’s intellectual debt to Africa in his 1868 work *West African Countries and Peoples.* William Wells Brown, also African American, had addressed the question of African accomplishment in his 1874 exploration of the historical experience of continental and Diasporic Africans in antiquity and modernity entitled *The Rising Son; or, the Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race.* Six years later Martin Delany, a native of West Virginia, had investigated, in his *Principia of Ethnology*, the racial character of the builders of the civilization of the pyramids. The subject of West African kingdoms had received attention from the

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207 R. B. Lewis, *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History, Containing the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Race, from the Creation of the World to the Present Time* (Boston: Benjamin F. Roberts, 1844)
210 William Wells Brown, *The Rising Son: Or, the Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race* (Boston: A. G. Brown, 1874)
African American historian George Washington Williams in his 1882 work *History of the Negro Race in America*. The *History* pointed not only to the wealth and splendor of ancient Meroe, the indebtedness of ancient Egyptian civilization to that of Africans to the south, and the civilizing impact of Egypt upon Greece and Rome but also to the character of the West African kingdoms of Benin, Dahomey, Yoruba, and Ashanti, and it announced its investigation of these West African kingdoms openly in its Table of Contents. In addition Williams made specific, albeit brief, reference to the existence of empires in the Western Sudan in the 1500s or 1600s. “Two or three hundred years ago,” he wrote, “there were several very powerful Negro empires in Western Africa. They had social and political government, and were certainly a very orderly people.” 212 These voices, intent on vindicating the African before the world, all contended for the active participation in and contribution by African people to the human story. Du Bois, withal, credited none of them for helping to excite his interest in African history. Perhaps he was being disingenuous in failing to do so; but, equally, as he had intimated, he might have known of their claims but have dismissed them as being inaccurate and self-serving, coming as they did from amateur rather than professional historians and from men who were black and not white.

Whatever the case, once he did turn to the subject Du Bois did acknowledge the contributions of other black authors to expanding his knowledge of Africa’s past. His research notes relating to Africa’s history tell us relatively little of the processes of thought which he followed as he went about building his narratives: the handwritten notes, fragments and clippings of publications authored or edited by him or by others,

212 Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880 . . .*, p. 26
copies of newspapers such as *West Africa*, and typewritten drafts which are grouped as his research materials on Africa form too threadbare a collection to suggest how he developed his ideas. However the footnotes and bibliographies accompanying his major treatments of Africa’s past do lend some insight into his approach to research, and they do register attention to the work of several black authors. Williams’s *History*, William Henry Ferris’s *The African Abroad*, Edward Wilmot Blyden’s *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* and his *From West Africa to Palestine*, George Washington Ellis’s *Negro Culture in West Africa*, J. E. Casely Hayford’s *Gold Coast Native Institutions*, and William Leo Hansberry’s “Sources for the Study of Ethiopian History” all feature among his scholarly resources. In regard to the development of his thought on Africa’s past, if not in regard to what initiated his turn to Africa’s past, then, Du Bois actively inserted himself in the ‘vindicationist’ line of thought of continental and Diasporic Africans.

Not only texts authored by continental and Diasporic Africans but also the work of a number of white scholars, journalists and travelers counted among the resources upon which Du Bois drew to develop his conclusions about African history. Heinrich Barth, a German traveler, had ventured, on the basis of explorations that he had carried out in the mid-1800s, ethnographic and historical portraits of peoples inhabiting parts of north Africa and of the central and western Sudan. Felix Du Bois had published

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Timbuctoo the Mysterious, in which he had recounted what he had observed and was taught of African commercial, social, and cultural life while travelling the Niger River, visiting the city of Jenne, and abiding at Timbuctoo. Flora Shaw, Lady Lugard, had presented in A Tropical Dependency a narrative of successive imperial assertions in Iberia, North Africa, and the western Sudan from the eighth through the twentieth centuries. In the two-volume English condensation, titled Voice of Africa, of his original five-volume German text, Leo Frobenius, another German, had dissected the religious, political, and social life of the Yoruba on the West Coast of Africa and had painted, through attention particularly to the Nupe and the Fulbe, the pre-Islamic life of the Sudan and the struggle between that culture and Islam. Maurice Delafosse’s The Negroes of Africa had described the peopling and cultural development of Africa in early eras, kingdoms and empires of the western Sudan during the moment of Europe’s ‘Middle Ages,’ and the development from the 1400s onwards of societies of the Gulf of Guinea coast, the central and eastern reaches of the Sudan, and the great continental trunk inhabited by Bantu-speaking peoples. The expertise of these and other authors was what Du Bois drew on to expand his knowledge of the history of Africans and Africa and what enabled him to develop over time an almost reverential regard for Africans’ achievement, discernible in this kind of perceptive appraisal:

“[The world a thousand years before Christ is] difficult for us to conceive because its effective center was not the Atlantic nor the Mediterranean, not Europe nor even Asia. It was Africa that strange valley of the Nile River where a nation had existed so long that

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no one could conceive of a world without Egypt or of a world worth knowing outside of Africa.”

This was the respectful vision which, on a number of occasions over a span of more than forty years, Du Bois presented to the world.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Empowerment: The Vision of Africa’s Past

Striking his own distinct note upon his return to historical investigation, in at least four initiatives Du Bois presented an extended vision of the historical development of Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora. Pageantry was the format which he first employed to undermine settled stereotypes about the Negro’s personality and history. His *Star of Ethiopia* took the stage on several occasions over a span of twelve years. The second initiative which he undertook was the publication of a volume in 1915, in the midst of the Great War, called *The Negro*. At the time that this volume appeared, suggests historian George Shepperson, very little serious study of the historical experience of Africans and persons of African descent located around the world had been undertaken; and against that background *The Negro* work represented an early, and important, attempt to address that theme.\(^{217}\) Du Bois’s third initiative, *Black Folk, Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race*, explored in 1939, as World War II loomed, the question of Africans’ role on the world stage over the course of time. His fourth extended engagement with Africa’s past emerged in 1946, at the close of the war, in the form of *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history*. More limited projects as well, notably a Little Blue

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\(^{217}\) George Shepperson, “Introduction,” p. x
Book, speeches, and items in *The Crisis*, provided further avenues for him to disseminate his views.

The *Star of Ethiopia* pageant, in the form that Du Bois worked it up on paper, presented Africans as pursuing the prized star, freedom, and fighting to keep the star aloft through thousands of years of spiritual, ideological, and cultural struggle. In the beginning Africans were ‘savages’ who lived in a state of subjection to and fear of the natural world. Then they acquired knowledge of how to work iron and they found their way to freedom. They embraced religious faith through their encounter with settled peoples in Egypt. Later some Africans embraced Christianity and presented it to the world while others embraced Islam and still others held to indigenous faiths. Islam and indigenous faiths clashed with one another. White Christians entered the arena, swiftly followed by buyers and sellers of people who destroyed Africans’ liberty. Thereafter captive Africans, transported westwards across the ocean and enslaved, picked cotton. They remained enslaved until militant action rather than mere talk brought renewed freedom. Freedmen pressed forward with efforts to build their lives. Moving by faith in Christ, above all, along with their own powers of thought, their strength, and their inspiration, they overcame opponents who would crush their new autonomy. They built a new civilization of recovered liberty on a foundation of knowledge, work, science, justice, art, and love.\(^{218}\)

Star of Ethiopia took to the stage in 1913 in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the emancipation proclamation. It returned to the stage in 1915 in Washington, D.C., in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment. A third production took place in Philadelphia in 1916 to celebrate the one-hundredth general conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. A further production took place at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles in 1925. Audiences saw, according to Andrew Hilyer, who wrote for the Washington Bee shortly after the pageant had appeared in the nation’s capital, a vivid narrative presenting the black race’s pursuit of its star beginning in Africa and extending to the United States. In the beginning came Kushites, represented as people who followed ‘savage’ practices including sacrificing human beings. They acquired the skill of making iron and they embraced a commitment to freedom. Equipped with iron-producing technology, the Kushites attacked their neighbors, including the Egyptians, who were presented as being a friendly and highly cultured people. Kushites and Egyptians mingled and blended into one people. Their cultural influence extended to Central Africa over time, stimulating the development of great empires which flourished from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries. Islam made an appearance, prompting wars between adherents of Mohammed and adherents of indigenous faiths. The wars weakened and divided the people, leaving them vulnerable to the manipulations of traffickers in people. Slave hunters tried to destroy the freedom of the people, but without success. The Christian world watched approvingly the work of the slave hunters. Then the locale shifted to America. There enslaved persons lived lives of suffering. They could not or would not escape to forests and swamps; instead, in time they found ways to deal with their troubles and they built lives under conditions of forced labor. Abolitionists
and revolutionaries took up their cause, without avail, but the impulse to freedom found voice first in the revolution wrought by Toussaint L’Ouverture and the soldiers of Haiti and then in the struggle for freedom from slavery waged by African American soldiers during the civil war in the United States. In the aftermath of the war, African Americans used their liberty to develop themselves, becoming tradesmen, businessmen, athletes, ministers, physicians, professors, teachers, nurses, and more. But “race prejudice, envy, gambling, idleness, intemperance,” and the assaults of the “ku klux” did their best to deprive African Americans of their freedom. Those threats succeeded in some cases and failed in others. Then emerged a call for pan-Africanism: for blacks located around the world to rally as one around the cause of liberty and to establish it firmly on a foundation of knowledge, science, work, justice, art, and love, beyond the capacity of anything to destroy it. The children of the race provided both the motivation for this work of safeguarding freedom and the means by which it would be achieved.  

In *The Negro* Du Bois modified and, naturally enough, radically expanded the *Star of Ethiopia*’s presentation of Africans’ historical experience. By its account, Africans had a history which extended over thousands of years. Because Africa was a continent that was unusually inaccessible to people from outside it, much that had happened there – a “great human drama” – had remained unknown to the rest of the world. That drama was rich. It had begun with having to fight harder for physical survival than did peoples living on other continents, because the epidemiological environment was more hostile to human life than was that of any other continent. It


220 Du Bois, *The Negro*
included unusual difficulty in resisting incursions of ‘barbarians’, for Africa was also a continent with no major interior barriers within it that were able to afford to centers of industry and culture protection against invaders. In spite of those challenges, Africans repeatedly raised up civilizations. They cultivated all manner of sophisticated agricultural, industrial, manufacturing, commercial, and cultural pursuits. They developed highly complex polities in a number of regions around the continent. Thus in the northeast they founded states in the valley of the Nile river and in the highlands in the extreme northeast. In the center and west they drew upon three enormous clusters of towns and cities, all of them connected with the Niger river, to raise up a succession of empires in the western Sudan, prosperous city-states in the central Sudan, and a civilization of loosely federated cities near the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. In addition, from the heart of the continent Africans mounted a great migration southeastwards. Calling themselves “La Bantu” and speaking one language, in time they conquered virtually all of Africa south of the Gulf of Guinea and also spread their influence northwards. In the southeast, for its part, a culture arose which made itself felt throughout the southern end of the continent. While these many economic, cultural, and demographic developments were taking place, Africans were also sending influences out from the continent and receiving influences from beyond it: Egypt gathered from the continent and transmitted onwards African ideals, while Phoenicians and other Semites from various parts of Asia, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and other groups interacted with Africans in ways ranging from trade to military cooperation to religious ideology, and, much later, Europeans would divide the continent among themselves. The tide turned against all this rich accomplishment with the systematic trade in African people.
Centuries of predatory slave trading destroyed the peace, prosperity, and fabric of African societies across the entire continent and led to a perception of Africans in the eye of the world as being people without culture, civilization, and history.

An early and major location of African creativity, Du Bois proposed, was the Nile Valley. In age and in cultural and political development the civilizations built there were possibly the oldest ones that scholars knew of and were certainly the oldest ones in Africa, rooted in a culture extending back some six or eight thousand years. To begin with, there was Ethiopia. The story of Ethiopia was hard to reconstruct, but such clues as were available pointed to Ethiopians as being the “originators of African culture, and to a large degree of world culture.”²²¹ According to the Greeks, the Ethiopians thought themselves to be the oldest people of any and the progenitors of many cultural practices. Ancient opinion held Ethiopia in the very highest regard. It viewed Ethiopia as being “a region of gods and fairies” and the home of the “blameless Ethiopians” and of “Black Memnon, King of Ethiopia . . . one of the greatest of heroes.”²²² It considered Ethiopians “to be the most pious and the oldest of men.”²²³ Besides Ethiopia there was Egypt. For its part, Egypt could lay claim to being “the motherland of human culture.”²²⁴ That society already had an art and a culture five thousand years before Christ and before the reign of its first recorded king. Politically Egypt built three successive empires, each one divided from the others by a period of imperial collapse. Ultimately the three successive empires

²²¹ Du Bois, The Negro p. 48
²²² Ibid., p. 37
²²³ Ibid., p. 48
²²⁴ Ibid., p. 46
gave way to Egypt’s decline, with the conquest of Lower Egypt by the Assyrians and then the Persian conquest of the society.

The relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt was intimate from the start, Du Bois reflected. The Ethiopians said that they were the root of the Egyptian people: “[t]hey affirm that the Egyptians are one of their colonies.” The Egyptians appeared to concur that they came originally from Ethiopia, since they called the territory to the south of the Second Cataract of the Nile “Kush,” since in the farthest area of Kush lay Punt, and since they acknowledged that they and their civilization came originally from Punt. The relationship between the two societies remained central to the development of each one. Culturally Ethiopia lagged behind Egypt, probably because Ethiopia was a much poorer land than Egypt was, and its agricultural resources were limited. As the economic and cultural distance grew between Egypt and Ethiopia, assaults from Africans to the south of Egypt spurred Egyptians to invest heavily in protecting their wealth. Over the course of thousands of years, ‘barbarians’ and Egyptians waged hundreds of campaigns, with the Egyptians intent upon checking or subduing the aggressors. Many times the would-be invaders fell captive. However the direction of assault began to shift during the period of Egypt’s second empire. What brought it about was that Ethiopia began to grow wealthy through trade. Eyeing this development avariciously, Egyptians mounted attacks across the border. At the same time, “larger intercourse” developed between the two societies. Relations grew closer still after the Egyptian empire collapsed under invasion by a foreign people called the Hyksos and the Hyksos ruled Lower Egypt. “Ethiopia became

225 Ibid., p. 36
both a physical and cultural refuge for conquered Egypt.” In time, “under Negroid rulers,” the Egyptians took Lower Egypt back. Thereafter, under Egypt’s third empire, the relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt continued to evolve. Although Ethiopians continued to resist, gradually Ethiopia was incorporated into Egypt. In consequence, when a Libyan usurped the Egyptian throne, the legitimate dynasty retreated to Ethiopia. From there, the dynasty expanded north in about 750 B.C. and for a century ruled all of Egypt.

The story of Ethiopia after Egypt lost her independence to a succession of foreign conquerors featured stress and struggle, Du Bois observed. The Ethiopians were able to maintain their own political independence as Egypt fell to the invading Assyrians and then Persians. In time, Candaces ruled Ethiopia as queens. Foreign pressures grew: Greek culture began penetrating Ethiopia from the east while “wild Sudanese tribes” pressed in from the west, and a vigorous resistance had to mounted to check the approach of Roman power. Ultimately the ancient kingdom declined, Abyssinians established themselves there, Nubians from the western desert ousted the Abyssinians, the Nubians became Christian in the sixth century A.D., and as Islam spread up the Nile the Nubians held Islam at bay for two centuries. Eventually Islam overcame that opposition. “[A] congeries of Mohammedan kingdoms with Arab, mulatto, and Negro kings” came to prevail in the Egyptian Sudan between the 1200s and the 1500s A.D. Until the 1800s they resisted the Egyptian power of the Mamelukes and later the Turks. It was in the 1800s that the area became, nominally, part of Egypt, which in its turn fell under British control. Revolt by

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\[226\] Ibid., p. 38
the Sudanese against the British failed. By this time “[c]ontinuous upheaval, war, and conquest”227 had destroyed much of Ethiopian culture.

In regard to these societies so rich in human history and accomplishment in the Nile valley, argued Du Bois, it had to be stressed that these were fundamentally Negro civilizations. Of Ethiopia there could be no question. The name itself was indicative: “Ethiopia” meant “the Land of the Black-faced”. As for Ethiopia’s northern neighbor, Egypt was “always palpably Negroid,” and Egyptian civilization appeared “to have been African in its beginnings and in its main line of development, despite strong influences from all parts of Asia.”228 Egyptian religion was African in its foundation, its language was African rather than Asiatic in origin, and the art and culture already in place around 5,000 B.C. was the product of “a distinctly Negroid people.”229 In earliest times Egyptians were black, as the writings of Herodotus and Aeschylus indicated, and the appearance of monuments attested, and language, religious ceremonies, and social customs suggested. The Africans pressed down from the interior of the continent. The Punt from which they said they came lay, evidence suggested, in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa. Gradually Semitic and Mediterranean peoples mingled with them and the complexion of the people of the society became lighter. From time to time this

227 The Negro p. 45
228 Ibid., p. 30
229 Ibid., pp. 128, 131, 33. Du Bois adds the following information about the character of the Negroes of the Nile and about links between the Great Lakes region and Egypt. The Negroes living to the south of the Second Cataract, he writes, “early became great traders in ivory, gold, leopard skins, gums, beasts, birds, and slaves, and they opened up systematic trade between Egypt and the Great Lakes” (p. 80). “Many things show the connection between Egypt and [the area of Africa, particularly Uganda, just north of the Great Lakes. The same glass beads are found in Uganda and Upper Egypt, and similar canoes are built. Harps and other instruments bear great resemblance. Finally the Bahima, as the Galla invaders are called, are startlingly Egyptian in type; at the same time they are undoubtedly Negro in hair and color. Perhaps we have here the best racial picture of what ancient Egyptian and upper Nile regions were in predynastic times and later” (p. 89).
Complexion was now darkened, now lightened, by later infiltration of people from various directions. A snapshot of the peoples of the river valley around 5,000 B.C. would have revealed mulatto Egyptians north of the First Cataract of the river, Negroes mixed with Semitic peoples between the First and Second cataracts, and Negroes south of the Second Cataract. Looked at in the light of Egypt’s political development, Negroes were already present in Egypt in predynastic times. Dynastic Egypt certainly boasted their presence: during the three periods of Egyptian power, pharaohs counted among them many who unquestionably were Negroid.\(^\text{230}\) The rulers of the twenty-fifth dynasty, notably, included several who “showed . . . evidence of Negro blood,” including Shabaka and Tarharqa,\(^\text{231}\) and that dynasty’s culture followed African traditions in its religious and political practices.\(^\text{232}\) Possibly blacks played a prominent role in Egypt during the two intervening periods of disarray as well as during its periods of power. That was because during the first period of collapse it might have been “conquering black men from the south” who overcame Egypt\(^\text{233}\); and the racial character of the agents of the second period of collapse, the invading Hyksos, was uncertain, but they might have been blacks from Asia, particularly since “Negroids largely dominated in the early history of western Asia.”\(^\text{234}\)

Besides establishing civilizations in the valley of the Nile River, pointed out Du Bois, Negroes developed states in other areas of the northeast of the continent. The far eastern part of Ethiopia – the highlands bordering the Red Sea and Asia – experienced its

\(^{230}\) Ibid., pp. 31, 32, 39, 91, 78, 33-36,
\(^{231}\) Ibid., p. 39
\(^{232}\) Ibid., p. 40
\(^{233}\) Ibid., p. 33
\(^{234}\) Ibid., p. 35
own development. It was closely tied, by trade and war, to the opposing shore of Arabia in western Asia.\textsuperscript{235} The racial character of the whole region, called Abyssinia and lying both east and west of the Red Sea, included a black presence: “[o]n both sides [of] this sea Negro blood [was] strongly in evidence, predominant in Africa and influential in Asia.”\textsuperscript{236} African blood formed the foundation upon which spread Arabian, Jewish, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman influences. Within Abyssinia the Axumite kingdom arose. Byzantine Greek cultural influence penetrated the area and gradually Abyssinia became Christian. In time, the Abyssinians were expelled from Arabia. On the other, African, shore of the Red Sea they remained isolated for centuries. By the 1500s and 1600s, a number of small states had succeeded Axum.\textsuperscript{237} In the 1800s, the Italians attempted to subdue Abyssinia. At the battle of Adua, “one of the decisive battles of the modern world,”\textsuperscript{238} the Abyssinians in 1896 defeated the Italians and in doing so reaffirmed their independence.

Impressive though they were, the civilizations of the northeast corner of the continent hardly began to exhaust the creativity of Africans, Du Bois asserted. In three areas linked to the Niger River in the west of the continent, Negroes built additional civilizations. The process started as immigrants from Ethiopia – the space embracing the northern part of the continent from the Red Sea to as far west as Lake Chad\textsuperscript{239} – spread westwards to the Atlantic Ocean, dislodged the indigenous inhabitants, and introduced into the region the African culture that they had developed in Ethiopia. That culture

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\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., p. 42
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., pp. 42-45
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., p. 46
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., p.103
\end{flushleft}
constituted a substratum which later contributions to the region’s culture – whether Egyptian, Phoenician, Carthaginian, Greek, Byzantine, or Islamic – “modified but never displaced.”

On the foundation of that Ethiopian culture the immigrants built civilizations on the Gulf of Guinea Coast near the mouth of the Niger river as it flowed into the Gulf. Two of those civilizational centers, Yoruba and Benin, might have arisen as early as three thousand years before Christ. Interaction might have taken place between them and the peoples of the Mediterranean world including the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians. Be that as it might, cities and states flourished there. Benin was able to trace its royal line back one thousand years and perhaps longer. The material culture of the citizenry of Yoruba and Benin stood at a very high level, and their industrial and political organization was striking. Sophisticated techniques were employed in manufacturing materials. Fine indigenous craftsmanship made its mark in architectural design and in working materials such as stone, bronze, glass, and terra cotta. Traditions of autonomy and longstanding institutions characterized political organization. Yoruba political traditions rejected the ‘imperial idea.’ The individual cities retained their autonomy and they did not permit “one overpowering city” to subordinate the rest. They did attempt to conquer other states lying to the north, but their own traditions – of “industrial democracy and city autonomy” – militated against effectiveness as conquerors.

The northern and eastern stretches of the Niger boasted their own glories. They emerged as the civilization of the Gulf of Guinea came into contact with Mediterranean people in the desert and with Egyptians and Arabs from the east. Out of those contacts

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240 Ibid., p. 48
arose “centers of Negro culture . . . at Ghana and Melle and in Songhay, Nupe, the Hausa states, and Bornu.” These centers, some of them, formed “nuclei of larger surrounding monarchical states” embracing the ‘imperial idea’ that the Yoruba had resisted. The kingdom of Ghana, which had a history extending back to about 700 B.C., was by the mid-1000s AD the principal kingdom of the western Sudan with great wealth based on trade. Melle, a Mandingan kingdom, began rising in the 1200s at the expense of Ghana and eventually supplanted it. Governed by kings known by the title of Mansa, the kingdom also developed great wealth and from the mid-1200s to the early 1500s commanded the region. In the early 1500s Songhay, with a thousand-year history and now led by the dynasty of the Sonni, rose up to destroy Melle and build the “largest and most famous of the black empires” of the western Sudan, one that reached from the Atlantic to Lake Chad and was celebrated for its prosperity and peace. Meanwhile, the Hausa states emerged as dynamic manufacturing and industrial centers on the eastern flank of the river in the central Sudan. To the east of them, Bornu, situated on Lake Chad, held sway over most of the territory, called Kanem, which lay between the lake and the Nile river, and became a leading power of the Sudan by the end of the 1100s.

Islam, Du Bois emphasized, was not responsible for bringing economic and political sophistication to the Niger region: long-distance trade and city and state development in the region were indigenous African achievements. Islam had come to the western Sudan from the northwest, “stealthily and slowly.” There had been a military

\[241\] \textit{Ibid.} Importantly, notes Du Bois, Africans were not passive recipients of such foreign influences as appeared: at the same time that they were influenced by other cultures, they influenced other cultures, as where they taught the Byzantine peoples “certain kinds of work in bronze and glass” and they exported a range of valuable commodities to them (p. 49).
component: early in the 700s AD Muslims had conquered North Africa, had converted the Berbers, and had crossed into Spain, and in the 800s Moslem Berber and Arab armies had crossed the western end of the Sahara into the land of the blacks. However Islam came to “Negroland” chiefly in the form of Islamic traders. They found a trade already established, great cities already in place. They did not start new trade; they developed further a trade that was already widespread. Similarly, they did not found new states; they “modified and united Negro states already ancient.” In the western Sudan, the first state which they encountered was the kingdom of Ghana. The kingdom of Melle “formed an open door for Moslem and Moorish traders,” and helped Islam to hem in the geographical space of the older indigenous African culture. From 1009 the kings of Songhay were Moslem, and Mohammed Askia, who usurped the Sonni throne, was “strictly orthodox.” The Fula who in the 1800s stepped into the vacuum of power created by the decline of Songhay were all Moslems. As for the central Sudan, Islam came to it from the east. In the 1000s, Arabs had filtered into Darfur, Kanem, and neighboring parts of the Sudan and Central Africa. In the 1800s the Fula united under the banner of Islam and took control of the central Sudan. They were originally based on the Senegal River and the Atlantic Ocean but by the 1800s were scattered between the ocean and Darfur. They drove Islam into areas of the region which had long and stubbornly resisted it but had been weakened by the effects of the trans-Atlantic trade in human beings. One such area, for example, may have been centered above the Bight of Benin and radiated outward to the east, the west, and the north and for a thousand years held Islam back.
Still more fell to be charted of the achievements of Africans besides their accomplishments on the stage of the Nile and the stage of the Niger, judged Du Bois. There was the saga of the colonization of the fluid world, originally uninhabited, of the Congo river basin. The “intricate interlacing of water routes and jungle of forests” that marked the region were first penetrated by “tiny red dwarfs” and then invaded by “tall black men.” What led the black invaders to colonize the region was not clear. Whatever the reasons, once there the invaders absorbed or displaced the early inhabitants and developed their communities in several ways. To begin with, culturally they transformed themselves into the Bantu nations: “a congeries of tribes of considerable physical diversity” who shared customs and one language, who called themselves “The People” – La Bantu – and who would in time rule, by means of their language and their power, “all Africa south of the equator” with the exception of areas which Europeans had infiltrated. They built economies that featured agriculture, livestock husbandry, mining and metallurgy, rubber extraction, manufacture of textiles, ceramics, and other products, and vigorous trade. Some communities organized producers into occupational guilds. Towns developed which grew large, some of them requiring hours to cross from one end to the other. Spurred by having constantly to confront invasions of newcomers, some communities formed states, such as those of the Congo and Luba-Lunda peoples. Women participated in political life in some polities, including serving as rulers. As communities of people, while some groups indulged in “savage customs,” many others displayed such high integrity of character and such intellectual disposition as to win the keen admiration of observers.
The huge expanse of the central-east, southeast, and mid-south portions of the continent was not left out of the path of African Negro initiative, pointed out Du Bois. The truth lay quite to the contrary. A wide crescent taking in the Upper Nile, reaching down to the Great Lakes, continuing south all the way to the Zambesi River, and taking in along the way a large part of the interior lying to the south of the Congo river basin lay home to a sophisticated civilization. In that crescent the original inhabitants were Negroes, specifically those of the Abatwa or the Khoi Khoi – the Bushman or Hottentot – type. They, joined by other Africans, developed an economy, political organization, and culture which extended over a huge area including what became Zambia and Zimbabwe and parts of the Kalahari Desert. Agriculture and mining for precious metals and precious stones figured large in material life. A state arose which utilized enslaved persons for mining, which practised irrigation, and which built stone buildings and fortifications. Craftsmen worked in various metals and made beautiful pottery. Determining when this civilization arose was difficult, but the timing of its overthrow was established: in the 1500s and 1600s. What brought about its demise was invasion. Incursions by migrating groups was not new to the area. Indeed the Bushmen and Khoi Khoi inhabiting the upper reaches of the Nile had been pushed south and west gradually by Africans of the Nilotic type, and Bantu-speaking peoples also had penetrated the region. Now in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, came fresh invasions. Their perpetrators left havoc, ruin, and death in their wake and annihilated the civilization. Meanwhile, like these lands of the deep underbelly south of the Congo river basin, the lands immediately surrounding the Great Lakes of the continent and extending as far south as Lake Nyassa also witnessed significant civilizational developments. A
population that was highly diverse both physically and culturally inhabited this region. A mixing of aboriginal Africans with invading Africans coming from the northeast, the north, and the south engendered this physical and cultural diversity. A kingdom arose in the region, called Kitwara, which however was broken apart around the early 1800s. One of the polities which emerged in the wake of the collapse of Kitwara, Uganda, was organized by Africans and was a “complex feudal state.” That state, after suffering civil war between competing religions – Islam, English Protestantism, and French Catholicism – fell under English control at the end of the 1800s.

The long east coast too, and its adjacent interior, supported the rise of indigenous African civilizations, declared Du Bois. On part of the coast north of the equator, Bantu peoples inhabited the area as far south as Sofala in the 900s AD. They formed part of a larger political entity that was powerful and wealthy. A second large and powerful indigenous state developed on the coast and in the adjacent interior of the southeast quarter of the great leg of the continent. Trade was an important part of its economy. The kings of this state were converted “to nominal Christianity” by the Portuguese. To indigenous African coastal communities were added, in time, Asian and European settlements. Arabs built communities on the northern part of the east coast. Persians founded the important coastal town of Kilwa and developed it into the major trading hub of the east coast and an imperial center which dominated Zanzibar and other territory. The Portuguese arrived on the coast at the close of the 1400s with the voyage of Vasco da Gama, and within ten years they had occupied a number of coastal sites. Long distance trade, possibly with West Africa and certainly with Asia, figured among the activities of
indigenous and immigrant communities, and “brought Central Africa into contact with Arabia, India, China, and Malaysia.”

There remained yet to be told, urged Du Bois, the epic of African assertion in the face of European onslaught in the lands of the far south of the continent. In that arena transpired a dramatic struggle for ethnic and racial supremacy, with Abatwa, Khoi Khoin, Bechuana, Amazosas, Zulu, Ova-Herero, Dutch, Gricqua, English, Portuguese, and German interests contending for dominance. The epic began in mist: South Africa might already have lost its first human inhabitants by the time the struggle for ascendancy began, for “[t]hese Bushmen” – Abatwa were the pioneer peoples in South Africa at the time that the racial confrontation unfolded – “believed in an ancient race of people who preceded them in South Africa.” Behind the Abatwa came the Bantu, pushing the Abatwa southwards. Incoming Khoi Khoin also assailed the Abatwa. So did the Dutch, who came in the mid-1600s. Some or all of those assailants enslaved Abatwa women and children, hunted their men “like wild beasts,” and stole their lands, though they put up a fierce resistance. The Dutch also clashed with the Khoi Khoin, at first purchasing land from them and then, “as they grew more powerful,” seizing Khoi Khoin land, trying to enslave them, and also intermingling with them. Some of the Khoi Khoin slowly withdrew northwards from the Dutch, only to meet on-coming Bantu speakers, of whom the first encountered, in the mid-1700s, were the Bechuana. At first the Khoi Khoin made headway against the Bechuana, but Gricquas, coming from the south, joined with the Bechuana and halted the Khoi Khoin. A permanent settlement in favor of the Gricqua and Bechuana against the Khoi Khoin was forestalled by two developments, both taking place
in the 1800s. One concerned Europeans. The English took control of Cape Colony, and the Dutch “began to move in larger numbers toward the interior.” The other concerned the Bantu. Into the ethno-racial mix came “a newer and fiercer element of the Bantu tribes,” the Zulu-Amazosas. The Amazosas and the Dutch fought a series of wars in the late 1700s, and the Amazosas and the English another series of wars in the 1800s, resulting in the Amazosas losing territory, and eventually their independence, to the English. The Zulus, united under Chief Chaka, subjugated the peoples of the whole of the southeastern seaboard, only then to face incursions by Dutch Boers moving into the interior. Zulu and Boer fought a fight to the death and the Zulu were pushed back. Thereafter Zulu and English clashed and machine guns won over assegais. The Zulu too lost their independence, in 1879. The British consolidated their rule over the Zulu and then extended their dominion over the resistance of a splinter Zulu group which had migrated northward. Meanwhile, to the north and northeast of South Africa, war against the Portuguese and the British left Africans who had established themselves to the northeast of the Limpopo and to the north of the Zambesi shorn of their independence. To the northwest of South Africa, Khoi Khoin clashed with Ova-Herero Bantu; and German military intervention decimated the Khoi Khoin. The discovery of gold and diamonds in the area then brought further complications to the existing racial conflict.

Those Africans of South Africa, many of whom understood their origins to be located in the area of the Great Lakes, were no crude ‘savages,’ mused Du Bois; and so the greater was the tragedy that these wars upon wars upon wars left the Africans of the region fragmented and dispersed. The Abatwa were not only talented painters and
sculptors; politically they maintained “regular government.” “Tribes with their chiefs occupied well-defined tracts of country and were subdivided into branch tribes under subsidiary chiefs.” The Khoi Khoi – “Men of Men” – boasted a language of exceptional sophistication. The Gricquas, a mixed race, sprang from an old Khoi Khoi group. The Bechuana boasted organized government. Economically and culturally, “they were careful agriculturalists, laid out large towns with great regularity, and were the most skilled of smiths. They used stone in building, carved on wood, and many of them, too, were keen traders.” The Amazosas maintained an economy and social life which revolved around herding cattle, breeding stock, and hunting. In disposition they were tactful, intelligent; honoring their ancestors formed the basis of their religious traditions; politically they organized themselves as a patriarchal monarchy whose powers were limited by an aristocracy; and their common law placed responsibility for the conduct of an individual or group with the appropriate organ of the community (96). The Zulus operated under a military system that was the acme of discipline.

Not only were the Africans of South Africa refined and accomplished peoples, pronounced Du Bois; many of the African peoples across the continent were as industrious as they and as cultivated. African Negroes were mistresses and masters of production and exchange. As agriculturalists they excelled, investing a great deal of attention in cultivation and in processing and tending their fields with assiduous care. Those who focused on raising cattle rather than farming often maintained huge herds, with single villages having thousands of head. Raising sheep, goats, swine, chickens, fruit, vegetables, and carrying out fertilizing and irrigation – all these fell within the
expertise of African husbandry. As manufacturers Africans commanded respect. Weaving, spinning, and dyeing cotton was commonplace, and the level of craftsmanship was often of exceptional quality, well able to compete with the best of European wares. Indeed West Africa and the Sudan were suppliers of cotton cloth to the world. Basketry, weaving mats, working hides and furs, plaiting cord, working iron and copper and bronze and tin and brass and silver and gold, turning and glazing earthenware, making glass, forging iron, crafting utensils and instruments and tools and weapons, embroidering rugs and carpets, setting gold and precious stones, producing charcoal, making hats and footwear and clothing, producing soap, manufacturing gunpowder, sculpting wood, carving ivory, carving bone – all these fell within the craftsmanship of the African artisan. As traders African merchants were second to none. It was they who for thousands of years conducted trade between Central Africa and Egypt, who made the cities of the Sudan and North Africa rich in their early days, who elevated Timbuktu into a renowned center of trade. The Ashanti state deliberately cultivated international trade.

By one European account, the “sharpest European merchants, even Jews and Armenians,” could learn much from Negro traders. As builders, Negroes held their own. “... [C]areful hut building distinguish many tribes. Cameron tells of villages so clean, with huts so artistic, that, save in book knowledge, the people occupied no low place of civilization.”

The philosophical life of Africans across the continent was far from impoverished, Du Bois remarked: political, economic, and social traditions attested to its sophistication. Political organization varied from group to group, with institutions
ranging from absolute despotisms to constitutional monarchies verging on republics. The political economies of some communities reflected attention to balance and equity. Care was taken, for example, to situate villages in groups and to make sure that each group did produce – and was forced by common consent to limit itself to producing – one kind of product or service, whether fish or palm wine or importation of foreign goods or weaponry or something other. In that way each group of villages was assured of being able to survive, for it produced something which no other group produced. Generally property belonged to the clan community: “[t]he main mass of visible wealth belonged to the family and clan rather than to the individual . . . .” Land, in particular, always belonged to the group, never to individuals. Women enjoyed considerable status. While it was true that men often held power, that they practiced polygamy, and that they also practiced “marriage by actual or simulated purchase,” sometimes women ruled, sometimes women participated in public assemblies, and, above all, relationships were traced through the female line, giving mothers tremendous influence. Again, while the male head of an extended family was responsible for socializing, educating, controlling, and disciplining all members of the family, for adjudicating disputes among family members, and for leading a military unit in time of war, he relied on the assistance of his female kin for discharging his responsibilities effectively.

In yet other dimensions of his intellectual and cultural life and in his religious and social life the African comported himself with distinction, claimed Du Bois. Africans living roughly north of the equator spoke a wide range of languages, while the vast majority of those living south of the equator spoke dialects of Bantu. Language had been
“reduced to writing” in Egypt, Ethiopia, and some other parts of Africa; elsewhere oral tradition was strong, and long-distance communication through drum and horn highly efficient. Literature, folklore, proverbs, and poetry featured in cultural production, and two-dimensional and three-dimensional visual art, industrial art, architecture, and manufacture of musical instruments were outstanding in quality. Religious life lay rooted in animism – seeing all the world as being spirit – and veered towards polytheism and monotheism. Christianity came to Africans from outside the continent, it very early penetrated northern Africa and the Nile Valley, and in Africa the young Christianity found, in the words of a distinguished European scholar, “its most zealous confessors of the faith and its most gifted defenders.” Islam too came from outside the continent, “by conquest, trade, and proselytism,” entering through northern and eastern Africa and supplanting Christianity in many, though not all, places where the older religion had earlier taken root. Western Europeans reintroduced Christianity from the 1500s onwards, and African Americans also became active in planting churches. In social custom, finally, Africans were renowned for their kindness and hospitality to strangers and their ceremony, courtesy, and dignity.

The long and impressive record of African Negro historical dynamism and cultural accomplishment begged a question, Du Bois reflected. In view of that record, how could it have come about that Africans should be perceived as having no noteworthy history and as being a species apart, as being non-human? Why should the need arise to emphasize that physically the African was entirely of the same species as were peoples of other complexion and feature? Why was it called for to stress that while Africans did
have all the usual human weaknesses they did not have any more of them than did people of other races? The answer had nothing to do with the true profile of Africans, Du Bois responded. Rather, the answer lay in recent experience. In the modern era catastrophe had enveloped the civilizations of the continent. Disaster had come with the twin assaults of the Islamic and European trades in human beings. For the western Sudanese peoples specifically, disaster compounded disaster after the collapse of Islamic power in the Spanish peninsula in the late 1400s prompted invasion and collapse in Songhay and ensuing economic chaos. Disaster deepened with the assault upon Africans of European colonial imperialists and their armies. Out of that extended historical tragedy – certainly not out of innate character – emerged the utter distortion of the profile of the history and culture of the African. Catastrophe, not inferiority, lent to Africans in the eyes of the world the appearance not of the grandeur and dignity and wealth to which their history entitled them but rather of degradation and stupidity.

In thinking about the slave trade and slavery, Du Bois argued, it was important to understand the place of slavery in human experience. All peoples – Africans and others – had practised slavery. Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, for example, had all held people in enslavement. It was important to note as well that the persons who had been enslaved had been persons of all colors, not just blacks. Indeed Saracens and Moors had engaged in a white slave trade. It was simply the result of an historical accident that in the modern era it had come to be that the complexion of enslaved persons was black. What was that historical accident? Slave trading had gradually come to center in Africa rather than in Asia or Europe. Slave trading had gained that focus owing to the particular geographical
location of Islam, Islam’s “enmity towards unconverted Negroes,” and the inability of small African communities to defend themselves effectively against Islamic incursions. Islamic slave trading had entered Africa in the 600s AD in company with Arab conquests in Africa. The Islamic trade had developed to the point that Africans from the Egyptian Sudan, Abyssinia, and Zanzibar began to flow to Arabia, Persia, and India in larger numbers. Islamic slave trading had exercised an important impact upon African societies. It had led Africans to participate in the trade:

“As Negro kingdoms and tribes rose to power they found the slave trade lucrative and natural, since the raids in which slaves were captured were ordinary inter-tribal wars. It was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the demand for slaves in Christian lands made slaves the object, and not the incident, of African wars.”

The advent of Islam in Africa was the first of the disasters which ultimately overturned African civilizations.

The Christian trade in African men and women began much later than did the Islamic trade, Du Bois asserted. However it matched the Islamic trade in scale and in destructive impact. European buying and selling of African people was already present in a small way in the 1300s, involving Spaniards who brought Africans to Europe under terms of enslavement. The Portuguese continued that practice in the 1400s, and built their first slave-trading fort at Elmina in 1482. As the Spanish began to conquer the Americas, by 1501, so it appeared, they were importing into the hemisphere enslaved Africans from Europe, and Africans were common in Spanish America from at least the second decade of the 1500s. During that decade the Spanish developed a plan to import Africans directly from Africa. The trade in Africans developed from that point: over time the Spanish granted to a succession of parties a monopoly right to import Africans to
their American domains under terms of enslavement. The trade grew dramatically in scale. What fueled it was voracious European demand for “brute labor” in the Americas.

The European legal trade in African peoples lasted some four hundred years.

Taken alone and especially taken together, insisted Du Bois, the Islamic and European trades in African men, women, and children ravaged African societies. They spurred raiding that sucked people from every part of Africa and of every type of physical and mental endowment and sociocultural group. In communities in the Zambesi basin, for example, “[t]here could be no extension of agriculture, no mining, no progress of any kind,” for under the impact of rampant Portuguese depredations on the continent’s east and west coasts slave trading became by far the most important commerce, in money value, in the river basin. To the northwest, in communities on the Guinea Coast, it appeared to be the advent of the massive trafficking in human beings which engineered a transformation in the culture of the region from humane to inhumane values – from “city democracy . . . elevated religious ideas . . . finely organized industry . . . noble art” to “orgies of war and blood sacrifice.” The traffic took on such proportions as to “turn the attention and energies of men from nearly all other industries [and] encourage war and all the cruelest passions of war . . . .” Industries changed and became disorganized, family ties weakened, government weakened, peaceful civilization fell apart. Centered on the coast “near the seat of perhaps the oldest and most interesting culture of Africa,” the traffic fostered the rise in the region of centralized states which acted as agents of destruction. The new states, such as Dahomey, which was founded in the early 1600s, and Ashanti, which rose to power in the 1600s, replaced the loose federations of cities
that had earlier prevailed. They introduced to the region a political culture and an
approach to human relations which stood in complete contrast to the political and social
norms prevailing in neighboring communities. “[A] fierce and bloody tyranny with
wholesale murder” characterized Dahomey, while Ashanti was constituted as a “military
aristocracy” in which “cruel blood sacrifices” were carried out. States like Dahomey went
to war specifically for the purpose of capturing, enslaving, and trading people.
Throughout the continent, not simply in the Zambesi basin and on the Guinea coast,
people retreated into caves and hills and “forest fastnesses.” With the loss through
Islamic and European slave trading of probably some hundred million persons – counting
both those who survived the process of seizure, enslavement, and delivery to destination
and those who did not – societies stagnated culturally. In Guinea, for example, where the
trans-Atlantic slave trade was centered, ancient African culture largely dissolved under
the impact of the moral, social, and physical devastation of the trade. Around the
continent cruelty instead of peace received stimulus, and religion became more
superstitious. Demographically whole regions became depopulated and whole societies
disappeared.

As if further tribulation were needed, Du Bois persisted, developments in the
interior north and east of the Guinea coast compounded the wreckage being wrought
upon societies located on the coast and in the adjacent hinterlands. At the close of the
sixteenth century invasion, defeat, and ensuing chaos descended upon the western Sudan.
The Moors whom the Spanish had driven back from Spain into Africa in 1502 found
themselves followed there and harassed by the Spanish as well as cut off from Europe
permanently by Turkish seizure of Mediterranean ports. Confined to Africa, they fell into
decadence and eventually directed their avarice at the peoples living to the south of them.
In 1591, armed with firearms and cannon they defeated Songhay warriors armed with
bows and arrows at Tenkadibou. There followed in Songhay, under Moorish dominion,
murder, robbery, revolt, misrule, defilement, convulsion, and oppression, and, by the end
of the 1700s, the establishment of a Moorish elite which preyed upon the African people.
The 1600s and 1700s witnessed, then, chaos in the western Sudan brought about by the
Moorish overthrow of the Askias of Songhay. That was the very hour at which from the
west of the continent came Europeans with a demand for human beings so great as to
render persons “the highest priced article of commerce in Africa” when combined with
demand generated by the Islamic trade, and the very hour at which communities of the
Guinea coast were faltering or falling.

Then followed a third hammer-blow at the close of the 1800s. European invasion
and colonial imperialism thrust themselves upon an Africa in turmoil. On the Guinea
coast the French crushed Dahomey at the end of the 1800s, as the English did the Ashanti
in the same era. Sierra Leone, from the start a colonial implant established in the late
1700s as an effort to check the trade in people, struggled for stability. Liberia, begun in
the early decades of the 1800s initially out of a desire of white Americans to relocate
freed blacks in the United States, met with aggression from England and France and
hostility from the United States upon declaring her independence. These developments
emerged just as slave trading was loosening its grip on African societies. By the mid-
1800s, licit slave trading across the Atlantic had largely ended, owing to pressure from
abolitionists and owing to economic costs – arising in part from actual and potential revolts by enslaved persons – associated with slavery as a way of organizing production. The Islamic trade had come to a close by the early 1900s, leaving the trade alive only in Portuguese islands on the west coast of Africa and in the Congo Free State. Now Europeans placed Africans in another vise, for the intent of the new assault was clear: to seize control of other forms of African riches besides their people. What that European program meant for Africans was illustrated in the experience of societies of the Congo river basin. Those societies had first encountered Europeans in the 1400s and had suffered centuries of European slaving. From the 1600s they had met with Arab slaving, which had played a major role in destabilizing and disrupting communities. Arab slaving had grown in scale as the European trade in had people slackened, forcing people to “take refuge in caves and other hiding places” and destroying industry and propagating “disintegration and retrogression.” Invasions as well, and internal dissension, had added to the havoc: invasion by “barbarians from the interior” had led to the partial overthrow of the kingdom of Congo in the 1600s, for example, and internecine conflict had brought down the kingdom of Mwata Yanvo of the Luba-Lunda people. Now the communities of the river basin suffered the final devastation: occupation by forces of Leopold II of Belgium. While Europeans did attempt to suppress Arab slave trading in the region, what they replaced it with was their own “greed and serfdom.” Europeans seized the land, destroyed humane cultural norms, exploited and atrociously abused the inhabitants, and caused millions upon millions to die.
The price paid by Africans for the greed of Arabs and Europeans lay beyond measure, Du Bois calculated. For Africans it was a disaster without mitigation, he concluded. They suffered “an economic, social, and political catastrophe probably unparalleled in human history:” “a rape of a continent to an extent never paralleled in ancient or modern times.” The traffic in and the enslavement and exploitation of Africans remained “the most inexcusable and despicable blot on modern human history.” For the world, slave trading and slavery left a legacy that was still plain to see around the globe. Slave trading and slavery came to be founded on racial caste, unlike systems of trading and enslavement which preceded them. This racial caste system in turn became “the foundation of a new industrial system.” In themselves and in the systems that they engendered, slave trading and slavery “spread more human misery, inculcated more disrespect for and neglect of humanity, a greater callousness to suffering, and more petty, cruel, human hatred than can well be calculated . . . .” His argument, cogently constructed and detailed, made it difficult to disagree.

Black Folk: Then and Now, appearing in 1939, presented a narrative of African history that was essentially the same as was the story that Du Bois projected in The Negro. That much was not surprising, since Du Bois saw the new work as growing out of his desire to publish a new edition of The Negro even though his publishers had conceived of it as being a distinct project and an entirely new book. 242 Here, as in The Negro, Du Bois surveyed the historical experience of African peoples region by region, moving through the continent from the northeast to the west and on to the center, the east, and the south. Again he emphasized that the culture, trade, and states of the western

242 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, p. 324
Sudan, of the Guinea Coast, and of the plains south of the Congo forest in the region of the Limpopo and Zambesi rivers were indigenous and African, not importations from elsewhere. Moreover he reiterated firmly that Egyptians were fundamentally black physically and African culturally. To be sure, differences in detail distinguished the two narratives. Where he had given considerable attention in *The Negro* to outlining the origins and early migrations of black people, for example, Du Bois in *Black Folk Then and Now* spent more time introducing the reader to major social groups of contemporary Africa. Again, as he described the civilizations of the Nile Valley, he gave less play to the development of Egypt and more, by comparison, to the development of Ethiopia, including discussion of Ethiopia’s changing natural environment. As well, in discussing the Arab conquest of north Africa he commented in more detail on the Moorish invasion of Europe and occupation of Spain. Likewise, he treated the wars between the Ashanti and the British in far more detail than he did in *The Negro*, in the course of outlining the experience of the peoples of the Guinea Coast. However in the two works the project was the same and the main lines of argument were the same. Once more Du Bois explicitly battled the claims of contemporary scholarship. Once more, and indeed more testily, Du Bois affirmed that Africans had a past, that it was one as full of achievement as was that of any other people, and that one instance of achievement after another drawn from scientific investigation established that claim incontrovertibly.

*The World and Africa*, the last of Du Bois’s major works on Africa’s past, set forth his ripened judgment on the character of Africans’ experience.243 He had not

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changed his mind about the contours of Africans’ striving and achievement: there was the same celebration of Africans’ soaring imagination and productive industry expressed in civilizations raised up from one end of the continent to the other. What he added to his audience’s understanding of Africans’ historical experience, beyond the themes already shared in *Star of Ethiopia*, in *The Negro*, and in *Black Folk: Then and Now*, was how essential that understanding was to making any sense of world history. Thus he adumbrated the prominent role played by Africans in the evolution of other societies bordering the Mediterranean Sea and pointed to the seminal presence of black people around the globe. Africans taught the world, he contended: African culture, spreading from Egypt, influenced Crete and western Asia from southern Arabia to Syria to western Asia Minor; Greek mythology presented the Greeks as having sprung from a mulatto, Epaphus, who was born in Egypt; the names of nearly all the Greek gods derived from Egypt; “Homer openly borrowed from Egypt his story of Ulysses;” Alexander and the Caesars learned from Egypt; many of the great men of the Roman empire were born in Africa; blacks figured prominently in early Islam; and European civilization stood rooted in the civilizations of the Nile Valley. Beyond the Mediterranean arena, the original inhabitants of India, other parts of Southern Asia, the Easter Islands, the Malay Peninsula, Australia, Polynesia, and still other places were black, and blacks were present in China and in Japan. There could be no comprehension of the human story, he averred, without acknowledging the feats of Africans.

These four major expositions of Africa’s past aside, more limited initiatives allowed Du Bois sometimes to glance towards, and at other times to venture into,
Africa’s history. *Africa: Its Place in Modern History* was one such initiative. This little work, one of two *Blue Books* which Du Bois wrote on Africa and which the Haldeman-Julius Publications firm published in 1930,²⁴⁴ stressed the claim that *The World and Africa* would later hammer home. Du Bois leapt at once to his central point, borrowing from the opening words of his “African Roots of War” article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* fifteen years previously:²⁴⁵ “‘Semper novi quid ex Africa,’ cried the Roman proconsul; and he voiced the verdict of forty centuries.” “Yet there are those who would write world-history,” Du Bois continued, “and leave out this most marvelous of continents.” Taking his reader by the hand, Du Bois ushered him along a rapid-fire tour of Africans’ experience with Europeans, pointing out principal outcrops along the journey. First he gestured towards how Africa sat at the center of the jockeying for national advantage on the part of Europeans that had culminated in the Great War. The remainder of the journey constituted an elaboration of that point. After nodding towards Africa’s civilizational achievements over the course of centuries and its pivotal role in nurturing Christianity and Islam in their infancies, he rehearsed the story of the emergence of European slave trading in Africa and European slavery in the Americas. He outlined the impact of slave trading upon the civilizations of Africa’s west coast. He drew attention to how, in tandem with the demise of slave trading, capital and labor in white societies united to exploit within Africa the natural resources and the people of the continent. He expanded on how that exploitation followed upon long centuries of curiosity about Africa and, in the modern period, intensive exploration of the continent.


by European travelers and penetration of it by European missionaries. He surveyed the physical take-over of African societies, whether by Dutch encroachments in the south or by French conquests in the north or Italian and British and German blandishments in the east, and in the course of doing so he illustrated the sharp elbowing among European nations that marked their pursuit of control of Africa. He excoriated Britain for its determined manipulations towards suppressing politically and exploiting economically the black people of Sierra Leone. He paid homage to the agitation of blacks across the continent for political empowerment in the face of imperial domination. Du Bois left his reader persuaded that truly world history was unintelligible without grasping the importance of the wealth possessed by black men.246

Speeches that Du Bois made – and he spoke frequently247 – also allowed him to illustrate the proposition that understanding world history entailed understanding African history. One of the arguments that he presented in support of the proposition that what took place in Africa touched the lives of all people everywhere emerged in an address prepared in 1946 for a class of graduating students.248 There he announced that the life of Taharka, a prince of Ethiopia and Egypt, was “the story of one of the world’s great black men, whom the world has forgotten” . . . “perhaps the greatest of black men ever to wear a crown.” From the throne of Ethiopia and Egypt Taharka confronted Assyria and saved Egypt and saved Jerusalem from Assyria’s assault. He built alliances with states in

247 John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. write that “Du Bois lectured in almost every community containing a substantial number of African Americans, and frequently he spoke on subjects somewhat removed from the crusading activities of the NAACP.” From Slavery to Freedom, p. 416
248 Du Bois, “Taharka, Emperor of the World”
western Asia. He led expeditions far beyond Ethiopia – even, by one account, to the Straits of Gibraltar. He continued construction on the great temple at Karnak. He styled himself “Emperor of the world”, and for good reason, even though ultimately the aggressive might of Assyria overwhelmed him and drove him out of Egypt and to his death. Under his rule, Ethiopia had been the leading power of the age. Understanding him and his context was important for people everywhere because Ethiopia had marked the world with its cultural imprint. Culture, “a priceless heritage,” had arisen in Africa before it arose anywhere else. It was Ethiopia which had shared that torch first with Egypt and later with Greece, western Asia, southern Europe, the Roman Empire, the English Commonwealth and the United States. Taharka stood, therefore, in the center of the stream of the cultural heritage of mankind. Students needed to find out more about him and about Ethiopia, argued Du Bois, for much about them was “unknown and inconceivable,” and then students needed to share their knowledge with the world.

Other speeches given by Du Bois on Africa’s history, notably two prepared in 1947 and in 1954, presented a second argument in favour the proposition that what happened in Africa mattered for everyone.²⁴⁹ To leave out Africans’ past was to water the seeds of war, Du Bois urged. African history, extending back to the origins of human kind, captured within its scope what was probably the oldest civilization in the world, two of the greatest powers of ancient times, the contender with Europe three hundred years before Christ for dominance of the world, the stage on which took place the rise of the

Christian church and the early expansion of Islam, and an array of remarkable states featuring scintillating cultures drawn from a common template. Europe, indeed, drew the seeds of its own renaissance thirteen hundred years after Christ from its contact with Asia and with Africa. African history had been actively suppressed for a century precisely because the enterprise of brutalizing black people in order to raise cotton had made it necessary to say that black people were not fit to do anything else, which in turn had made it expedient to say that their history demonstrated their inferiority. Unsurprisingly, therefore, as a result of suppressing knowledge of Africa’s past Westerners had found it easy to think Africans inferior to themselves and to try to center global dominance in Europe. That idea and that agenda had contributed to two world wars. Therefore reviving the study of African history could help to overthrow that idea and that agenda and contribute to peace.

Du Bois used The Crisis as well as pageant, books, and speeches to nurture just such a revival of African history. From virtually the beginning the magazine set a tone of applause for Africa’s past. Its editor welcomed articles by other authors which celebrated historical Africa. An article contributed by Frances Hoggan, a medical doctor, “of London, England,” outlined an argument set forth by a respected Belgian scientist who claimed that it was blacks who had taught Europeans the art of sculpture. A banner article entitled “African Civilization,” written by Mary Dunlop MacLean, the white managing editor of the magazine, laid out in authoritative terms the thesis that Africans, not outsiders, were the creators of the civilizational cultures being identified in increasing numbers across the African continent; that Africans were the likely discoverers of the art
of working metals; that the civilizations of the Upper Nile counted among the most ancient ever found; that civilization likely flowed northwards down the Nile River rather than southwards up the river; that evidence from Crete argued for ancient interaction between Africa and Crete; and that the notion that Asia was the source of civilization in Crete and in Africa had no foundation. Hoggan contributed a further article which sketched the personal attributes and political accomplishments of Moshesh, a ruler of the BaSuto, who lived in what became South Africa during the first half of the 1800s. Hoggan wrote of the king with respect and approbation, lauding in particular his talent for diplomacy. In Du Bois’s hands the magazine functioned as a tool for sharing his own celebratory vision of Africa’s history and similar visions advanced by other writers.

Du Bois put *The Crisis* not only to publishing full-fledged articles relating to Africa’s past but also to presenting running notice of ongoing developments in various fields of scholarship which touched on African history. The magazine alerted its readers to excavations taking place at the site of Meroe in the northeastern corner of the continent and noted with pride that “[g]reat temples, royal palaces, public buildings and splendid tombs” and fine objects of various kinds were being uncovered from the desert sands. It reported that on the west side of the continent “Dr. Leo. Frobenius, of the German Central African exploration expedition, has obtained some remarkable terracotta work from West Africa and has found some unknown ruined cities.” It took note of a statement made at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science by

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the president of the Association and interpreted the statement as meaning that in Europe, and especially in Crete, civilization was of African origin. It published excerpts from an article by Alexander Francis Chamberlain in which the assistant professor of anthropology at Clark University in Massachusetts dismissed claims that Africans lacked historical accomplishment on the basis of emerging historical data. Finally, the magazine directed its audience to items that they could read for themselves to learn more about Africa’s history. It drew attention to *The Prehistoric Period in South Africa* by J. P. Johnson, for example, and *A Narrative of the Negro* by Mrs. Leila Amos Pendleton, along with articles by C. R. Beasley, Harry H. Johnston, A. W. Greely, and Frederick A. Edwards entitled, respectively, “Prince Henry of Portugal and the African Crusade of the Fifteenth Century,” “Opening Up of Africa,” “Recent Geographic Advances in Africa,” and “The Mystery of Zimbabwe.” Throughout its treatment of African history it worked from the premise of a direct biological and cultural relationship between the African and the African American – a premise made explicit, for example, in a remark from a white writer which it reprinted from the New York *Evening Journal* under the caption “The Negro in Egypt.” The writer had observed:

The giggling shopgirls whose life of misery is still a joke to them – blessed youth! – should interest you deeply. And the Negro, too, with a tired black face, resting for the next day’s slavery – slavery on a wage basis, but slavery all the same. Possibly you despise his thick lips. But those lips are carved on every sphinx in Egypt’s sand, and if you could go back far enough you would find the ancestors of that Negro, before the days of the Pharaohs, laying the foundations of your religion and locating the stars in heaven.

252 “What to Read,” *The Crisis* Vol. 2 No. 3 (July, 1911), p. 125
At that time your forbears were gibbering cave savages, sharpening bones and gnawing raw flesh.

Through *The Crisis*, as through speeches, through books, and through his pageant, Du Bois did all he could to ignite an appreciation of the accomplishments of Africans, an appreciation of their relevance for African Americans, and an appreciation of the importance of those accomplishments to everyone everywhere.
CHAPTER FIVE

Empowerment: Professing the Vision

But was anybody listening? By his own estimate, Du Bois’s words fell on deaf ears, at least in the academy. The change over time in the tone of his major works on Africa betrayed his assessment that mainstream academicians were unresponsive to his vision. *The Negro* presented a mood of alertness, eager engagement, and expectation that hearing the truth would transform the hearts and minds of his academic and public audience. In its brief Preface, while he acknowledged the reality of racial prejudice he implied that research that would be carried out over time would by itself disperse unwarranted views of the black person. But the tone of cool professionalism of *The Negro* gave way thirty years later in *The World and Africa* to a tone of exasperation tinged with impatience, anger, even bitterness, and what looked to be ongoing engagement in debate only through habit and under protest. In the latter work Du Bois made no effort to discipline his contempt for and frustration with the failure of establishment historians to move away from what he viewed as being a false picture of Africa even though the authors of those views enjoyed access to the same information to which he had access. He seemed to have reached the conclusion that their racism could not be penetrated by challenges anchored in dispassionate, unbiased investigation.
Consider, as illustration of his utter disenchantment, how he characterized American and European scholars as he laid out the evidentiary grounds for his claims about Africa’s past. “I am challenging Authority,” he wrote, “– even Maspero, Sayce, Reisner, Breasted, and hundreds of other men of highest respectability, who did not attack but studiously ignored the Negro on the Nile and in the world and talked as though black folk were nonexistent and unimportant. They are part of the herd of writers of modern history who never heard of Africa or declare with Guernier ‘Seule de tous les continents l’Afrique n’a pas d’histoire!’”  

Consider again, how he characterized the work of Beardsley: “I should like to have used the researches on the Negro in classic Europe of Dr. Frank Snowden of Howard University. But classical journals in America have hitherto declined to publish his paper because it favored the Negro too much, leaving the public still to rely on Beardsley’s stupid combination of scholarship and race prejudice which Johns Hopkins University published.” Consider the significance of his remarks, made on two occasions at mid-century, concerning the extent to which establishment historians had embraced the notion that Africans had contributed to world history. In the early 1900s, he in 1950 recalled, the historical experience of Negroes had fallen “practically unrecognized,” and “[m]ost people, even historians, would have doubted if there was enough of distinctly Negro history in America to call for publication.” Decades later, in spite of the work of himself and others, the problem remained real. “[T]here are persons still affirming what was 50 years ago the almost universal judgment,” he wrote in 1954, in a speech which he had prepared for a student.

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256 Ibid., p. x
conference, “that Africa has no history.” Consider his scathing indictment of how Western historians had treated the exceptional civilization of West Africa and his conviction that a continuing reign of racial bigotry was what gave ongoing sanction to that treatment:

“Of all this West African cultural development our knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete, jumbled up with the African slave trade. There has been no systematic, general study of the history of humanity on this coast. Nearly all has disappeared in the frantic effort to paint Negroes as apes fit only for slavery and then to forget the whole discreditable episode, wipe it out of history, and emphasize the glory and philanthropy of Europe. The invaluable art treasure which Britain stole from Benin has never been properly classified or exhibited, but lies in the British Museum.”

“Yet on the West Coast was perhaps the greatest attempt in human history before the twentieth century to build a culture based on peace and beauty, to establish a communism of industry and of distribution of goods and services according to human need. It was crucified by greed, and its very memory blasphemed by the modern historical method.”

For Du Bois, hope had turned into frustration and then into anger. The truths that he had made known about Africans’ role in world history, he seemed to have concluded, were, proverbially put, so many pearls cast before swine.

The shift in Du Bois’s emotional attitude towards his peers in the community of historians was largely warranted. The assumptions which he had brought to studying Africa’s past and the conclusions that he had reached as a result of his investigations stood on the margins of scholarly orthodoxy. First, he had elected to work from the premise that African culture did not sit lower than that of Europeans in an evolutionary hierarchy. By contrast, many of his contemporaries in the first two decades of the century took as their starting point the notion that culturally speaking Africans had stood from the first, and continued to stand, at the dawn of human development. Secondly, Du Bois had

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elected to work from the premise that African lifestyles and cultures, like those of other peoples, had changed over time, in response to changing circumstances and pressures. That second premise led him to approach Africans historically, expecting to have to account for processes of change over time. Establishment historians, convinced that African societies had not changed, did not see African societies as susceptible to historical treatment and so did not see African societies as falling within their field of endeavour. Political scientists, administrative officers in the colonial services of European countries, and anthropologists, not historians, dominated Western reflection about African societies in the first half of the century. Furthermore, even though Du Bois saw some glimmer of hope with what anthropological research was uncovering—“general anthropology is gradually revealing the trend of the Negro in Africa,” he wrote, “as we emerge from the blight of the writers of current history”—anthropologists, who were the first among Western professional scholars to take up serious research in Africa, prior to the 1950s characteristically emphasized the static features of any African society and treated African peoples as being suspended in time. Du Bois staked out a different approach. The two visions of Africans, mainstream and Du Boisian, made for a striking contrast.

The difference in approach stands out in that digest of contemporary British scientific knowledge, the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The authoritative eleventh edition, published in 1910-11, declared bluntly that the story of Africans was largely a contemporary plot. T. Athol Joyce, the author of the encyclopaedia’s discussion of

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260 Ibid., p. xi
African ethnology and a member of the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum, introduced his essay with the caution that one challenge that lay before the scholar, in regard to the indigenous peoples of Africa, was that with the exception of those of the lower Nile valley and of what was called Roman Africa, the indigenous peoples were “practically without a history, and possess[ed] no records from which such a history might be reconstructed.” The fundamental difficulty was that “[t]he negro is essentially the child of the moment; and his memory, both tribal and individual, is very short.”

John Scott Keltie, author of the discussion on African history, expressed the conviction that analysis of civilization in Africa lay with the study of external conquest. He introduced his treatment of his subject with the observation that “[i]f ancient and Egypt and Ethiopia . . . be excluded, the story of Africa is largely a record of the doings of its Asiatic and European conquerors and colonizers, Abyssinia being the only state which throughout historic times has maintained its independence.”

For Du Bois to venture only four years later some two hundred and thirty pages on the proposition that the story of Africans constituted a moving picture, not a snapshot, and that on the continent it was Africans rather than other peoples who generated that movie, was to fashion a studied departure from scholarly orthodoxy.

The results of grounding analysis of African societies on a premise that Africans offered little in the way of indigenous historical development lay on display in the United States as well. American Anthropologist, the flagship journal of the American Anthropological Association and the authoritative voice of the discipline in the United

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263 Ibid.
States, published between 1900 and 1930 eleven articles and other items relating to African societies. The articles, prepared by Melville Herskovits, W. C. MacLeod, Samuel P. Verner, and A. Winifred Hoernle all described cultural and social practices that were current at a given time and largely ignored historical development. Thus Herskovits, a student of Franz Boas’s and the United States’s first Africanist, sketched a static picture of what he termed the ‘East African Cattle Complex’ as he tested the applicability beyond North American societies of the ‘culture area’ concept that had been developed by North American anthropologists. In his summation Herskovitz acknowledged the ‘snapshot’ character of his study. “We may then come to the conclusion,” he stated, “that a culture-area is an empirical grouping of tribes which manifest similar cultures; that, being descriptive, it is a picture which does not necessarily include time-depth . . . .” MacLeod’s comparisons of traditions regarding what a person might or might not physically step over, and the reasons why, among peoples of societies situated as far distant as Africa, North America, South America, and Europe carried the same synchronic orientation. Verner’s study of groups situated in Central Africa who were lighter in complexion than most of the people of the region joined in this approach, notwithstanding his reflections on how such persons might have come to be present in the region. Hoernle, exploring the social organization of the Nama of what is today Namibia,

came closest to tracing an historical process: she pointed to processes bringing about the
destruction of Nama power and culture at the same time that she described Nama
nomadic lifestyle and lineage groupings. However her comments on political and
military developments and culture collapse were ancillary to her focus on the nature of
social organization, offered not for their own sake but so as to explain why the
contemporary situation stood as it did. Taken individually and together, these several
treatments of African societies differed sharply from the dynamic historical
characterizations that Du Bois presented in 1915, mid-way along this interval of
American Anthropologist’s activity.

Lending credibility to Du Bois’s disenchantment were reflections by Melville
Herskovits on the question of where the field of anthropology had been during the first
A Wider Perspective,” 265 the foremost American anthropologist acknowledged that there
had been an absence of historical perspective in the discipline’s approach to studying
Africa. “[M]ost of the ethnographic work in Africa tended to overlook the factor of
historicity,” he pointed out – an approach, he continued, which carried with it advantage
but also loss. 266 The emphasis had been on trying to understand institutional
arrangements in African societies and how they had functioned. It was time, he argued,
for the field to take seriously the notion that African societies had been dynamic
internally and had interacted with other societies on the continent and in the rest of the
world. The task ahead was to reconstruct historic contacts between peoples without

266 Ibid., p. 230
written languages. Unlike previous treatments by Europeans of Africa’s past, those reconstructions would read African societies on their own terms, not as objects of European conquest. With that goal in mind, anthropological data would be mined in such a way as to open up “the historical relationships that have made of a given cultural scene what we find it to be at a particular moment.” Such lay the road ahead, then, in Herskovits’s view, at the century’s midpoint. Manifestly, in the road behind, when Du Bois had brought forth his narratives of Africa, Africa lay in the eternal present, in the view of the academy.

What had contributed to anthropology’s characteristic emphasis on stasis prior to the middle of the century, and so to its lack of receptivity to the kind of analysis of Africa’s societies which Du Bois had presented, was the dominance in the inter-war years of the theoretical paradigm called structural-functionalism. The paradigm had emerged mainly among Anglophone professional anthropologists who, together with French counterparts, had commanded the field from the 1920s onwards. The Anglophone school – a tiny and close-knit group prior to World War II: in the whole of the British Commonwealth there had been but twenty professional social anthropologists – had counted among its pioneers A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. The theoretical work of Radcliffe-Brown, in particular, had governed British social anthropology for nearly twenty years. As an analytic framework, structural-functionalism “postulated that all of the contemporaneous cultural and social features of a stable society could be assumed to form part of a coherent and interdependent system. The task of the interpreter was to infer the connections.” “Kinship, religion, ritual, economic production,

267 French pioneers in the field included Maurice Delafosse and Marcel Griaule.
exchange, leadership, and warfare all were remarked on ‘structurally’ – that is, in their ‘functions’ as social dividers or connectors.” Structural-functionalism’s emphasis on the functions of institutions and their integration within a cultural whole to produce a stable society typically brought into view the “customs” and “traditions” of a society at a given time, not their transformation over time. That moment captured by the anthropologist’s investigation might be one of two types: a kind of timeless, enduring moment in which the society lay unchanging and untouched by external influence before the advent of colonial conquest; or the particular historical moment in the life of the society during which the fieldwork was done. Whichever of these two very different kinds of moment the anthropologist claimed to present, the cultural descriptions so generated appeared ahistorical and the societies which they depicted unchanging.  

To be sure, anthropology in the inter-war years was not tied solely to the structural-functional paradigm and not all work presented a static picture of Africans. Historical analysis was not entirely absent from the discipline. Malinowski, for example, argued that social change should be studied, even though his own major fieldwork had not brought social transformation into view. In addition, Anglophone anthropologists who built the field in the wake of the pioneers and who played a central role in the growth of the discipline included E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Audrey Richards, Hilda Beemer Kuper, Isaac Schapera, Phyllis Kaberry, Hortense Powdermaker, Meyer Fortes, S. F. Nadel, Gordon Brown, Max Gluckman, Ellen Hellmann, Godfrey Wilson, Monica Hunter Wilson, C. Daryll Forde, and Jack Goody; and these same individuals, even as

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269 Ibid., pp.1, 10, 13, 16, 18, 22, 24, 27, 39
they produced standard ethnographies in the structural-functionalist mode, also wrote historical studies. Monica Hunter in 1936 explored, in her *Reaction to Conquest*, the impact of European conquest on Pondo society. In the same year Meyer Fortes produced “Culture Contact as a Dynamic Process.” In 1949, Evans-Pritchard presented an historical study, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*. Daryll Forde’s wide-ranging professional interests included African history. In *The Analysis of Social Change*, published by himself and Monica Wilson in 1945, Godfrey Wilson tried to bring together functionalism with the study of social change. Herskovits published in 1938 a history of the Kingdom of Dahomey; and his 1941 study *Myth of the Negro Past*, although preoccupied with the historical experience of Africans in the Americas and with cultural continuities between Africans of Africa and Africans of the Diaspora rather than with social change in Africa, expressed clearly his appreciation of the importance of placing social phenomena in historical perspective. Prior to the 1950s however, these analyses of social change were the exception rather than the norm in the discipline – the departure from the ideal rather than the embodiment of it. While there was an awareness that African societies were capable of change, the field continued to emphasize what in African societies appeared to stay the same.²⁷⁰

Importantly, too, anthropology’s awareness of Africans as being people like other people appeared not to have taken full hold when Du Bois was writing about historical Africans. One of the points that he stressed in his work was that Africans were people just as were any other people. He understood his audience: he emphasized that point because he understood that there was a need to do so. Anthropologists seemed not to be

²⁷⁰ Moore, *Anthropology and Africa*; Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*
certain of that postulate. How they studied law in African societies illustrated their uncertainty. Scholar Sally Falk Moore notes that prior to Max Gluckman’s 1955 study *The Judicial Process among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia*, ethnographies of law in African societies approached the law as being “a set of ‘tribal’ constitutional principles and list of norms.” Gluckman, when he carried out his fieldwork, listened to legal cases in an African court. When he wrote up his material, not only did he describe the procedures of the hearings, the facts of the cases, and the outcomes of the cases, but also what he thought to be the principles from which the judges worked and the way in which they reasoned. What is interesting is that according to Moore, Gluckman was “the first ethnographer to spend substantial time listening to legal cases in an African court.” Moreover “[t]he idea of observing an African people in the midst of their disputations and litigations as one might in a Western court was an entirely new one.” If this approach to understanding a people’s legal system seemed to be novel in the 1950s, it suggests that prior to that time Western anthropologists had not fully internalized the notion that Africans were basically like themselves – leaving a Du Bois to feel that he had to state the principle.

Yet notwithstanding this lingering climate of assumption among scholars that Africans lacked any substantial past, and in spite of the diet of African historical catatonia that schools and popular culture continued to feed to African Americans, mid-century seemed to witness stirrings among African Americans of a new

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271 Moore, *Anthropology and Africa*, p. 46
consciousness towards Africans and Africa. Observers registered a shift, albeit a
tremulous one, away from a sense of shame. Thus educator and scholar Horace Mann
Bond thought that he caught a flicker of positive movement. In 1951 he concluded that
while middle-class African American college students continued to set their faces against
identifying with Africa and Africans in the main, at the same time there was growing
among them, if slowly, a more receptive view of Africa and Africans.\textsuperscript{274} Eight years later, in 1959, he implied that African Americans now stood on the cusp of a shower of pride in
“Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to the world.” “And to have pigment in one’s
skin is to be proud, not to be ashamed.”\textsuperscript{275} Growing pride was what C. A. Chick, too,
espied.\textsuperscript{276} Writing in 1962, Chick, who was a Baptist Minister in North Carolina, judged
that pride in African ancestry had begun to re-emerge among African Americans in the
early twentieth century and had gained additional force after the Second World War.
Harold Isaacs also caught hints of movement. While he felt that feelings of repugnance
towards Africa had prevailed among African Americans “until barely the day before
yesterday and still apply to a great many Negroes even today,”\textsuperscript{277} he also noted that
African Americans seemed to be engaged, if painfully, in revising their estimate of
Africa. In 1963 he wrote:\textsuperscript{278}

\textsuperscript{274} Horace Mann Bond, “Africa for the Middle-Class Mind.” (Horace Mann Bond Papers. University of
Massachusetts Library. Record Group 411 Series 6 Box 171 Folder 6)
\textsuperscript{275} Horace Mann Bond, “The American Negro and Africa: From Pride to Shame to Pride” (Horace Mann
Bond Papers. University of Massachusetts Library. Record Group 411 Series 6 Box 172 Folder 11), p. 3
\textsuperscript{276} Chick, Sr., “The American Negroes’ Changing Attitude Toward Africa”
\textsuperscript{277} Isaacs, The New World of Negro Americans, p. 106
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid., p. 107. Cornelia Sears, in her dissertation on mainstream perceptions of Africa, noted among
African Americans a gradual abandonment of ambivalence towards Africa and a replacement of it by a new
willingness to examine Africa and their relation to it. She dates the emergence of this new attitude towards
Alike in relation to Africa and to his own society, the Negro American now moves in and between parts of two worlds – the world of new breakthroughs and conquests of freedom, and the world which still tries to hold him in the vise of the past. About Africa his mind takes in the great changes, the new figures, new images, new emotions, the new and exhilarating appeals to prideful and beneficial association, while still holding somewhere deep within, all that was put there about Africa and his kinship to it in years long gone by. This makes a great and painful tangle which will not be quickly or easily undone.

Du Bois, ever part of a conversation about African Americans, stood apart from the consensus. He agreed with Chick that a more positive view of Africa had taken shape in the early 1900s, but he differed with Chick as to what it had given way to by mid-century. In his view, it had given way to ignorance and indifference, not to a further surge in pride.279 For all that, however, these observers all agreed that the shame in African ancestry that had beset African Americans at the close of the 1800s seemed to be abating at mid-century.

Why, so it would appear, was the attitudinal pendulum swinging away from the late 1800s’ rejection of Africa? Did despair over desperate conditions for African Americans in the “redeemed” South of the 1880s through World War II force a reassessment of Africa’s relevance and value, as Bond intimated? Did contact between African Americans and Africans during the wars of the first half of the century cumulatively educate African Americans about Africans and play a role in this shift? Did Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia in 1938 help to evoke a feeling of identification? Did the realities of Belgian exploitation of the people of Congo that were exposed by African American writers and missionaries play “no small part” in shaping African American attitudes towards Africa, as George Shepperson suggested280 -- and if they did, in what direction did they tilt those attitudes? Was Du Bois right – that missions sent by African

American churches reached Africa and brought back new knowledge of the continent, that African American literature including some of his own publications brought about a reassessment of the meaning and history of Africa, that African American students studying in African American colleges were beginning to learn something of the true Africa, and that black leaders from Africa and the United States were beginning to have greater interaction through the series of Pan-African summits held between 1900 and 1945? Was the heart of the matter that African countries were gaining political independence and standing poised to “play a new role in current history,” as Isaacs concluded and as James Meriwether later reaffirmed? Did Chick’s analysis hold – that by the 1960s greater awareness of African American contributions to the Americas, greater personal contact with Africans and Africa through wartime interactions and through meeting African students in the United States and through visiting Africa, anticolonial revolutions taking place on the continent, and above all a growing awareness of Africa’s early technological and civilizational advances all help to engender a rising esteem for Africa? Certainly the assault upon the mainstream vision of Africa’s past carried out by a loose phalanx of active and committed academic and public intellectuals who counted Du Bois among their number lend some credence to Chick’s last conjecture. They suggest that as Du Bois presented his vision of Africa’s past another audience, if not that of his scholarly counterparts, was indeed listening.

For persons standing outside the academy, Du Bois’s major narratives on Africa’s past were relatively easy to gain access to. The staged pageants were mounted in major

cities, drawing large audiences. By his own account, some thirty thousand persons saw the pageant when it appeared in New York, another fourteen thousand witnessed it in Washington, D. C., and thousands more watched it in Philadelphia and Los Angeles. Andrew Hilyer of the *Washington Bee* applauded the fact that more that twelve hundred persons, by his count, gave their active support to enabling the pageant to take place. *The Negro* also enjoyed considerable exposure. Advertised in the *Crisis*, it was available at the affordable price of fifty cents. Royalty reports suggested that it sold well. It remained sought after not only at home but also abroad, according to George Shepperson, even after its successor *Black Folk: Then and Now* appeared in print twenty-four years later. *Black Folk Then and Now*, for its part, drew considerable support from the reading public, if sales were any indication of esteem. Within less than seven months of publication nearly fifteen hundred copies of the work were sold. Sales of the book were smart enough to require second, third, and fourth printings by the end of 1945, notwithstanding that those were years of war. The public could and did solicit Du Bois’s analysis of Africa’s past.

The *Crisis* also afforded the public ready access to Du Bois’s vision of Africa’s history. The journal reached a substantial audience. A thousand copies of the first issue came off the press in November, 1910. The magazine’s annual circulation rose to a peak in 1918 of over one hundred thousand copies sold. What that latter figure meant, impressively, according to historian Philip Foner, was that each month one tenth of

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282 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, pp. 272-274
283 Hilyer, “The Great Pageant”
286 Aptheker, “Introduction,” *Black Folk Then and Now*, pp. 11-17
African American homes in the entire country received the magazine. In its first five years of operation, nearly one-and-a-half million copies were sold, and between 1910 and 1920 some four-and-a-half million copies found a market. Indeed the new journal came to be self-supporting financially: in 1915 it earned $24,000 and in 1920 it earned over $77,000. Its success profited from experience that Du Bois had earlier gained over a four-and-a-half-year period between 1906 and 1910 as a result of editing *The Moon Illustrated Weekly* and then *The Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line*. *The Moon*, which had been distributed in Atlanta, Memphis, and elsewhere, had run for a year before closing its doors owing to insufficient funding and to a busy Du Bois’s inability to invest sufficient time in meeting his editing responsibilities. *The Horizon*, succeeding *The Moon* and appearing on a monthly basis, had given way, in July 1910, to *The Crisis*. The mounting circulation figures of *The Crisis* could hardly be said to flow solely, or even largely, from Du Bois’s presentation of African’s history. However that presentation was an integral part of the message of black value that *The Crisis* passionately promoted. The magazine’s large circulation gave wide exposure to that presentation.

Du Bois’s representations of Africa’s history in these various media left an imprint upon the minds of a generation of African Americans who followed him. Conceivably, playing the role of Emperor of Ethiopia in the Washington staging of *Star of Ethiopia* either sparked or cultivated a young Charles Wesley’s interest in the past, leading him to develop into an academic historian and president of the Association for the

Study of African-American Life and History. Among African Americans generally, noted Rayford Logan, who would teach history at Howard University, *The Negro* “popularized the history of the African kingdoms.” Paul Robeson, lawyer and athlete, actor and concert artist, orator and social activist, reflected that “[Du Bois] directed universal interest and attention to our Negro history and our rich African ancestry, to give us solid background for our struggle.” Students whom Du Bois taught at Atlanta University, including two individuals who became professors of history – Dr. Melvin Kennedy of Morehouse College and Dr. Clarence A. Bacote of Atlanta University – judged that his work in helping to shape African Americans’ consciousness regarding Africans was one of his greatest legacies. That was the conclusion arrived at by Dorothy Cowser Yancey, who found that “[m]ost of his students were of the opinion that aside from his manuscripts his major contribution to civilization was the fact that he ‘brought to notice here in America the relationship that ought to exist between Negroes in America and Negroes in Africa’” Du Bois’s rendering of the history of Africans and of peoples of African descent played a visible role in reorienting African Americans’ imagination regarding Africa and Africans by mid-century.

It would be too much, of course, to view Du Bois’s efforts relating to African history as constituting the whole of the ideological initiative which contributed to effecting a shift in African Americans’ outlook towards Africa and Africans. Other

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290 Shepperson, “Introduction,” p. xxi, and see footnote 26
popularizers of Africa’s past, notably Carter Woodson and – through Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association – Hubert Henry Harrison and John Edward Bruce, joined Du Bois in using history effectively to help to reshape African Americans’ imagination concerning Africa. Even though they parted ways with one another on a variety of other issues, their thinking on African history coincided.

Relations between Du Bois and Woodson were problematic, report historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick: “there never was any close relationship between the two pioneering Harvard Ph.D’s,” they write, and “the two never worked together, and on certain occasions they even clashed violently.”

Du Bois and Garvey famously disagreed, for example in their prescriptions for progress on the part of Black people. Garvey at first admired Du Bois but later came to accuse him of being a leader who in fact embraced whiteness and had no pride in his blackness. Du Bois countered that Garvey advocated a race superiority and race separation that was little different from the race superiority and race separation advocated by white racists, and claimed that the true hope for the world lay, on the contrary, in closer, more tolerant, more respectful exchange among peoples of different races.

As caustic and condescending towards Garvey and Garveyism as Du Bois became, however, and as much as he proclaimed that Garvey was “sincere but uneducated” and his movement “purely commercial and based on no


conception of African history or needs” and “American and not African” in nature, he shared with Garvey, as with Woodson, the same vision that Africans had a past and one which had value. On that point they found common ground. Du Bois’s ideological influence upon African Americans’ consciousness in regard Africa’s history worked in concert with that of other champions of Africa’s past.

Central among those champions was Carter Woodson. Woodson stood front and center in the movement to rehabilitate Africa’s historical repute. The founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the Journal of Negro History, and the Negro History Bulletin, Woodson invested much of his resources of time, energy, and money in challenging the mainstream vision of Africa’s past. During the 1920s, according to his biographer Jacqueline Goggin, “[Woodson] began collecting historical and contemporary documents on Africa, gathering folktales and stories, and corresponding with scholars [Melville] Herskovits, Monroe Work, and Maurice Delafosse, who were researching the African past.” In addition, the Associated Publishers, a company that he established to publish books by black scholars, “brought out an English translation of Delafosse’s Les Noirs de l’Afrique as well as his own African Myths Together with Proverbs. Woodson provided Alain Locke with funds for a two-year project of preparing a monograph on African art as a manifestation of African culture.”

During the 1930s and 1940s, investigating African history and culture and its impact upon blacks in the diaspora was one of the three areas of emphasis in his research.

296 Du Bois, “Africa and the American Negro Intelligentsia,” p. 49
297 Thorpe, Black Historians, p. 112
agenda. When he travelled to Europe he collected research materials on Africa as well as on other topics. He published *The African Background Outlined* and *African Heroes and Heroines* in order to educate school teachers and the general public about Africans. Working in collaboration with a colleague, he investigated diplomatic relations conducted between the United States and Liberia from the nineteenth century. He worked towards publishing an *Encyclopedia Africana*. Africa was for him, as it was for Du Bois, an abiding intellectual preoccupation.

That passion was evident in the *Journal of Negro History*. Under Woodson’s editorial eye, over the course of its first two decades the geographical area that received most attention in its pages, after the United States, was Africa. The conceptual issue which animated much of the work of thirteen authors who discussed Africans and Africa during the first ten years of the publication’s exploration of continental history and culture was this: were Africans civilized? The investigations yielded a nuanced array of conclusions. For some authors, Africans were civilized, emphatically, and not only that, were the very people who had bequeathed civilization to the world. For others, Africans were civilized, certainly, their civility was autochthonous, and their level of civility placed them on the same plane as Europeans. A third group hazarded no opinion on the

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299 Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson*, pp. 120-121
302 *Goggin, Carter G. Woodson*, p. 128
304 At page 114 of *Black Historians*, Earl Thorpe writes that “[b]y 1935 at least 350 articles and series of documents had appeared in the *Journal*. . . of which 241 were devoted either wholly or primarily to the Afro-American in the United States. Thus, about one-third of the material had dealt with the race outside the United States of America. Of this one-third, the greatest number had dealt with Africa, an almost equal number with Great Britain and Europe, and the remainder with Latin America, Canada, the West Indies other than Haiti and Cuba, and an almost negligible number with the Pacific Area and Near East.”
issue and let slip no hint otherwise of its conviction, preferring a noncommittal posture. For a fourth group, Africans were civilized, yes, and again through their own agency, but their level of cultivation had to be acknowledged as resting at a level inferior to that of Europeans. A fifth set of authors represented Africans as being civilized, yes, but as having originally been brutish and as having received such elevation as they then possessed at the hands of Europeans. The several authors approached the various historical questions revolving around the central issue using a variety of methodologies, but for the most part they relied upon private and public written sources, material objects, ethnographic evidence, and the works of European and other scholars and observers, antecedent and contemporary alike, as they advanced their various claims. Whatever might be the specific visions of Africa’s past advanced by particular authors, however, and whatever their methodological emphases, Woodson, who was “the sole judge of articles submitted” to the periodical, stood determined to put forward to the reading public scholarship which drew their attention to African Americans’ ancestral home.

*The African Background Outlined, or, Handbook for the Study of the Negro*

summarized Woodson’s own understanding of historical Africa. Like Du Bois’s *The Negro*, Woodson’s work, which appeared in 1936, presented itself as being a trenchant effort to revise the distorted image of the black person. What Woodson called “[t]his elementary treatment of the African background of the Negro, together with brief outlines

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305 Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980*, p. 19. Jacqueline Goggin writes, indeed: “In the first two years of the [Association of Negro Life and History’s] existence, Woodson . . . had to solicit enough articles and book reviews to fill [the Journal’s] pages. . . . Most of the Journal’s early contributors were Woodson’s black colleagues and associates from the Washington public schools, Howard, and the organizations with which he was affiliated. At times when he lacked enough articles, Woodson may have written articles and signed his friends’ names. He also wrote the majority of book reviews in early issues, sometimes leaving them unsigned or using pseudonyms.” Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson*, p. 42
for the study of the race in the modern world”\textsuperscript{306} drew upon ancient and modern authors, from Herodotus to Delafosse and from Josephus to Lady Lugard, to paint a portrait of African as deserving of being accorded “a high place in history.”\textsuperscript{307} In eighteen chapters dealing wholly or significantly with Africa, it began by discussing with readers the availability and general nature of sources relating to African history, along with views on the peopling of the continent. From there it surveyed major historical developments that took place among Africans situated in Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Western and Central Sudan. Pausing to investigate the nature and impact of European trafficking in people, it then returned to characterizing African societies, taking up those which lay south of the equator. Thereafter it shifted its approach and explored European direct exploitation of Africa from the late 1800s, described African culture and religion and art, and detailed features of African culture which continued to mark African American society. Woodson summed up his argument in a statement worthy of repeating without paraphrase: “No other race has achieved so much with such a little help from without as has the Negro. . . . While there have been few agencies to help the Negroes in Africa or abroad, there have been hordes to impede their progress. In spite of all difficulties, however, the annals of this race read like beautiful romances of a people in an heroic age.”

The impact of Woodson’s work in revising perceptions of Africa’s history was considerable. In regard to the academy, in the \textit{Journal} he built an effective institutional voice for the ‘vindicationist’ school of historians who sought to affirm Africans’ value and importance through time. Through his activities he influenced thousands of scholars

\textsuperscript{306} \textit{The African Background Outlined}, p. v
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid., p. 179
in historical study and research, judged Du Bois, writing shortly after Woodson’s passing in April, 1950. Beyond the academy, Woodson left a mark on African American popular consciousness. Horace Mann Bond considered that “to no circumstance or to any person is [the development by the 1950s of a more positive attitude towards Africa and Africans on the part of middle-class Negro youth] to be more ascribed, than to the genius, sacrifice, and tremendous achievement” of Carter G. Woodson. Middle-class youth were not the only young people who felt the imprint of Woodson’s vision, moreover: Malcolm X recalled that Woodson’s “Negro History opened [his] eyes about black empires before the black slave was brought to the United States, and the early Negro struggles for freedom.” Du Bois hailed Woodson’s contributions in popularizing African history as having been exceptional. He noted that in addition producing a scholarly journal of excellent quality, a monthly bulletin, books of his own authorship, a publishing business which issued works by himself and by others, and an annual week-long celebration of Negro history called Negro History Week, Woodson built what was, thought Du Bois, most astonishing – a constituency among African Americans who supported investigation into and dissemination of black history. Indeed, urged Du Bois, Woodson’s institutional achievements constituted “a unique and marvelous monument” left not only to African Americans but to the people of the United States. Woodson’s work, as Du Bois acknowledged, was of inestimable value in inducing African Americans to esteem their own story as black people.

With the same spirit as that with which Woodson and Du Bois wrought, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, “the largest and most powerful black nationalist organization the world has ever known,” aggressively promoted education in African history. Launched in 1914 by Marcus Garvey, the UNIA aimed in part to stimulate a spirit of race pride in Africans and peoples of African descent and to establish universities, colleges, and secondary schools to educate black children. In pursuit of that agenda, it projected its message through two main publications to audiences located on both sides of the Atlantic: The *Negro World* and the *Daily Negro Times*. The *Negro World* “became the most widely circulated race paper in America.” A team of writers which included the self-educated historians John Edward Bruce, Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, William Henry Ferris, Hubert Henry Harrison, Duse Mohamed Ali, and Robert Poston published literary reviews and historical columns which “captured the imagination of over fifty thousand subscribers and several hundred thousand readers a week.” The organization also drew to its standard the support of a formidable cohort of black intellectuals who enabled its chapters to offer lectures in history. Counted among its lecturers were Bruce, Harrison, Schomburg, and Joel Augustus Rogers. Their work carried to a membership counted in the hundreds of thousands, if not indeed in the millions, a ‘vindicationist’ narrative of Africa’s past.

Consider the activities and views of Hubert Henry Harrison. It was Harrison, argues his biographer Jeffrey Perry, who in New York City stimulated the racial consciousness and activism among African Americans and laid down the institutional

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312 Crowder, *John Edward Bruce*, p. 153
foundation that Marcus Garvey tapped to build the racial ideology and the organizational apparatus of the UNIA.  

Harrison, born in St. Croix in the Virgin Islands in 1883, had settled in New York at the age of seventeen and had developed a reputation as an intellectual phenomenon. His intellectual range extended from philosophy to literature, from evolution to economics, from astronomy to race. His inventory of skills included acquaintance with Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, and Latin. A writer, he was assistant editor of the socialist publication *The Masses* for four years, and he published book reviews and articles in outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *New York World*, the *New York Tribune*, the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, the *West Indian Statesman*, leading African American newspapers, and various freethought publications. An orator of brilliance, he spoke at open-air meetings and on radio shows as well as in institutional venues such as City College, New York University, Columbia University, public libraries, and YMCAs. Penetrating in his social thought, he was a crusader for the causes of underprivileged groups, a staunch advocate of education for the woman and man in the street rather than education solely for an elite, and a committed social activist. As editor for four years of the *Negro World* he made a central contribution to the ideological effectiveness of the Garvey movement.

Like Du Bois and Woodson, Harrison placed heavy emphasis on African history. “Garvey’s emphasis on racialism was due in no small measure, “wrote Joel Augustus Rogers,” to Harrison’s lectures on Negro history and his utterances on racial pride, which animated and fortified Garvey’s views.”

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314 Ibid., pp. 151-152
Society for Historical Research, Harrison understood clearly how an ignorance of Africa’s past undermined the self-confidence of the African American child and how an awareness of his own history was central to strengthening the African American adult in his confrontation with the white American. Working from that awareness, he developed a fifteen-lecture series on the culture of Africa. The African origin of civilization was the subject of the last lecture that he presented, indeed, at the Harlem YMCA in December, 1927, before his death. He urged that African American colleges should offer courses in the culture of the West African and the history of the African. His own clarity about African history bolstered his pride in race. “I, Sir,” he wrote at the age of twenty-one years in a letter to the editor of the New York Times, “am a Negro, and, strange as it may appear, I am proud of it.”

John Jackson, who had known Harrison and had heard him lecture, recalled that Harrison, commenting on hearing black people singing a hymn asking God to bleach them whiter than snow so that they might enter the kingdom of heaven, said that he would rather remain black and go to hell. For Harrison, knowledge of history, personal self-confidence, and group empowerment walked hand in hand.

The vision of Africa’s past which Harrison projected, like that advanced by Du Bois, stressed the crucial role played by Africans in the human story. Humankind, he argued, began in Africa: the species had evolved millions of years before from the apes of Africa. Africans had played a pioneering role in Mediterranean civilization. Herodotus had characterized many of the Egyptians as being black and all of them as being dark,

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had attributed the foundation of Greek art, science, and religion to Egyptian culture, and
had attributed the foundation of Egyptian culture, in turn, to black Ethiopian civilization.
Africans in the west of the continent, like those in the north, had long been, and
continued to be, ‘civilized.’ Thus the Yoruba knew centuries before Europeans did that
flies and mosquitoes carried disease; black Africans were administering vaccines against
smallpox long before Edward Jenner lived; and Africans certainly possessed the notion of
God. Africa “was prolific in statesmen, scientists, poets, conquerors, religious and
political leaders, arts and crafts, industry and commerce when the white race was
wallowing in barbarism or sunk in savagery.” Indeed the achievements of Africans
were such that they had a great deal to teach African Americans; the very West Africans
whom African Americans aspired to lead were in actuality a long way ahead of them; and
African Americans, rather than seeking to ‘civilize’ Africans, would do well to try to
learn from them. Having African ancestry, argued Harrison, was something of which
every African American could be proud.

The activities and views of John Edward Bruce also illustrate the importance of
African history in the ideology of the UNIA. Bruce, born in 1856 in Maryland, began a
career as a journalist at the age of eighteen. Over the remainder of his sixty-eight years,
journalism was his primary occupation. He published in outlets ranging from the North
Carolina Republican to the New York Times to the Cherokee Advocate. His voice ranged
as far afield as the West African Record, the South African Spectator and the Jamaica

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319 Jackson, Hubert Henry Harrison: The Black Socrates; Perry, ed., A Hubert Harrison Reader; James, Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia. For some differences between Harrison’s and Garvey’s views of contemporary Africans, see James, Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia, p. 129
Advocate. “Bruce Grit” was the name under which he frequently wrote. He also edited a number of periodicals and published his own newspapers and journals. After meeting Marcus Garvey in about 1916, he placed his trans-Atlantic network of friends and acquaintances in Africa and the Caribbean at the disposal of Garvey’s movement. That network included personages such as Arthur Schomburg, Library of Congress librarian Daniel A. Murray, pan-African thinkers Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummell and J. Robert Love, Majola Agbebi who founded the first independent African church in West Africa, lawyer and newspaper editor J. E. Casely Hayford, Gold Coast educator J. E. K. Aggrey, and John L. Dube, Solomon Plaatje, and D. D. T. Jabavu of the South African Native National Congress. In his later years Bruce became personal secretary to Marcus Garvey. In addition he too, like Harrison, wrote for the Negro World.

In company with his ‘vindicationist’ peers, Bruce immersed himself in the work of disputing mainstream visions of Africa’s past. Convinced, as they were, that an awareness of their history was necessary if African Americans would resist white supremacist ideology effectively, he collected materials relating to African and African American history, carried out research, gave speeches, and published texts on those themes. The tenor of some of his articles and speeches is suggested by titles such as “Greeks, Romans, and Negroid Egypt” and “Ancient Glory of the Negro Race.” In 1899 he gave an address on Alexander Pushkin in which he traced the poet’s tie to an African grandfather. In 1904 he began publishing a series of pamphlets that presented the history of Africans and African Americans, including the history of Ethiopia in antiquity. “His articles and public lectures,” writes Ralph Crowder, “were always punctuated with

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Crowder, John Edward Bruce; Seraile, Bruce Grit
references to historical situations or the need for African Americans to use history as a tool to offset the inferiority doctrine promoted by whites.”

In company with others, he lobbied to have black history incorporated in African American elementary and secondary school curricula and to have African American colleges establish courses and chairs in black history. He played a key role, according to George Shepperson, in sharing Africa’s past with important pan-African and African nationalist thinkers in a way that affirmed the value of their blackness. His activities extended as well to building and strengthening institutions that focused on African and African American history. In 1899 he created the Alexander Crummell Historical Club to promote knowledge of the achievements of the black man. Working with Arthur Schomburg and others, he co-founded in 1911, in his home, the Negro Society for Historical Research, and served as its first president. In 1914 he joined Schomburg, James Weldon Johnson, and others in forming the Negro Library Association. In his mature years he functioned as a bridge between historians and other scholars who had received formal training in universities and those who had trained themselves, particularly in his role as a member of the American Negro Academy, which had been established in 1897. Through organizations like the Men’s Sunday Club, whose meetings took place at his home, he mentored younger men whose intellects were self-trained and who had a commitment to racial advance. He provided a father figure to African students who came to the United States. Indefatigable, committed, he too made African history a centerpiece of his endeavors within and without the UNIA.

321 Crowder, John Edward Bruce, p. 44
322 Shepperson, “Notes,” pp. 309-310
Manifestly Du Bois’s voice was not alone, then, in contributing ideologically to twentieth-century African Americans’ shift in consciousness concerning Africa. Nevertheless we can trace a distinct line of influence that his understanding of Africa’s history exercised. The vision of Africa’s past that he advanced provided inspiration for several young African Americans who would become historians and educators and who in turn would influence the consciousness of others. William Leo Hansberry was one such young man. Born in 1894 in Gloster, Mississippi, Hansberry became a seminal voice in the field of African history. From the 1920s through the 1950s he stood at the forefront of African American research in African history. A visionary, he launched a program in African history at Howard University in 1922, long before mainstream institutions or even African American institutions had made any serious commitment to African studies.\(^323\) A distinguished scholar, his lectures bore the mark of an historical consciousness that was disciplined, original, resourceful, radical – inspired, even – and that valued keenly thoroughness in research and clarity of exposition. Like Du Bois, Hansberry conceived his scholarship on Africa as being part of a larger project of establishing what it was that historical, ethnological, and archaeological evidence had suggested about the intellect and capabilities of Africans in the eras antedating and corresponding to antiquity and to the European medieval period.\(^324\) Like Du Bois, he took up this project in explicit opposition to claims that Africans had produced no civilization and had no history. Like Du Bois, his work influenced a younger generation of black


\(^{324}\) Hansberry does not specify the antiquity to which he is referring. The context of his remarks suggests that he is referring to Graeco-Roman antiquity. However the possibility cannot be ruled out that he has in mind also Egyptian antiquity.
men and women. His story exemplifies the difference that Du Bois made through his narratives of Africa’s past.

Hansberry, when he wrote of his own development as an historian, pointed to Du Bois as having played a significant role in his intellectual unfolding. As a boy he had already developed a foundation in the history of ancient Greece and Rome through reading materials contained in the library of his father, who had taught at Alcorn University. He attended elementary and secondary schools in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia. The last of them, Old Atlanta University, was where he also completed his first year of university. It was at this moment that Du Bois intervened in his formative intellectual development through the instrument of *The Negro*. He encountered the work in the summer of 1916, one year after it appeared. “I ordered a copy immediately and when it arrived I soon discovered that the little book contained just the type of information for which I had been searching for many months.”

In *The Negro* Du Bois had suggested that readers seeking additional knowledge might wish to consult the books listed in the accompanying bibliography. Hansberry then sought access to Harvard University for the specific purpose of gaining access to those works. His formal education continued at Harvard, where he received a bachelor of science degree in 1920 and later earned a master’s degree. *The Negro* showed him the way forward at a point early enough in his intellectual growth to enable him to master contemporary knowledge relating to Africa’s past while still a young man and to disseminate that knowledge to generations of students. Du Bois himself came to view *The Negro* as being but a modest

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326 Ibid., p. 81
product. He later wrote of it: “[it] gave evidence of a certain naïve astonishment on my own part at the wealth of fact and material concerning the Negro peoples, the very existence of which I had myself known little despite a varied university career. The result was a condensed and not altogether logical narrative.” 327 Whatever the faults of the work from Du Bois’s perspective, however, it played a pivotal role in establishing African history in the African American academy, because it was the text which made available an intellectual road map, and a model of the kind of treatment of Africa’s past that he himself might wish to venture, for the pioneering and talented young William Leo Hansberry.

An acute awareness of the need to work data produced out of pioneering research on Africa into a freshly conceived, coherent, extensive vision of Africa’s past is evident in the work of Hansberry. Consider his discussion of the cultural history of part of west-central Africa.328 Here was an early work, appearing in the Journal of Negro History in 1921 when Hansberry was about twenty-seven years old. Reviewing evidence of an archaeological nature, in the main, although drawing as well upon other kinds of sources, Hansberry proposed that in pre-classical and pre-Christian times indigenous Africans had created in central Africa a highly cosmopolitan and accomplished civilization, “a genuinely superior type of culture,” that of “a mighty people with a glorious past.”329 The highly polished clay walls and clay benches, conical clay tombs, carved works such as elephant tusks and wood caskets, glass and porcelain objects including terra cotta portraits, and metal castings produced by African artists and craftsmen stood shoulder to

327 Du Bois, The World and Africa, p. vii
329 Ibid., pp. 265, 271
shoulder, he pointed out, with some of the best art of other ancient civilizations, in the view of European scholars. His own estimate, he explained, based on the evidence and on the assessment of it by European counterparts, was that in light of the ingenuity, resourcefulness, originality, technical expertise, and artistic perfection that they displayed the artifacts “place the ancient and medieval African on a plane with, and in many cases above, his contemporaries in Europe and America.”\textsuperscript{330} The achievements of the community were that much more remarkable, he commented, when account was taken of the challenges posed by the nature of the climate and by the utter absence of certain resources – stone, for example – with which to work. On the question of the ability of the artists and artisans and craftsmen to work in stone, he argued that evidence suggested that had they had access to the material, they would have worked it with great skill: they were confined to working in other materials simply because there was absolutely no stone available in their region. He disputed the claim that the culture which had produced the artifacts was introduced by Arabs or Europeans rather than being created by indigenous Africans, pointing out that the cities in which those cultural artifacts were to be found had already reached the highest point in the development of their grandeur before the arrival of Europeans, and that the cultural life of the region had stood at a much higher level prior to European contact than that which had obtained in the centuries following such contact. In “Material Culture of Ancient Nigeria” Hansberry offered a careful, detailed, convincing affirmation of African cultural agency and accomplishment.

Through his teaching Hansberry made a signal impact on young men of the continent and of the Diaspora. He taught at Howard University for nearly forty years.

\textsuperscript{330} Ibid., p. 266
By all accounts his lectures commanded large audiences and affected a goodly number of students. Joseph Harris, who edited some of Hansberry’s notes and lectures after Hansberry’s death, wrote in 1977 that “I . . . am . . . convinced that Professor Hansberry’s influence as a teaching historian and humanist can never be fully determined. During my travels to Africa and the Caribbean over the past few years, I have encountered several persons in various professions who recalled Leo Hansberry as the Howard professor who really provided the inspiration and perspective they needed to succeed as black persons.” Hansberry’s protégés counted among them statesmen and scholars. Nnamdi Azikiwe, future president of an independent Nigeria, wrote of Hansberry that “[y]ou initiated me into the sanctuaries of anthropology and ancient African history.”

Hansberry’s contributions to the field of African Studies, Azikiwe established in 1963 the Hansberry Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka. Williston Lofton, another student of Hansberry’s, later joined Hansberry as professor of History at Howard. “Several of the leaders of the Black studies movement of the 1960s and 1970s were [Hansberry’s] protégés,” Joseph Harris noted as he reflected on Hansberry’s impact. John Henrik Clarke, who was born in 1915 in Alabama, was one such pioneer. His awareness of Africa began in early boyhood, he recalled, with listening to his great-grandmother’s stories of the continent and of how his great-grandfather had vigorously resisted enslavement. He credited Hansberry with having exposed him to the ‘philosophical meaning’ of African history and with having ‘deepened [his] understanding of African Studies’ as he listened to Hansberry’s lectures, even though he

counted Arthur Schomburg, the Afro-Puerto Rican bibliophile and amateur historian, as having exercised the decisive influence upon his intellectual development. Clarke would go on to teach African history at Hunter College of the City University of New York and at Cornell University. He would serve as president of the African Heritage Studies Association and as associate editor of *Freedomways* magazine. In addition he would become a chronicler of the Afrocentric conversation that made its presence felt on the mainstream intellectual landscape in the second half of the twentieth century and an interlocutor of some of the conversation’s major participants. Through his students he would help to shape the field of Black Studies. Counting among his students were, by his own calculation, “at least eleven who [were] heads of Black Studies programs.” Clarke held Du Bois in high esteem. He participated in the development of the edited collection of essays titled *Black Titan* which paid tribute to Du Bois seven years after Du Bois’s passing. A direct line of inspiration linked Clarke to Hansberry and in turn to Du Bois; and through Clarke, Hansberry, and so Du Bois, reached deep into the education of black students of the latter half of the twentieth century.

By means the work of Chancellor Williams, not students alone but a global audience felt the impress of Du Bois’s thought on African history; and again Hansberry was the intermediary who transferred the staff from one warrior to the other. “Standing alone and isolated in the field for over thirty-five years, William Leo Hansberry was the teacher who introduced me to the systematic study of African history and, of equal

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334 Clarke, *My Life in Search of Africa*, p. 3
importance, to the ancient documentary sources,” wrote Chancellor Williams. The son of a freedman, Williams earned a Master’s degree in History from Howard University in 1935 and a Doctoral degree in History and Sociology from American University in 1949. In 1961 he succeeded Hansberry as professor in the Department of History at Howard University. In 1971 he published *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 BC to 2000 AD*. The work, based upon years of research within and beyond Africa, chronicled assaults by outsiders upon African civilizations. *Destruction*, claimed the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, “catapulted [Williams] to cult-figure status” and bestowed upon him “worldwide renown.” Authors such as Robin Walker, whose recent *When We Ruled: The Ancient and Medieval History of Black Civilizations* attempts to survey African civilizational cultures across not only the continent but also western and southern Asia, acknowledge their debt to Williams’s *opus*. Through Williams, Hansberry’s influence, and so Du Bois’s, reached beyond the academy to an international constituency.

Williams, it should be noted, drew early and directly, as well as later through the agency of Hansberry, from Du Bois’s wisdom concerning Africa’s history. He explained that his childhood awareness of literature exploring African and Diasporic history arose in part through reading works listed on the back pages of *The Crisis*. Outlining the origins of his intellectual journey, he penned a statement that merits presentation in its entirety, for what it reveals about the role of Du Bois’s account of African history in

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337 “Chancellor Williams,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 76 p. 198
promoting awareness and approbation of Africa’s past among young African Americans.\textsuperscript{339}

In a small town surrounded by cotton fields in South Carolina, a little black boy in the fifth grade began to harass teachers, preachers, parents and grandparents with questions which none seemed able to answer: How is it that white folks have everything and we have nothing? Slavery – how and why did we become their slaves in the first place? White children go to fine brick, stone and marble schools nine months a year while we go to a ramshackle old barn-like building only five-and-a-half months, then to the cotton fields. Why?

In the sixth grade one of our teachers, Ms. Alice Crossland, helped me to become a sales agent for the \textit{Crisis} and the \textit{Norfolk Journal and Guide}. This was like turning on the floodlights of heaven: for the books on our race, listed on the back pages of the \textit{Crisis}, started me off on their never-ending search, raising more questions as I progressed through school, questions whose answers were even more perplexing. For, having read everything about the African race that I could get my hands on, I knew even before leaving high school that (1) \textit{The Land of the Blacks} was not only the “cradle of civilization” itself but that the Blacks were once the leading people on earth; (2) that Egypt once was not only all-black, but the very name “Egypt” was derived from the Blacks; (3) and that the Blacks were the pioneers in the sciences, medicine, architecture, writing, and were the first builders in stone, etc.

Williams’s experience captures the saving grace that Du Bois’s vision of Africa’s past supplied to fledgling spirits seeking answers and affirmation in a world deeply antagonistic to their needs.

Horace Mann Bond was another such spirit who drank early from Du Bois’s cup. Bond, born in 1904, became a leading African American educator, scholar, and policymaker in the 1940s and 1950s. The roster of educational institutions at which he taught included Lincoln University, the Colored Agricultural and Normal University of Oklahoma, Fisk University, Dillard University, the Alabama State Normal School, and Tuskegee Institute. In addition he worked with the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a philanthropic organization involved in African American education. In 1939 he began an eighteen-year sojourn in educational administration, serving six years as president of Fort

\textsuperscript{339} Williams, \textit{The Destruction of Black Civilization}, p. 18.
Valley State College in Georgia and then twelve years as president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He was the first African American to preside at Lincoln, a distinguished men’s college which had been founded to educate blacks and which counted among its graduates Nnamdi Azikiwe and the first president of an independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. He rarely forsook the classroom: while serving as a college president he continued to teach, and after leaving the presidency of Lincoln in 1957 he taught at Atlanta University until his retirement. He developed a reputation as a scholar. The two main foci of his research were mental and psychological tests and African American education. Ultimately he published six books and over seventy articles. He played a role in shaping public policy: he contributed, for instance, to the research carried out for the legal brief submitted by the NAACP in the *Brown v. Board of Education* suit. Through it all he carried with him to his positions of influence an enduring and passionate interest in Africans and Africa and their history. That interest had roots partly in *The Crisis* and Du Bois.340

By his report, Bond first became aware of Africa and Africans during his childhood years. His Aunt Mamie, his mother’s sister, who lived with his family in Kentucky and played an active role in shaping his intellectual development, had earned a medical degree and had served as a medical missionary in Africa. Aunt Mamie, notes Bond’s biographer, “had instilled in her nephew an enduring love for that continent and its people.”341 In addition, the *Crisis* helped to imbue him with a positive image of Africa

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341 Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond*, p. 146
and Africans. Bond, already in 1912 at age eight a reader of the *Crisis*, later recalled specifically:

My father was a charter subscriber to *The Crisis* Magazine when it began publication in 1910…. I was an avid reader of *The Crisis*, from my earliest literate days. We lived in rural Kentucky places and my isolation from the world was the greater because I read omnivorously. Through *The Crisis* Du Bois helped shape my inner world to a degree impossible to imagine in the world of contemporary children, and the flood of various mass media to which they are exposed…. And Africa! For an American child growing up between 1910 and 1920, there was scarcely an antidote anywhere for the poisonous picture of Africa, and of Africans, painted in the school geographies, the newspapers and magazines, and by the movies. *The Crisis* magazine gave me the one antidote available. From the earliest day of *The Crisis*, Africans were revealed as intelligent human beings. I have long counted it as one of my great blessings that I read Du Bois on Africa when I was very young.

These early influences were supplemented in later years by personal contacts and graduate-level formal instruction. While in college and graduate school, Bond had African classmates, learned about Africa from his teachers, and took courses on Africa. However *The Crisis* helped to lay the foundation of awareness and respect that encouraged Bond in his later explorations and that ultimately bloomed into a wholehearted involvement with Africans.

The priority which Bond placed upon Africa and Africans played itself out in a variety of ways in his professional life. He worked to attract more African students to Lincoln and to other institutions in the country. He invested considerable effort in encouraging the provision of scholarships for African students. Beginning in 1949, he visited Africa on more than ten occasions. Deepening Africans’ understanding of African Americans and *vice versa* became a central preoccupation. According to his

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biographer, he “constantly sought to enhance the image of Africa and Africans in the minds of African Americans. He especially tried to correct the impression that American blacks had little appreciation for or interest in their African roots and African brothers and sisters.”344 Conscious of the hostility of American culture towards Africans, he was an early president of the American Society for African Culture (AMSAC), one of whose aims was “to help Western and more particularly American culture sweep away the prejudices that would deny the contributions of African culture.”345 In his view, far from being ‘primitive’ people, Africans were brimming with potential.346 In Africa itself, indeed, his brother J. Max Bond became president of the College of Liberia partly with his help. At Lincoln he created an Institute of African Studies, he expanded the institution’s curricular offerings in African studies, and he himself took time away from a demanding schedule as college president to develop and teach a course in African history. A commitment to Africa attracted more and more of his talent and energy as he rose through the ranks of the academy.

Bond, Williams, and Hansberry illustrate the claim that while the mainstream scholarly community was not responding to Du Bois’s account of Africa’s past, African Americans were listening and learning. Du Bois’s thinking on the full spectrum of issues facing Africans Americans drew the attention of young members of the race. Listen to the testimony of man of letters Langston Hughes: “[s]o many thousands of my generation were uplifted and inspired by the written and spoken words of . . . Du Bois

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344 Urban, Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, p. 149
345 Quoted at page 159 of Urban, Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond.
that for me to say I was so inspired would hardly be unusual . . . My earliest memories of written words are those of Du Bois and the Bible. My maternal grandmother in Kansas, the last surviving widow of John Brown’s Raid, read to me as a child from both the Bible and The Crisis."³⁴⁷ Hear Paul Robeson, who graduated from college in 1919: “[w]e [Negro students . . . read religiously The Crisis of which he was editor for so many years, and in which he wrote clearly, constructively and militantly on the complex problems of the American scene, on the Negro question, on Africa, and on world affairs.”³⁴⁸ Hear Benjamin Mays, president of Morehouse College in Atlanta: “I’ve followed Dr. Du Bois through the years from the time I was a high school student in South Carolina because I eagerly subscribed to the Crisis to read Dr. Du Bois’ editorial ‘As The Crow Flies’.”³⁴⁹ Listen to historian John Hope Franklin, who at age eleven first saw Du Bois. Franklin averred that for his generation of college students “Dr. Du Bois was our hero, and we did what we could to preserve the legacy of freedom and self-respect that Du Bois and his supporters bestowed upon us.”³⁵⁰ A still younger generation also attended to Du Bois: James Forman and H. Rap Brown, organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “both acknowledged being directly influenced by Du Bois,” writes historian Manning Marable.³⁵¹ What falls to be registered here is that

Du Bois’s thinking not only on civil rights and human rights and geopolitics but also his thinking on Africa’s past left a readily discernible mark.
CHAPTER SIX

Empowerment: The Ground

Even though Du Bois grew disillusioned about the willingness of establishment historians to acknowledge Africans’ historical accomplishments and the world significance of those accomplishments, his concern to elaborate the centrality of Africans’ role in world history continued until his death in Ghana in 1963 at ninety-five years of age. By then his public engagement with African history had extended over nearly half a century. His concern to highlight Africa’s central role in the human story had already found particular expression in *Africa: Its Place in Modern History* and in *The World and Africa* in the 1930s and 1940s. It had continued to find expression in the 1950s, as when he pointed out in 1957 in a foreword to *Decision in Africa* by the scholar and activist Alphaeus Hunton that he had been trying for fifty years to make clear “[Africa’s] role in the progress of the human race during the Twentieth Century,” and when he declared, in speech prepared in about 1959, that some writers thought to write universal history and yet leave out Africa.\(^{352}\) Now that concern found further expression in an effort, begun in 1962, to publish a comprehensive *Encyclopaedia Africana*. In that publication, it would appear, he had intended not only to reaffirm his conviction that the deeds of Africans were pivotal to understanding human history but also to present the

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vision of Africans’ deeds from an African point of view. Age did not deter him from continuing to press for highlighting Africans’ deeply creative role in the human story.

The idea of publishing an *Encyclopaedia Africana* had been gestating with Du Bois for decades. As early as 1909 he had carried the concept of such an encyclopaedia forward to the point where he had secured commitments from African American and white American scholars and from scholars in England, Italy, and France to sit on the board of advisors of the proposed publication. Lack of funding had prevented him from moving forward with the project. He had taken up the concept again during the Depression. By his account, that second foray into producing an encyclopedia had come about when, in 1931, the Phelps-Stokes Fund had planned the publication of an *Encyclopedia of the Negro* and, under duress, had invited Du Bois and Carter Woodson, to participate in the project. Again lack of funds had proved to be an insuperable difficulty – “chiefly, I am sure,” commented Du Bois years later, “because I had been named Editor-in-Chief.” As a result, this second attempt had yielded “only one thin preliminary volume.” 353 The project undertaken in the 1960s constituted a third effort to publish such an encyclopedia. This time the obstacle to completion proved to be definitive. Before it could be completed Du Bois passed away.

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But while Du Bois did not live to see the eventual publication of the *Encyclopaedia Africana* in 1977,\(^{354}\) his conception of the kind of world that people should live in, his concern to place world history in proper balance with Africa’s role fully acknowledged, his assertion that Egypt was an African civilization, his ultimate skepticism regarding the willingness of white historians to acknowledge Africans’ accomplishments, and his determination, emerging out of that awareness, independently to construct a scientifically informed narrative found a home in the work of a younger generation of formally trained and credentialed African American students of history. Maulana Karenga, Molefi Kete Asante, Jacob Carruthers, Asa Grant Hilliard, and other ‘Afrocentrist’ or ‘Afrocentric’ historians expressed in their work a continuity of endeavor with Du Bois. Like him, they investigated the past and reflected on it precisely in order to bring about societal change. Like him, they urged black people to embrace their history and culture. At the same time, however, discontinuities also made themselves evident. These historians called for black people to develop a significantly deeper relationship with their historical and cultural tradition than did Du Bois; they announced themselves as working from a methodological starting point different from that of Du Bois; they dealt differently with the question of audience than he did; and they adopted an attitude towards white audiences that was different from that which he adopted. These continuities and disjunctures illustrate the complex legacy of Du Bois in the African American historical community.

The principal continuity that united Du Bois and Karenga, Asante, Carruthers, and Hilliard was their image of the kind of world that should prevail. Du Bois, as we have

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noted, envisioned a world marked by justice, by equity, by an appreciation of the value of all people. Out of such a world would emerge that for which he strove: peace. Molefi Kete Asante expressed a similar vision. “We seek to introduce a new human ethic based on a higher civilization,” he wrote, “a peaceful agrarian mythology, a spiritual exploration of beauty, order, and harmony, so as to affirm a mission of spirit.” In this civilization, spirit and nature would unite harmoniously in the consciousness of the human self. What was wanted, he affirmed, was “a more equitable society,” “justice and liberty,” “a world of peace.” Asante recognized the identity of purpose linking Du Bois and himself. He described Du Bois as having been a humanist and as having moved forward the project of liberating oppressed peoples. “Du Bois’ unyielding mission,” he remarked, “was the humanizing of the world through the humanizing of America.” Maulana Karenga too acknowledged the continuity. “Du Bois . . . challenged the Black intellectual to rise above crisis,” he explained, “and dare pose a relevant paradigm of liberation and a higher level of human life.” Joseph Carruthers reiterated the same vision. The task at hand, he pointed out, was to restore “harmony among the Creator, Nature and man.” A clear line of purpose connected Du Bois and the Afrocentrist enterprise.

The work of Carruthers illustrated this shared objective. Carruthers’s Essays in Ancient Egyptian Studies, originally presented as lectures, reflected the thinking of an

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356 Ibid., p. 104
357 Ibid., p. viii
358 Ibid., p. 23
360 Carruthers, Essays, p. 71
activist who approached an understanding of history and culture as being the key to group restoration and world rehabilitation. Born in 1930 in Texas, Carruthers completed doctoral studies in political science at the University of Colorado. He taught at Prairie View College in Texas and at Kansas State College before joining the Center for Inner City Studies of Northeastern Illinois University. He served as founding president of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, an organization dedicated to liberating African people around the world through promoting the study of African civilizations. Carruthers made ancient Egypt, also called Kemet, one center of his intellectual praxis. His works on Kemet either explored dimensions of Kemetic culture or commented on the debate concerning the origins of civilization or delineated the directions which Kemetic studies should take in the future. In his Essays, Carruthers drew a direct line from grounding oneself historically and culturally in African values as expressed in the civilization of Kemet to being able to address the problems of modern humanity.

The argument that Carruthers presented in his Essays urged that what needed to come into being was a peace within and among societies, as Du Bois urged, but also a wider peace, one of the cosmos: a reconciliation among Creator, Nature, and man. For that to happen, he thought, Africans of the continent and of the Diaspora needed to

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361 For information about ASCAC, see http://www.ascac.org/
resurrect their authentic spiritual foundations. Therefore Africans would have to 
rediscover and embrace the worldview rooted in their own history and culture. The 
society the study of whose history and culture would do most to lend Africans that 
spiritual foundation was the society of Kemet, since that society provided “the best 
presently known source of data about the uncorrupted African past with enough data to 
not only verify the facts of African civilization but to begin the construction of a 
framework to reinterpret the history and social reality of the world.”

Ancient Egyptians were black Africans who had come from an area to the south of Egypt. The central 
element of their intellectual culture which their descendants would need to embrace would be the concept of Maat, understood as right, truth, justice, reciprocity, harmony, righteousness, balance. That concept had informed their social morality and their political philosophy and political institutions, including that of divine kingship, all of which had emerged autochthonously – those ideas and institutions were not foreign implants – and which had emphasized doing what was best for all, not enriching a minority at the expense of a majority. For continental and Diasporic Africans to learn and embrace African civilizational culture, artists would have to use their multiplicity of talents to “put forth truth of speaking and acting.”

In addition, challenges standing in the way of that learning and embrace would have to be met: challenges such as developing a new calendar based on a major African event such as the unification of the Two Lands constituting ancient Egypt; replacing the study of Latin and Greek as the principal classical language with the study of Egyptian hieroglyphic script, where Africans were concerned; utilizing ancient Egyptian names, not European and Asian names, for places

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363 Carruthers, Essays, p. xi
364 Ibid., p. 72
in the Nile Valley; and developing maps which presented the world as ancient Africans would have oriented it. An intellectual revolution would need to take place, and its goal would be to bring what Du Bois would have celebrated: a comprehensive reconciliation and peace.

What was this concept ‘Maat’ that had exercised so beneficent an influence in ancient Egyptian society? The work of Karenga explicated this concept and demonstrated his commitment to the same agenda as that of Carruthers and Du Bois. Karenga, born Ronald Everett in 1941, committed himself early and energetically to an agenda of social and cultural change. He took as a major undertaking what he called “intellectual self-determination and development.” 365 “I have argued since the 60’s and still contend,” he explained, “that the key crisis in Black life is the cultural crisis, i.e., the view and value crisis. It is a crisis which reflects itself in a deficient view of self, society and the world and in values or categories of commitment and priorities which diminish our human possibilities.” 366 An activist in the movement for civil rights in the United States, in the 1960s he established the cultural nationalist organization US which helped to establish departments of black studies and black student unions in academic institutions and to build community-based institutions. In 1966 he launched the African-American cultural festival and holiday Kwanzaa, designed to affirm African continental and Diasporic cultural principles and strengthen racial pride. He was an organizer, in addition, of the Million Man March to Washington, D. C. three decades later, in 1995. Having earned degrees in African Studies and in political science, he completed two doctorates, the first one in political science, the second one in social ethics. He served as professor and chair

365 Maulana Karenga, “Foreword,” in Carruthers, Essays, p. vii
366 Ibid.
of the Black Studies Department at California State University at Long Beach. Themes that united his published work were the nature of the moral universe and the imperative to put theory into practice through building family and community and through undertaking committed action and struggle. Some of his published work addressed those themes in an African historical context, specifically that of ancient Egypt.\(^{367}\) His *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, a magisterial work which emerged in 2004 from his dissertation for his second doctorate, explored the concept that underlay a community which would fit the Du Boisian vision: one marked by prosperity, by order, and by peace.

A just world could indeed come to be in our time, insisted Karenga, as did Du Bois. We knew this to be so, thought Karenga, because there once was a world which, imperfect though it might have been, celebrated precisely that ideal and ordered itself in alignment with that ideal. Maat was the “fundamental, pervasive, and enduring” concept of ancient Egyptian civilization. It invited scrutiny. Karenga undertook that scrutiny with a view to “[delineating] and critically [examining]” the moral vision to which the concept gave expression. “I am interested,” he explained, “in extracting from the available texts a reliable portrait and understanding of ancient Egypt’s highest moral standards, its delineation of right and wrong, its definitive concepts of relational obligations and rules of conduct and other data which composed and informed the ancient Egyptian moral

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universe.”

In his exposition of Maat Karenga laid out how the Maatian ideal had evolved and had become the governing concept of ancient Egyptian society over the course of its long history. He explored the nature of God as understood in the Maatian tradition of texts. He teased out the teachings of Maat with regard to what human beings should value and how they should behave. He investigated those assumptions about the character and origin of things which undergirded the moral teaching of Maat. He analyzed from the perspective of Maat what human beings were and what human beings were capable of becoming. Why? Those undertakings contributed, explained Karenga, towards a project of current relevance: towards “a philosophical reflection on what it meant and means now to practice Maat.” The goal of the project of explicating Maat in its full subtlety and complexity was to gain an understanding of ancient Egyptian ethical thought and practice on its own terms rather than in negative relation to the cultural projects of other peoples, to “[establish] the value of this restored tradition as an ethical option in our time,” and to bring it to bear in twenty-first century discourse and discussion about ethics. To what end? It lay in the service of recovering an ethical tradition “as both an intellectual and practical project” so as to “restore that which is in ruins and raise up that which was damaged and destroyed,” as the Egyptians themselves taught: “setting right that which is wrong and replenishing what is lacking, making it better and more beautiful than it was before, as the Maatian texts urge us.” The goal was to repair the world.


369 Karenga, *Maat*, pp. xiii, xv, 11, 12, 13, 26
How were we to effect that repair in the world of today? This was a question that Molefi Kete Asante took up with the same persistence in the closing decades of the twentieth century with which Du Bois had taken it up in the opening decades of the century. Asante became the most visible proponent of Afrocentrist thought. Author of more than sixty books and more than three hundred articles and essays, he extended his influence further still by training a generation of young scholars through directing more than a hundred doctoral dissertations. Born Arthur Lee Smith, Jr. in 1942 in Valdosta, Georgia into a family of impoverished circumstances, Asante secured his doctorate at age 26. Having attained a full professorship at the State University of New York at Buffalo at age 30 and formally trained in the field of Communications, he went on to chair the Department of Communications at SUNY Buffalo for seven years. In 1984 he assumed the chair of the Program in African American Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia. From that base he introduced the pioneer doctoral program in African American Studies in the United States. He became founding editor of the *Journal of Black Studies*. His research pursued several lines of inquiry. One major avenue concerned how historical knowledge ought to be presented to and processed by African and African diasporic populations under any circumstances but particularly in light of the intensely racist Eurocentrism that had marked European and American treatments of world history from the time of the emergence of the professional discipline.\textsuperscript{370} A second

topic that drew his attention was civilizations of Africans and processes informing the historical development of African societies. Here several publications, authored or edited or coedited by him, dealt with the civilization of Kemet, its impact on the world around it, and the twentieth-century conversation concerning that civilization and its impact. Other works on Africa looked at various dimensions of Africans’ history and culture, ranging from religious ideas to intellectual figures, from shared cultural patterns to media practices to ideological products. On the horizon of the twenty-first century he devoted his energy to the same project which Du Bois undertook: laying out the path to a better world.

Asante offered a package of specific prescriptions for how black people could move forward in his signature work *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*. The package included individual and collective steps such as taking an African name; creating a new rhetoric to express a perception of the world which was free from racism; thinking critically rather than passively about language and other symbols and about action; establishing Afrocentric schools; rewriting the grand narrative of history; and formulating a theology that reflected the history of African peoples. It also included developing an “Afrological” scholarship: a scholarship which trained its focus largely although not exclusively on the continental and Diasporic African worlds, drew “its vital energies, insights, concepts, and ideas, from the particular experiences of African people,” and

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deployed a methodological perspective that in choosing concepts and ascribing meaning to issues and behaviors reflected an awareness of the local and global contemporary context and an appreciation of and commitment to values forged by African people over the long course of time.\textsuperscript{372} Altogether these individual and collective undertakings would issue from, and would reflect, a process of extricating self and community from the alienation and the oppression that accompanied using as one’s guidepost the traditions of other peoples – a process of “freeing one’s mind.”

This imperative to “free one’s mind” formed a persistent theme flowing from the pens of Afrocentrist historians. “[F]reeing our minds of chains,” wrote Carruthers, was the principal reward of doing historical research on Kemet. “If we are to take command of the world and recreate an African world order,” he reflected, “we must first recover the ability to conceive of such a task. We must first take command of our own minds.”\textsuperscript{373} Karenga noted that “until we break the monopoly the oppressor has on our minds, liberation is not only impossible, it’s unthinkable.”\textsuperscript{374} Asante pressed the matter emphatically. “There can be no freedom until there is a freedom of the mind.”\textsuperscript{375} “Nothing can ever achieve for us the victory we seek but a recapture of our own minds.”\textsuperscript{376} Why? “Social and political conquest are the results of intellectual and spiritual conquest, and time does not change that fact.”\textsuperscript{377} Whatever specific steps might mark the agenda of individual and group empowerment, those steps all flowed within a current of an expanding mental liberation.

\textsuperscript{372} Asante, Afrocentricity, pp. 75, 77, 78, 83
\textsuperscript{373} Carruthers, Essays, pp. 36, 38
\textsuperscript{374} Karenga, “Foreword,” in Carruthers, Essays, p. vii
\textsuperscript{375} Asante, Afrocentricity, p. 41
\textsuperscript{376} Ibid., p. 59
\textsuperscript{377} Ibid., p. 44
What was it from which blacks needed to free their minds and spirits and what was it that they needed mentally and spiritually to embrace? What they idealized and what they envisioned, judged Asante. European values celebrated the material rather than the spiritual and lay preoccupied with the technical rather than with the human. “We are left believing that technique is the source of everything the West attempts . . . . It is a politics of the manipulation of things and substances as opposed to human significance. How many nuclear reactors are possible in one state? Can this mountain be moved? What are the possibilities of building a bigger bomb? Can we ascertain the results of energy loss in a certain place? How do we dispossess the Africans to steal their land and have them believe we are doing them a favor?”

In utter contrast, in African culture “[t]he self is the center of the world, animating it, and making it living and personal.” In the African vision, the material was real and so was the spiritual, and the self united in it the material and the spiritual, matter and mind, substance and form, oneself and the world, drawing no sharp lines, forcing no polarities. Again, in the Western vision, “[p]rogess . . . is not more knowledge but more technique. How to do it faster, smoother, longer, louder, and with greater exploitation . . .” constituted progress. The African vision was entirely different. There progress consisted in sifting to a deeper consciousness. “Progress . . . is related to the development of human personality because we are the source of life for the material and the spiritual; when we become more conscious of ourselves we shall be advanced and will make progress.” European social ideals celebrated confrontation and the “utter destruction of aliens,” viewed social

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378 Ibid., p. 105
379 Ibid., p. 104
380 Ibid.
harmony as being a lack of progress, and viewed progress as growing out of conflict. African people on the other hand demonstrated “a deep respect for the sacred, for harmony, for rhythm, for righteousness,” and a respect for difference and for pluralism and a vision of life as being founded in “culture, spirit, and harmony.”381 Shifting from European to African ideals and vision was fundamental to the project of mental unshackling.

European rhetoric as well as European values and vision formed part of what black people needed to free themselves from, argued Asante. He laid great stress on repudiating the strictures of language that held the African mind in a straitjacket of subordination. The problem with the rhetoric deployed in American society, as he saw it, was that at times white society used it as a weapon against black people. “[T]he oppressor seeks to use language for the manipulation of our reality.”382 It was a rhetoric that was “vile, corrupt, and vulgar,” because it committed itself to exploiting people and because it “makes the victim the criminal.”383 It featured “degrading terms” that black people themselves had unfortunately incorporated into their own speaking.384 Black people needed to create a language that served their liberation agenda. That language would not take its inspiration from opposing the language of the West: it would not raise up what was merely a reverse image of Western discourse. Rather, it would have recourse to another source entirely: the “history, culture, and materials of our existence.”385

381 Ibid., pp. 100, 102, 103
382 Ibid., p. 42
383 Ibid., p. 43
384 Ibid., p. 44
385 Ibid., p. 42
must gather the materials and sources from ourselves first.”386 The new rhetoric would be “a language of truth.”387 Using media of “voice, percussion, writing, and images,” it would feature concepts and symbols and would advance precepts that were “aggressive” and “innovative” and would embody new values; and on the ground of those values could be raised up, in the present day, a new society.388 “I seek a language whose axiological basis resides in history but [whose] pragmatic manifestations are in our present reality.”389 As a matter of personal empowerment, a new language would constitute an instrument of liberation. “Our language provides our understanding of our reality.”390 As a matter group empowerment, a new language would effect the same result. “Language is the essential instrument of social cohesion. Social cohesion is the fundamental element of liberation.”391 Freeing one’s mind from “the captivity of racist language” was “the first order of the intellectual.”392 A rehabilitation of rhetoric needed to accompany a reorientation of vision and value.

As Asante saw it, to free one’s mind of the imprint of one cultural and intellectual tradition necessarily entailed having access to another to which one could turn: it was not possible to reject one until it became possible to secure another. The ground of empowerment – that which made possible casting off chains and forging new ideals, new vision, new rhetoric, new world – consisted in returning to the richness of one’s own tradition. “Seek knowledge above all things,” Asante declared, “and open your hearts to

386 Ibid., p. 43
387 Ibid., p. 48
388 Ibid., pp. 44, 48
389 Ibid., p. 45
390 Ibid., p. 42
391 Ibid., p. 42
392 Ibid., p. 41
your own history.” Other Afrocentrist scholars thought likewise. Asa Hilliard was one. Born in 1933, Hilliard pursued formal training in psychology and in counseling that culminated in his receiving his doctorate in 1963. Thereafter a long career in teaching at pre-college and university levels which centered on the intellectual development of the African American child enabled him to develop recognized expertise in the areas of educational testing and evaluation. In a natural extension from that central concern, Hilliard addressed himself to the question of the kind of curriculum and socialization that would support African American children in reaching their intellectual potential and yield empowerment for the whole community. Thus arrived at African history, he helped to found the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations and to develop multimedia products relating to African history for popular audiences. From there he pushed through to farther shores, to survey the views of some of the participants in the conversation about Kemet to point to some of the obstacles that they faced, and to look at dimensions of Kemetic culture itself. Throughout, he stressed that black people, if they

393 Ibid., p. 6
would transform their situation in the world, had to ground themselves in their history and culture as Africans. “I address the need for an awakening of African people with an emphasis on the fact that this awakening can occur only through a systematic study of our own rich cultural heritage,” he wrote. “Our cultural base is the ‘tie that binds’. It is the source of our unity and power.” He continued: “before any substantial healing can take place [from the disaster occasioned by European and Arab slavery and cultural aggression] we Africans must ‘begin at the beginning’ and peruse the wisdom of our ancestors. . . . Our healing requires a greater conceptual frame than that provided by civil rights. First, we must see ourselves as an African people, or we will be unable to develop this critical frame . . . .” Again, “[w]e must know and understand our past in order to move forward. This does not mean that we should live blindly in the past, but it means that we must use the valuable wisdom that our ancestors left for us.” The recipe for empowerment in education, and in every other arena, was the same. “The first thing needed by educators and others attempting to solve our educational problems is a clear sense of history.”


395 The Afrocentrist consensus that in the return to one’s history and culture lay the ground of empowerment aligned with Du Bois’s own view that African American success was predicated on knowing their history. This agreement on strategy constituted a second continuity between the work of Du Bois and that of the Afrocentrist fraternity.

If the richness of one’s own tradition – of language, of values, of historical experience, of political and social and material custom – was not fully visible, then the necessary task was to resurrect it fully from the historical record, argued Afrocentrist historians. Doing that would not be easy. A people’s history was so easily lost and was so hard to recover. “The past escapes if it is not understood, clarified, and constantly reinterpreted in the light of new revelations. Reclamation is no simple task; it is, in fact, fraught with untold dangers,” noted Asante.396 Nevertheless there was no other way forward. What the project called for, in the African case, as Karenga expressed it, was “a kind of intellectual archaeology directed toward recovering and reconstructing classical African cultures as sources of paradigms for enriching and expanding modern African intellectual discourse and culture.”397 Probing the texts and civilization of Kemet was central to that endeavour, urged Asante, reaffirming Carruther’s analysis of where the project ought to begin.398 Acquiring whatever languages were relevant to the project was part and parcel of making the commitment. Asante himself developed linguistic skills that included familiarity with or fluency in Middle Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Akan, Yoruba, KiSwahili, Arabic, Portuguese, English, French, Spanish, and German. The goal was to make the strongest possible effort to piece together from evidence an understanding of a complex past.

Once one’s own tradition became visible through historical and cultural reconstruction, the task for each individual lay beyond merely studying it from the outside as a spectator, in the Afrocentrist view – and here Afrocentrism took a step

396 Asante, Afrocentricity, p. 87
397 Karenga, Maat, p. xiii
398 Asante, Afrocentricity, p. 11.
beyond Du Bois’s prescription. The task became one of internalizing the values and principles of that tradition as one’s own and then of placing oneself, garbed in one’s full consciousness of and participation in that tradition, at the center of intellectual analysis, intellectual synthesis, intellectual critique, and political action rather than allowing oneself to be, or to remain, displaced from that central position by a European or Asian or other subject. Taking up this ‘Afrocentric’ posture involved one in allowing oneself to surrender to, be inspired and animated by, be empowered by, and accord honor to the spirit and the values and the choices expressed by the ancestors who constituted one’s history and gave birth to one’s culture. It required one to live assertively in one’s own tradition, in view of the fact that the surrounding intellectual milieu typically placed the European and his tradition at the center of intellectual activity. Furthermore taking up this posture generated an understanding that one’s outlook and commitment and experience, more than one’s skin color, defined one’s identity. “Regardless to our various complexions and degrees of consciousness, we are by virtue of commitments, history and convictions an African people. Afrocentricity, therefore, is only superficially related to color, it is more accurately a philosophical outlook determined by history.”

Harkening to the theoretical perspective offered by Afrocentricity, surrendering to a living relationship with one’s tradition as Afrocentricity invited one to do, and deepening one’s understanding of the historical and cultural rather than purely racial nature of community constituted the culmination of an individual’s journey into empowerment.

If transforming one’s consciousness in relation to one’s tradition constituted the road to personal empowerment, how did one accomplish this transformation? Asante

399 Ibid., p. 37
anticipated the question and proffered an answer. One liberated oneself into a consciousness of oneself as being historically and culturally African through a process involving organized learning and personal experience. “[A]cquisition of consciousness is part pedagogical and part phenomenological. We learn from our teachers who have studied our history and given attention to our traditions and revolutionary possibilities; and we learn from the lowest stages of conflict with a racist opposition whenever we assert ourselves. Our consciousness grows at each stage until we are finally clear in our Afrocentricity.”

To put the point differently, “acceptance is a matter of consciousness and consciousness is the result of experience and conviction. The experience we have already had; the conviction comes when we can act on the basis of our history.” That history was worthy of awe: “for [the Afrocentrist] it is impossible to see how anything from outside ourselves can compare with what is in our history. We have a formidable history. . . .” Conscientization arrived through studying the story of Africans’ past from the perspective of the African subject, from learning Africans’ cultural traditions, and from reflecting on the response to one’s asserting oneself in the fullness of one’s entitlement and dignity as a human being.

Moving into Afrocentricity conferred upon the black person incalculable benefits, argued Afrocentrists. Against the drift and the absence of orientation that bespoke the deepest form of alienation and reflected the deepest oppression, an Afrocentric commitment conferred an existential location and moral location, an aesthetic location and political location, a spiritual location and a cosmological location. It lent to the

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400 Ibid., p. 35
401 Ibid., p. 39
402 Ibid., p. 10
African person – psyche ever battered by white racist assault – existential orientation, assurance, and integrity. “Afrocentricity is you. It derives from you and goes back to you,” explained Asante.\textsuperscript{403} “Afrocentricity is a transforming power that helps us to capture the true sense of our souls.”\textsuperscript{404} “There is no way more perfect than the way derived from your own historical experiences.”\textsuperscript{405} “Nothing is more right for you than the way derived from your own historical experiences.”\textsuperscript{406} Afrocentricity inspired in and explained to the individual his and her distinctive aesthetic sensibility. “Form, feeling, and time (rhythm) are the key criteria in discussing the aesthetic for black people. The form, feeling, and rhythm must come out of our cultural consciousness or memory.”\textsuperscript{407} Afrocentricity lent moral clarity amid life’s human drama. “We know [who] we are and what we are supposed to do to the degree that we know our history.”\textsuperscript{408} More specifically, it invited a definite moral outlook. “[T]o be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and white racial domination.”\textsuperscript{409} It defined a political agenda. “[T]he Afrocentric awareness is the total commitment to African liberation anywhere [and] everywhere by a consistent determined effort to repair any psychic, economic, physical, or cultural damage done to Africans. It is further a pro-active statement of the faith we hold in the future of [Africa] itself.”\textsuperscript{410} It bestowed spiritual power. “No Afrocentric person can ever have merely a consciousness of oppression, pain, and suffering. The present and future must be projected as victory,
indeed the present must be lived victoriously.”\footnote{Ibid., pp. 64-65} It yielded cosmological ground on which one could stand and live one’s life securely. “Historically derived truths,” emerging from human experience through time, “are the only real truths.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 101} “[A]ll truth resides in our own experiences if we only look there.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 61} The road to a better personal future was the Afrocentric road.

The road to an empowered community, not just an empowered individual, issued from each person’s walking the Afrocentric road. The reason was simple to see, and history displayed it clearly. “The breakdown of our central political organizations from the disintegration of Egypt during the coming of the foreigners all the way to the enslavement of Africans represents one massive slide away from our center.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 52} Rebuilding a shared “awareness of our collective history and future”\footnote{Ibid., p. 34} and centering the consciousness of the community upon that awareness was the answer to the problem of collective empowerment. Upon that collective consciousness – that rise of the African spirit – and upon nothing else would be built the material and other forms of advance of African people. “There can be no effective discussion of a united front, a joint action, a community of interest until we come to good terms with collective consciousness, the elementary doctrine of economic, political, and social action.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 40} It would be a collective consciousness of historical and cultural tradition as well as of “shared commitments, fraternal reactions to assaults on our humanity, collective awareness of our destiny, and
respect for our ancestors” 417 that would make possible any renaissance of African civilization. “. . . I contend that the acceptance of the past will be the beginning of our liberation.”418 “[T]hose African leaders who speak about a renaissance of Africa must know that it is impossible without some appeal to a classical past. One does not live in the past, but one uses the past for advances toward the future.”419 Featuring in that awareness of the past would be, among other themes, the intellectual and material culture of Kemet. “When the results of our reflection on a neo-Kemetic reality really captures the continental imagination in Africa we will see the beginning of new world.”420 The sedimentation of historical and cultural awareness and the cultivation of a collective consciousness which was centered on that awareness would then have to be married to individual initiative, since collective consciousness was the indispensable platform for societal transformation but was not the catapult of it. Persons would then have make intellectual and economic choices, on the basis of that consciousness, which functioned to empower the community. “The past . . . only tells us what is possible; it cannot fight for us except in a psychological sense. We accept the psychological support and laud ourselves for having ancestors who gave us such a powerful legacy.”421 Now the individual would have to live his or her life in a spirit of transformational engagement with the world. The responsibility was his. “‘You are the miracle of the way.’”422 In that living there could be no mediocrity. “[T]he only road to happiness and harmony is

417 Ibid., p. 35
418 Ibid., p. 39
419 Ibid., p. 11
420 Ibid., p. 83
421 Ibid., p. 51
422 Ibid., p. 113
excellence in everything.”423 Through group consciousness coupled with individual excellence, Afrocentricity could restore a people.

Importantly, in calling for Africans of the continent and the Diaspora to center themselves in their history and culture, Afrocentrist historians did not see themselves as journeying in the wake primarily of Du Bois even though they saw in his work a similarity of humanizing purpose and even though he, like they, pointed to awareness of one’s history and culture as forming the indispensable ground of group empowerment. Asante judged that even though Du Bois became over time more Afrocentric in his outlook424 and “prepared the world for Afrocentricity”425 and “would have shouted to see it come”426 – so leaving us tempted to see the Afrocentric project as an evolution out of Du Bois and others rather than as being a development independent of Du Bois – Du Bois was not Afrocentric, in the last analysis, in his outlook. Carruthers, when in 1984 and again in 1999 he had occasion to mention his intellectual ancestry, overlooked Du Bois’s name.427 Du Bois loomed so large on the landscape of African American writing on African history in the first half of the twentieth century that Carruthers’ silence regarding him seemed to make its own statement. Admittedly Carruthers did write that the individuals whom he recognized as being his intellectual forebears stood “among others”428 but Du Bois was too prominent a thinker on the subject of African history to have been left in the company of a collectivity. When Carruthers went on to claim that “[t]he African worldview is essential to a proper explanation of world history. Otherwise

423 Ibid., p. 121
424 Ibid., p. 25
425 Ibid., p. 23
426 Ibid.
428 Carruthers, Essays, p. 14
we are merely engaging in the old Negro history game of adding the Negro contribution to white history;”

one had the feeling that he would place Du Bois among those who sat at the table of that particular game. The suspicion gained confirmation later in his analysis, when, citing *The Negro* and *The World and Africa*, he labeled Du Bois as an ‘integrationist’ historian of Africa who limited his undertaking to acknowledging the African presence in world history rather than extending it to excavating and celebrating the historical evolution of African culture on its own terms without reference to European and other history:

[George Washington] Williams along with DuBois started a strain of integrationist thought on ancient Kamit. They argued only that Blacks had a share in building the Egyptian civilization along with other races. This strain which is completely enthralled to European historiography is continued today by such Blacks as John Hope Franklin, Anthony Norguera and Ali Mazrui.

Afrocentrist historians, while typically acknowledging Du Bois’s stature in having played a central role in the process of group liberation, nevertheless placed him on the margin of the lineage of the Afrocentrist historical paradigm.

Who sat in the center of that lineage, then, if not Du Bois? The scholars to whom Afrocentrists typically attributed dominant influence over their own intellectual trajectories were the African historians Cheikh Anta Diop and Theophile Obenga. Asante credited Obenga with having influenced his intellectual development and Diop, together with Karenga, as having been among his central intellectual mentors. Karenga, for his part, saw Diop and Obenga as being key figures in the line of inspiration that culminated in his own work and that of a number of scholars of his generation. He described Diop’s

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430 Carruthers, *Essays*, p. 35

work as being about “inform[ing] and inspir[ing] our projects to rescue and reconstruct the rich and varied legacy of classical African civilization and use it as a source of paradigms of and for human possibility and creativity.”

For Diop, he pointed out, it was important to focus on ancient Egypt because “the rescue and reconstruction of ancient Egyptian history and culture as part of African history and culture” would renew African culture, create a new body of human sciences, and “reconcile” African civilization with world history. This vision of Diop’s -- shared by Obenga, as Karenga saw it – had motivated African continental and Diasporic scholars including himself to undertake projects of recovering the intellectual civilization of ancient Egypt. In the view of Afrocentrist historians, Diop and Obenga, not Du Bois, held pride of place in the Afrocentrist pantheon.

The Cheikh Anta Diop to whom Karenga referred was well known in the field of African studies. Born in Senegal in 1923, Diop completed baccalaureate studies in mathematics and philosophy in Senegal and then pursued studies in physics in Paris. In 1960 he secured his doctorate of letters from the University of Paris at Sorbonne, defending a thesis in which he argued that ancient Egypt had been a black African civilization. Unusually versatile intellectually, with expertise ranging from linguistics, anthropology, and history to chemistry and physics, he founded and directed the radiocarbon laboratory at the University of Dakar and taught in the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences at the university. His research addressed a number of tightly linked

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432 Karenga, *Maat*, p. xv
433 Ibid., pp. 16-17
questions. Did all Africans share the same culture in antiquity? Did that sharing include Africans in Egypt? Was that surprising or natural – who exactly were the ancient Egyptians? What were some expressions of that shared African culture in antiquity? How did African social and political systems compare with those of Europe? What conclusion should be drawn as to the relative value and merit of African and European culture? How, in view of Africans’ history and culture, were Africans and Africa to move forward from the current moment? In light of the timing, focus and extent of his work, among his peers the consensus was to view Diop as being the standard-bearer among continental African scholars seeking to provide an accurate picture of the place of Africans and Africa in world history.

434 Works that fall outside this line of questions nonetheless relate directly to it, indicating the coherence of Diop’s corpus. Examples are Physique nucleaire et chronologie absolue (Dakar: IFAN c. 1974) and Le laboratoire de radiocarbone de L’Ifan (Dakar: IFAN 1968)


Obenga followed in the footsteps of Diop and worked alongside him. Born in Brazzaville in the Republic of the Congo, Obenga, like Diop, educated himself in a broad range of disciplines. He completed advanced studies in philosophy, education, history, linguistics, philology, Egyptology, and Prehistory from institutions in Europe and the United States. His training and exposure embraced ancient and modern languages including Egyptian hieroglyphic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, French, English, and Italian. An Egyptologist, he held membership in the Societe Francaise d’Egyptologie and in the African Society of Culture. He directed the Ecole Normale Superieure in Congo, directed the International Center of Bantu Civilizations in Gabon, and held a professorial appointment at San Francisco State University. Beyond his commitments to the academy, he also donned the hat of government official, serving as Congo’s Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of President Joachim Yhombi-Opango. In his scholarship he maintained a focus on African societies. He divided his attention between exploring societies developed by people speaking BaNtu languages, on the one hand, and, on the other, investigating the peoples and civilizational cultures of the societies of the Nile valley in antiquity. As was the case with Diop, in the eyes of his peers the


scope and interdisciplinary character of his work cemented his place as a voice of world stature in the field of African history.

The rejection of Du Bois as being a primary influence upon the Afrocentrist project seems to be puzzling when we review the many similarities between Du Bois’s endeavors and those of the Afrocentrist cohort. The particular issue raised by Carruthers of Du Bois’s characterization of the role of blacks in developing the civilization of Kemet is easily dispatched. In *The Negro* Du Bois explicitly stated that Kemet was fundamentally and primarily a black African civilization – therefore that the lion’s share of that accomplishment owed itself to black Africans – and he did not revoke this view in *The World And Africa*. The difference between the two scholars’ view of who built Kemetic civilization appears to be one of emphasis rather than of substance. Beyond this and other particular issues, in Du Bois there was the same appreciation of the value of truth. At age twenty five, Du Bois wrote in his diary: “‘be the truth what it may, I shall seek it on the pure assumption that it is worth seeking – and Heaven nor Hell, God nor Devil shall turn me from my purpose till I die.’” Asante wrote of Afrocentricity that it “does not convert you by appealing to hatred or lust or greed or violence. As the highest, most conscious ideology it makes its points, motivates its adherents, and captivates the cautious by the force of its truth.” In addition, by Asante’s account Du Bois recognized in Africans’ philosophical and spiritual life the same overarching patterns that Afrocentrists discerned: “Du Bois saw in our history the unfolding desire for unity,

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440 Asante, *Afrocentricity*, pp. 11-12
Furthermore, when one reads The Negro, Black Folk Then and Now, and The World and Africa in the light of Asante’s stipulations as to how the Afrocentrist scholar should approach his or her object of study, one finds that Du Bois’s work exemplifies those principles. Asante declared that Africologists should display “competence” in their discipline, meaning that they should possess adequate analytic and other skills relevant for functioning in their discipline; “clarity of perspective,” meaning that they should be able to discern, focus upon, and interpret in an historically and politically perceptive way the issues of Afrocentric import; and “understanding of the object,” meaning that they should be able to view their subject in a world context and to “[approach] the subject in relation to the world at large.” Examining Du Bois’s work reveals that not only did he study continental and Diasporic Africans, render them as historical subjects, place them at the center of the story, and place events in a pan-African framework but also he displayed high competence in his discipline, a decided capacity to analyze events from an historically informed and African-interested viewpoint, and a commanding ability to apprehend the object of his scrutiny in the light of contemporary local and world events. Where then lies the lapse in Afrocentric spirit and approach?

The puzzle begins to unravel, the critique of Du Bois becomes more viable, and the proposition that disjunctures as well as continuities feature in the relationship between Du Bois and Afrocentrist historians gains ground, when we recall Carruther’s larger point and when we consult Asante further. One reason why Du Bois could not be considered an Afrocentrist, alleged Carruthers, was that Du Bois merely invited blacks to supplement their knowledge and appreciation of the accomplishments of European civilization with

441 Ibid., p. 25
442 Ibid., p. 78
an awareness of their own historical achievements instead of asking them to push
European history to the margin of their consciousness and replace it with an immersion in
their own historical and cultural tradition. Further reasons why Du Bois could not be
considered an Afrocentrist, added Asante, had to do with methodological approach and
with attitude. In regard to methodology, Du Bois “studied African people not from an
African perspective but from a European one which employed Eurocentric methods to
analyze and study black people.”443 What did that mean? Even though Du Bois
“acknowledged an African concept of the interconnectedness of all things,”444 and even
though his thought lay “beyond the limitations of a Eurocentric analysis”445 such as the
constraints of Marxist materialist analyses of society, ultimately he worked from a
Eurocentric vision in that his thinking “reflected the same mental flow as Darwinism,
Marxism, and Freudianism.”446 Methodologically, Afrocentricity called for abandoning
entirely, in its thrust towards rendering social relationships more humane, concepts of
conflict and profit and competition, and for relying instead on concepts derived from
African culture and spirit.447 In regard to attitude, Du Bois presented his scholarship to
the academy and the white world as a supplicant. “Although [Du Bois] demonstrated
admirably that the African could excel at European scholarship, this apologetic posture
was necessary in his mind to establish our respectability worldwide.”448 This posture
disqualified Du Bois from being regarded as an Afrocentrist, even as it disqualified the
Harlem Renaissance and Negritude movements from being Afrocentrist: “[t]he fullness

443 Ibid., pp. 23, 77-79
444 Ibid., p. 25
445 Ibid.
446 Ibid., p. 24
447 Ibid.
448 Ibid., p. 23
of the time had not come for Afrocentricity in either of those movements; they were apologetic movements with gifted individuals attempting to justify our culture to the world.\textsuperscript{449} The Afrocentrist posture was unapologetic. It carried self-possession. It perceived no need to justify to anyone any aspect of black historical or contemporary life. Carruthers and Asante disqualified Du Bois from the Afrocentrist guild on philosophical, methodological and attitudinal grounds.

One further consideration separated Du Bois from the Afrocentrist venture, as Afrocentrists saw it. Afrocentrist historians wrote with far less attention than did Du Bois to whether or not white historians were listening. Asante emphasized that the Afrocentrist scholar or artist concerned himself with speaking from Africans about Africans to Africans. It was not enough – as was the case with Harlem Renaissance poets, in his view – to speak of Africans primarily to others. The primary audience should be Africans.\textsuperscript{450} “In writing Afrocentricity,” he commented, for instance, “it was my plan to reach the additional Africans who were still in a confused state and to show them the way to peace.”\textsuperscript{451} While that text was received and engaged by the mainstream academy, he noted, and while he welcomed that response – “. . . the book has created its own supporters and detractors and has been at the core of intense debates about the de-colonizing of the African mind, the dismantling of America, and the destabilizing of the Eurocentric hegemony. This is as it should be. I did not mean for the book to be unread, un-remarked upon, or unheard” \textsuperscript{452} – his clear emphasis was on speaking to black people. By contrast, Du Bois came to the challenge of explicating African history with a clear

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\textsuperscript{449} Ibid., pp. 90-91
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid., p. 106
\textsuperscript{451} Ibid., p. viii
\textsuperscript{452} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
concern to educate black and white persons equally. He wanted to educate African Americans about the value of the African past so as to bolster their self-confidence in the face of virulent racism. He wanted to show white people the value of the African past so that they would abandon their racist views of blacks and make different policy and personal choices regarding blacks. Even when, in his later work, he addressed white audiences with an air of defiance and with far less confidence that education would make any difference to their decisions, he did continue to address them. Reaching both racial audiences seemed to have been important to him, because influencing each one was germane to the outcome of improving everyday relations between the two races in the United States. Perhaps partly through having learned from Du Bois’s own experience of how hard it was to unseat racist attitudes, Afrocentrist scholars wrote with concern for the intellectual accuracy of their historical and cultural theses, with concern to defend Africans’ historical cultural patrimony as being of African origin, with concern to reach African continental and Diasporic audiences, and without real attention to whether anyone but those particular audiences were listening.

In moving their revolutionary agenda forward, Afrocentrist scholars appeared to cooperate with one another effectively; and here again emerged a disjuncture worth noting, one separating them from Du Bois and his peers. Animosity publicly marked Du Bois’s relationship with Marcus Garvey. Tension sometimes strained relations between Woodson and Du Bois. In contrast, Afrocentrist historians consciously and successfully created a community of support for one another. Thus Karenga wrote the foreword to Carruthers’s *Essays in Ancient Egyptian Studies*. Asante provided a laudatory comment for the back cover of Karenga’s *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*. In addition he
discussed in his *Afrocentricity* Karenga’s focus on challenging cultural imperialism and developing an alternate system of thought that took African history and culture as its base.\(^{453}\) He expanded on his treatment of Karenga’s revolutionary significance in a full-fledged biography of Karenga.\(^{454}\) Karenga, for his part, in his Preface to *Maat* acknowledged Asante for “his model of consistent scholarly productivity,” among other contributions.\(^{455}\) Under the pressure of the weight of the dominant European intellectual culture, here was a fellowship that thrived. Carruthers put it thus:\(^{456}\)

> The impact of the colonizers historiography on the educational process is so overwhelming that only a collective consensus on the part of African scholars can deal with great historical issues which confront us. Individual contributions have been significant and in the past practically all we could hope to achieve, but now we must work together to develop the comprehensive perspectives necessary for a correct interpretation of the world.

In that spirit, Carruthers dedicated his *Intellectual Warfare* to John Henrik Clarke, a leading participant in the Afrocentrist conversation. The tight network of support evident among Afrocentrist scholars appeared to be lacking between Du Bois and his contemporaries.

Nearly fifty years after Du Bois’s passing in 1963, then, both continuities and disjunctures marked the relation between his project on Africa’s past and the work of a cadre of scholars who committed themselves to prosecuting an Afrocentrist agenda of group liberation and world healing. The Afrocentrist ideal, like the Du Boisian ideal, made the creation of a more humane world, not merely the extension of man’s knowledge of the world, the purpose of their scholarly activity. Like Du Bois again, Afrocentrist scholars judged that developing an awareness and appreciation of their own culture

\(^{453}\) Ibid., pp. 27-30  
\(^{455}\) Karenga, *Maat*, p. xvi  
\(^{456}\) Carruthers, *Essays*, p. 36
would lend black people the foundation from which to build successful lives. Where they departed from Du Bois was in their degree of emphasis on the turn to history and culture, in their intellectual methodology, in their image of their audience, and in their attitude as advocates. Where Du Bois judged it sufficient for blacks to learn of their history and culture and to draw upon it as a powerful resource to enable them to cope with the challenges of racism, Afrocentrists, in a subtle but key shift of emphasis, urged that blacks go beyond acquiring knowledge of their historical and cultural tradition and root their lives firmly in the soil of that tradition, living out of the space of the values and ideals of that tradition rather than living out of a space of European values and ideals and merely drawing on their awareness of their own tradition to bolster them in their bid to participate in European civilizational culture. Again, where Du Bois wrote from a platform of concepts put forward by European thinkers, Afrocentrist scholars urged that continental and Diasporic historians use conceptual frameworks that drew from African thought. Where Du Bois addressed himself to black and white audiences equally, Afrocentrist authors focused their attention on black audiences. Where, at least in the beginning, Du Bois rose to answer for the value of the African person and the African story, Afrocentrists asserted the value of the African story as already being given. A glance at the wider context of Du Bois’s intellectual productivity suggests a final disjuncture between Du Bois and the Afrocentrist grouping. Du Bois wrought in company with other scholars and public intellectuals who defied the claim that blacks had no reputable past, but together they appeared not to have succeeded in forming the tightly-knit intellectual phalanx in which Afrocentrists assembled.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.  

In 1913 William Henry Ferris, an African American graduate of Yale University and a member of the American Negro Academy, mulled over what might be W. E. B. Du Bois’s potential as a leader. He wrote:

There is no doubt that Dr. DuBois is endowed with rare and unique intellectual gifts, that he possesses an inborn manliness and refinement of character, and a superb self-possession, but the question is, Does he possess that combination of traits and qualities which makes one a born ruler and leader of men? . . . [W]hile I, as a student of psychology, regard Dr. DuBois as an intellectual giant, with the aesthetic sensibility of an artist or poet; as a student of human history, I cannot predict that he will evolve into a leader with faith in God, faith in man and faith in himself, who will breathe his own buoyant, hopeful and heroic spirit into the minds and hearts of his followers; a leader who will fill individuals in his race with the thought that they, too, can climb the mount of human achievement; a leader who will inspire his race to do great things as Oliver Cromwell inspired the Ironsides, as John Wesley inspired the Methodists, as Theodore Parker inspired the Unitarians, as Bishop Wilberforce inspired the friends of abolition, as Mirabeau inspired the French Assembly, as Napoleon inspired the French soldiers by telling them that from the heights of yonder Pyramids forty centuries looked down upon them.

Ferris was right, if by a leader of a race we mean an individual who inspired people through working shoulder to shoulder with others on the ground. It was the charismatic and determined Marcus Garvey, not W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, who engineered a mass movement of black people in the 1920s and 1930s to celebrate the pride in race.

457 “Gospel of John,” The Bible (Good News Translation), Chapter 8 vs. 32
which Du Bois preached. But Ferris was wrong if we are talking about inspiring a race at second hand, through working in the trenches of the mind and continuing on to place the results of those labors at the disposal of others better equipped to translate them into social action. Du Bois embraced the second strategy. His gamble succeeded. At the historic March on Washington in 1963, Roy Wilkins, then executive secretary of the NAACP, noting the passing of Du Bois, asked his audience for a moment of silence as a mark of respect for “the one who first wrote all the slogans we now carry on our banners”.  

Du Bois led his race; writing “with a sword in his hand,” as one scholar put it, he did “fill individuals in his race with the thought that they, too, can climb the mount of human achievement”; and he did so in part through sketching for young African Americans an elevating picture of their history in Africa.

That Du Bois succeeded in deploying his intellectual gifts to social effect and exercised a major impact upon the consciousness of African Americans was fully appreciated as early as the 1920s. In 1929 the Harlem newspaper *Amsterdam News* pronounced Du Bois to have done “more for the advancement of the American Negro than [had] any other living man.” Five years later the Board of Directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People acknowledged that influence in the course of accepting Du Bois’s resignation. The Board stated: “[T]he ideas which he propounded in [The Crisis] and in his books and essays transformed the

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459 Quoted in Aptheker, “A Life Dedicated to Freedom”
460 Thorpe, Black Historians, p. 72
461 See for example Letter, I. A. Smothers to Du Bois, 11 July 1957 (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. University of Massachusetts Library. Record Group 312 Series 21 Box 360 Folder 59)
Negro world as well as a large portion of the liberal white world . . . . He created, what
never existed before, a Negro intelligentsia, and many who have never read a word of his
writings are his spiritual disciples and descendants.” 463 Some thirty years after that Jessie
Guzman, then director of the Department of Records and Research at Tuskegee Institute,
declared that “Negro intellectuals owe more to [Du Bois] in terms of literary values and
scholarly achievements than to any other person.” 464 Du Bois not only propagated his
own ideas: he also fashioned a vehicle to enable the intelligentsia that he had helped to
create to reproduce itself in a further generation. “[M]y first article was published in the
Crisis, of which, Dr. Du Bois was editor,” recalled Benjamin Mays. 465 “Du Bois was my
first publisher,” noted Horace Mann Bond. “[D]uring my first quarter at the University of
Chicago. I had become exerci[s]ed over the then racist propaganda identifying Negroes
with low intelligence on the basis of the tests administered during World War I; and I
submitted an article, -- my first – to Dr. Du Bois, “Intelligence Tests and Propaganda,”
that he published in the June, 1924 Crisis. The intoxication of seeing my name in print
thus induced by Dr. DuBois, has never left me.” 466 Du Bois’s contemporaries understood
the impact of his intellectual leadership and they lauded it.

The bounty of scholarly literature that has emerged concerning Du Bois
constitutes its own comment on later observers’ verdict as to Du Bois’s significance. The
consensus appears to be that his intellectual influence and calibre extended far beyond

463 Quoted in Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, p. 314. There were, to be sure, other publications that contributed to
creating or strengthening a Negro intelligentsia, such a Negro World, published by the Universal Negro
Improvement Association, and Opportunity, published by the Urban League.
(Autumn, 1961), pp. 377-385
465 Letter, Mays to Terry, 4 September 1980 (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. University of Massachusetts
Library. Record Group 312 Series 23 Box 373 Folder 19a)
466 Bond, “I Knew Dr. Du Bois”
African Americans and far above anti-racist advocacy. John Hope Franklin, author of numerous studies of the historical experience of African Americans, remarked that so great was the scope and thrust of Du Bois’s life that two major biographies then in progress “[would] not begin to explore the ramifications and implications of all that Dr. Du Bois did and thought and achieved over all those years” of his long life.467 Herbert Aptheker, himself a scholar of distinction, declared that Du Bois “was a scholar-activist of such historic consequence that he merits comparison with the premier figure of the preceding century – Karl Marx.” 468 How so? “The greatness of Dr. Du Bois,” explained Aptheker,469 “lies in the fact that he centered the nearly ten decades of his life upon the fundamental questions of his time – and of our time: racism, colonialism, imperialism, war, illiteracy, poverty, hunger, exploitation; and that he did this with astonishing persistence, absolute integrity and historic effectiveness.” The benefit of hindsight has magnified rather than reduced Du Bois’s stature.

A crucial component of Du Bois’s achievement was his contribution to reshaping African Americans’ consciousness regarding Africa’s past. That was because at the heart of each individual’s image of self lay a narrative of where he or she came from, as Jungian psychologist Roberto Gambini has pointed out.470 For the individual to be stable and healthy psychologically, that narrative of individual and group origin which lay at the heart of his or her image of self needed to be one to which he or she could relate.

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467 Franklin, “W. E. B. Du Bois: A Personal Memoir.” 23 February 1989. Franklin made these remarks in the question-answer period following the address.
468 Aptheker, “A Life Dedicated to Freedom”
470 Gambini, Soul and Culture, p. 49
unproblematically – could be proud of, in a word. Du Bois, by arguing that blacks had a constructive past and one of world significance, helped to supply that narrative to young African Americans at a time when mainstream contributions to their internal script were deeply destructive. Educated about their historical accomplishments, young African Americans acquired the existential resources to assert themselves fully and consistently in withdrawing their consent from economic, social, political, and ideological practices which lay embedded in a system of caste exploitation and oppression. Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King made explicit the logic of Du Bois’s influence. “Steeped in the history of the Negro, [Du Bois] instilled pride of race in young colored people,” Wilkins asserted. King elaborated: “[Du Bois] virtually, before anyone else and more than anyone else, demolished the lies about Negroes in their most important and creative period of history. The truths he revealed . . . have been recorded and arm us for our contemporary battles.” Here King was speaking about Du Bois’s work in rewriting the history of Reconstruction in the United States, but he might equally have been speaking of any theme within Du Bois’s historical corpus. The existential and political repercussions of Du Bois’s advancing a counter-hegemonic script concerning the historic African lend added weight to the stature which contemporaries and later observers accorded to him.

It would be too much to credit Du Bois with having wrought alone in educating young African Americans to the value of their lineage. Carter Woodson, Hubert Henry Harrison, John Edward Bruce, Marcus Garvey, and others together rose to the challenge of alerting African Americans to Africa’s true history. But while Du Bois did not work

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alone, he stood tall in the center of the fray. Some of Du Bois’s contemporaries, indeed, viewed his place in the work of ideological transformation as having been pivotal. His acquaintance and fellow historian Charles Wesley hazarded that “[o]thers worked and wrought, some were ahead of him, others were by his side, but he was our man for Africa in his books, his addresses, his life, his career and his death with his last resting place within Africa’s bosom. He laid the foundation . . . .” 472 Earl Smith, a student of Du Bois’s relation to Africa, judged that “it was through him that the world came to know and understand Africa, and its correct role in world history.” 473 His vision of Africa’s past made itself felt not only in the academy but beyond. At the library of Norfolk Prison Colony, “Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois gave me a glimpse into the black people’s history before they came to this country,” noted Malcolm X. 474 From farther afield – from Asia – came further testimony. “Du Bois belongs to that early part of my memory and my consciousness,” noted India’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Mr. Rikhi Jaipal, in 1978, “and the first words of his that I remember are: ‘The spell of Africa is upon me’. . . . He . . . did more than anyone to correct the massive misinformation about Africa that its white rulers had prop[a]gated in their ignorance and insensitivity. . . . We owe to him the revelation of the wealth and beauty of the African heritage, of its historical impact on Asia, Europe and the Americas, and its infinite promise for the future. . . .” 475 Their applause was deserved. Du Bois made the interrogation of Africa’s past a central intellectual preoccupation, not a peripheral

472 Wesley, “Statement,” p. 42
dalliance, even amid the welter of issues competing for his attention. His pageant, his books, his speeches, and his *Crisis* articles and reports represented a major investment of time and energy which justify according him a place along with Woodson, Harrison, Bruce and Garvey at the forefront of the struggle.

Ironically, the battle for Africa’s past took a toll on Du Bois spiritually even as his contributions to the struggle helped to buoy African Americans. The battle deflated his faith in the sincerity of men and women and in the impartiality of scientific scholarship. He had not been naïve: he had been entirely conversant with the racist attitudes of whites and with how those attitudes had played themselves out in practical terms to the detriment and often peril of blacks. His understanding of the tragedy of social relations in the United States had made itself plain in his twenty-four years at the helm of *The Crisis*. That curricula developed by white people ignored the needs of black children and made black children think that whiteness was the human ideal was no news to him. That whites typically did not want blacks to learn about or remember their history was evident to him, as was the reason why: as he put it, suppressing African history formed part of a project driven by “greed, cupidity, avarice, [and] ruthless desire for private gain at any cost to public welfare” to secure European profit and world power.\(^47^6\) That whites worked hard to traduce the valor with which American black officers served during the Great War was an established fact in his judgment. That some white women in the United States publicly treated blacks abusively – in his words, “as the dirt beneath their feet” – was to him a

\(^{476}\)Du Bois, “The History of Africa,” p. 26
matter beyond dispute.” But with all that he had genuinely believed that having accurate knowledge could undermine prejudiced attitudes and so transform social relations. He had made a strong investment in the idea that objective historical science could bring truth to men and women and that it was only ignorance of the truth that propelled white men and women to treat black men and women brutally. Over the course of the thirty-odd years of observation and experience that separated *The Negro* and *The World and Africa*, that faith that education based on the results of scientific investigation would rid the world of race prejudice came undone.

The point is made clear when we review his comments on the subject. At the start of his career as an academic and public intellectual, he later recalled, he had been optimistic that knowledge would lead whites to cast aside their racist attitudes towards blacks. “The world was thinking wrong about race, because it did not know. The ultimate evil was stupidity. The cure for it was knowledge based on scientific investigation.” Again, “[r]ace prejudice was based on wide-spread ignorance. My long-term remedy was truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color nor race determined the limits of a man’s capacity or desert.” Learning of civilizations in West Africa had only deepened his conviction that science – conscientiously and impartially pursued – offered the avenue to a just society. “I came then and afterwards,” he wrote of his revelatory experience in Atlanta in the course of listening to Franz Boas’s graduation address, “to

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478 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, p. 58
479 Quoted in Crowder, *John Edward Bruce*, p. 105
realize how the *silence and neglect of science* can let truth utterly disappear or even be unconsciously distorted.\textsuperscript{480} His faith in the power of science to uncover and disseminate truth, and in the readiness of people to acknowledge the truth and modify their behavior once they had learned of it, had extended beyond the moment of his decision to leave the academy and confront racism through popular media; for even after the Atlanta riots of 1906 provoked him to emphasize speaking to a national audience through popular organs rather than largely to other academicians through scholarly studies, he remained optimistic, it would appear from the tone of his prose in 1915 in *The Negro*, about the fundamental fairness of his audience. Even later, “[t]he black world must fight for freedom,” he wrote. “It must fight with the weapons of Truth. . . .”\textsuperscript{481} The exasperation that he later displayed in *The World and Africa* at the academy’s display of indifference to his work indicates how deeply he had believed what he had professed, and how sincere he had been in calculating that his work, by making scholars aware of the truth, could have a positive impact on their attitudes towards blacks. It indicates as well how keenly he had felt betrayed by the lack of a discernible response.

Whether there is as yet any *direct* response is a point that bears further research. During the past half-century, certainly the mainstream academy has come to terms with Du Bois’s insistence that Africans have a history. Departments of History at major universities frequently include faculty specializing in the history of Africa. The question now is whether this new outlook on Africa’s past has come about specifically through mainstream scholars’ engagement with the ideas of Du Bois and his ‘vindicationist’

\textsuperscript{480} Du Bois, *Black Folk Then and Now*, p. vii (italics mine).
\textsuperscript{481} Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, p. 6. See p. 151
colleagues or at least has been accompanied by acknowledgment of their work. The verdict remains uncertain, but there are encouraging signs. In his 1998 Presidential Address to the American Historical Association, cornerstone of the mainstream historical profession in the United States, Joseph Miller discussed *The Negro*, dubbing it “the first continental-scale history of Africa” and noting what he perceived to be strong shortcomings in its approach to African agency. In 2007 Robin Law, the author of major works on West African societies in the era of the Atlantic trade in Africans, publicly lamented the exclusion of Du Bois from the pantheon of pioneers in the field of African history, consecrated him a founder of the field, and argued for the inclusion of *The Negro* in the canon of its early works. It remains to seen whether historians as a whole respond to Law’s invitation and explicitly begin to ground their work in, or at least acknowledge the value of, ‘vindicationist’ analyses. What also remains to be seen is the extent, if any, to which the work on African history of avowedly Afrocentrist authors is incorporated into the mainstream of historical discourse or finds itself standing instead, as did the work of Du Bois, arrested at the outer provinces of the conversation as if constituting a barbarian influence.

Another theme that bears further exploration is the extent to which Du Bois’s vision of Africa’s past made itself felt within emerging currents of African nationalist thought. Du Bois and his general ideological outlook were familiar to Africans who were engaged in nationalist struggle. *The Crisis* reached audiences in Africa as well as in the

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United States – and audiences in the British West Indies, in the South Seas, and in Europe too.

His writings, particularly his article “The African Roots of War,” as well as those of Carter Woodson, were making themselves felt among African nationalists by the 1920s, according to George Shepperson, who started the scholarly conversation about links between African nationalism and African American intellectual activity in earnest. Du Bois attended Pan-African conclaves in 1900, 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945 which brought him into direct contact with African delegates from the Gold Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and other colonies, including Kwame Nkrumah – whom Herbert Aptheker spoke of as having been Du Bois’s ‘disciple’ – and Jomo Kenyatta. In addition Du Bois “had close contacts with African students in the United States,” Shepperson writes. One of Du Bois’s students was John Dube. Dube emerged as the first president of the South African Native National Congress, precursor to the African National Congress. Du Bois was acquainted with Nnamdi Azikiwe. While Du Bois probably never met John Chilembwe, leader of the Nyasa uprising of Africans against white settlers in 1915, he described himself as having known Joseph Booth, Chilembwe’s employer and mentor, quite well. In the wake of Shepperson’s probing of the “African nationalism and African American intellectuals” thesis, Clarence Contee has continued the investigation, producing a hitherto unpublished doctoral study.

484 See for example Letter, Du Bois to J. R. Ralph-Casimir, 10 December 1929, and correspondence between The Crisis and Ralph-Casimir in October and December 1932 (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. University of Massachusetts Library. Record Group 312 Series 21 Box 359 Folders 31 and 34); see also Du Bois, “Editing the Crisis”
485 Shepperson, “Notes,” pp. 306-307
486 Aptheker, “A Life Dedicated to Freedom”
487 Shepperson, “Introduction”, p. xviii
490 Letter, Du Bois to Shepperson, 31 August 1951
What falls to be fleshed out fully is how Du Bois’s thought on Africa’s past, specifically, may have integrated itself into African nationalist praxis.

On that theme Shepperson has made suggestive remarks, and there does appear to be ground for exploring links between African nationalism and Du Bois’s vision of Africa’s past. The work in African history of Africans of the Diaspora indubitably exercised an influence in regard to emergent African nationalism, Shepperson argued. “No speculation . . .”, he wrote, “is necessary about the influence on emerging African nationalism of . . . cultural . . . pan-Africanism . . .”492 “Negro Americans . . . played a considerable part ideologically in the emergence of African nationalism,” in part “through the provision of the raw material of history”.493 As an example he pointed out that George Washington Williams’s History of the Negro Race was “one of the first historical studies by a Negro American writer to quicken the imagination of African nationalists.”494 Through first Edward Wilmot Blyden and then Du Bois, Shepperson continued, the history of African peoples was brought forward “to bolster both Negro American and emergent African nationalist self-esteem.”495 The Negro, added Shepperson as he introduced a 1970 edition of work, remained sought after by students of the history of Africa not only in the United States but also abroad even after Du Bois had subsequently published other works on Africa’s past.496 In addition to Shepperson, William Leo Hansberry pointed to links between African nationalists and Du Bois’s

492 Shepperson, “Notes,” p. 308
493 Ibid., p. 312
494 Ibid., p. 305
495 Ibid., p. 308
496 Shepperson, “Introduction”, p. xxiv
writings on Africa’s past. Hansberry wrote: “It is certain that Dr. Du Bois, by his favorable references to and citation from the works of [Edward Wilmot Blyden, Felix DuBois, and Lady Lugard], was primarily responsible for calling their inspiring contents to the attention of so many of the men who have taken the lead in fashioning Africa’s modern Renaissance as a consequence of the inspiration derived from a knowledge of the continent’s heroic past.” Furthermore, if African nationalists counted among those who sought The Negro, and if the culmination in independence of nationalist struggle in Africa empowered African Americans in their own struggle for civil rights during the 1950s and 1960s, then whether Du Bois’s’ vision of Africa’s past may have led not only directly, through identity formation, but also circuitously, through African liberation, to African American sociopolitical and economic empowerment becomes an intriguing question. The line of influence between Du Bois’s thought on Africa’s past, the ideological ground of nationalist movements in Africa, and the effectiveness of African American struggle in the 1950s and 1960s then invites extended scrutiny.

What we can say with confidence, at all events, is that at the turn of the twentieth century African Americans found white Americans challenging them as to whether they indeed had souls and whether they had a history. Those questions lay within a conversation that called into question their humanity and invited existential instability and alienation from self. That conversation fit, in turn, into a concerted effort by white Southerners to exercise over them a comprehensive dominance. W. E. B. Du Bois, already a protagonist in the battle to affirm that people who were black had souls, mounted a stern counterattack to the claim that Africans had no history. Alerted by Franz

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Boas to the existence of a scientifically defensible narrative of African historical accomplishment, he propounded a vision of Africa’s past that he formulated on the basis of knowledge enunciated in key works of African continental and Diasporic writers and white scholars and popular authors. His vision broke sharply with contemporary anglophone scholarly orthodoxy about Africa’s past. His own voice, projected through major, minor, and ancillary works, proclaimed to African Americans and to the world that Africans and their descendants everywhere had a proud lineage. Other voices which he facilitated in reaching an international audience announced the same message. The impact of this progressive message concerning Africa’s past was mixed. On the one hand, Du Bois’s vision did not effect any significant shift in mainstream scholarship about Africa. On the other hand his vision, aligning with those of Africa’s past advanced by other African American and Afro-Caribbean intellectuals and touching an African American audience nationwide, helped to tilt in favor of identification with Africa what appears to have been a mid-century ambivalence towards Africa on the part of African Americans. It invited a pride in African ancestry among young African Americans generally and provided inspiration and a road map for a younger generation of African American educators and students of history. It helped to maintain the momentum that an earlier generation of ‘vindicationist’ historians had generated in regard to sketching a positive picture of Africa and to usher the project safely into the hands of a succeeding generation who carried forward some of its key elements. Above all, by advancing a particular conception of the history of Africans and of the relation of Africa to the rest of the world it lent young African Americans voice to utter with conviction the words “we have a history: we are fully human,” and so to strengthen them for struggle.
For all of us who live in the shadow of the American ideological as well as economic *imperium*, and particularly for white as well as black Americans, Du Bois’s work on Africa’s past was fundamental to the fabric of our lives. On its face the 1912 poem which introduces this study, Bertha Johnston’s ‘I Saw A Little Blue-Eyed Girl,’ was a work of imagination, not of fact. However the caption that accompanied it alerted readers of it that its imaginary events were rooted in everyday factual reality between the end of Reconstruction and World War II.\(^{498}\) In 1929 Walter White, then assistant secretary of the NAACP and a seasoned investigator of lynchings, lamented the fact of encountering in Florida some years previously ‘[t]hree shining-eyed, healthy, cleanly [white] children, headed for school’ who nevertheless spoke to him ‘[a]nimatedly, almost as joyously as though the memory were of Christmas morning or the circus . . . of ‘the fun we had burning the niggers.’ ’\(^{499}\) Frederick Douglass wrote to Ida B. Wells regarding lynching: ‘[b]ut alas! Even crime has power to reproduce itself and create conditions favorable to its own existence.’\(^{500}\) One form of reproducing lynching was through socializing white children to embrace it. Lynching black people physically was destroying white children morally. But today we do not hear about white people engaging in lynching. In mainstream media and from public officials we do not hear such claims of black people lacking souls and having no history as would encourage whites in that extreme behavior. If we do not see that behavior and hear those claims, it is in part because Du Bois wrote on African history in such a way as to fortify young

\(^{498}\) *The Crisis* Vol. 4 No. 3 (July, 1912), p. 147
\(^{499}\) White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*, p. 3
African Americans for a struggle that helped to humanize white Americans. By helping to undercut an ideological system that activated a capacity for evil lying latent in every human being, Du Bois helped to create a better world for whites as well as for blacks. He did it in spite of their best efforts to frustrate him. He did it at considerable risk to his public image. He did it with surpassing generosity and sacrifice. Through his courage, as much as through his intellect, we see fewer tragedies in the lives of individuals as a result of other peoples’ intolerance. We see less of the pain and trouble and bitterness stemming not from “the way it is” but quite specifically from other people’s cruel and grasping hands.
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