
W.E.B. Du Bois: International Thought

W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the most significant American political thinkers of the twentieth century. This volume collects 24 of his essays and speeches on international themes, spanning the years 1900–1956. These key texts reveal Du Bois’s distinctive approach to the problem of empire and demonstrate his continued importance in our current global context. The volume charts the development of Du Bois’s anti-imperial thought, drawing attention to his persistent concern with the relationship between democracy and empire and illustrating the divergent inflections of this theme in the context of a shifting geopolitical terrain; unprecedented political crises, especially during the two world wars; and new opportunities for transnational solidarity. With a critical introduction and extensive editorial notes, *W.E.B. Du Bois: International Thought* conveys both the coherence and continuity of Du Bois’s international thought across his long life and the tremendous range and variety of his preoccupations, intellectual sources, and interlocutors.

ADOM GETACHEW is Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Political Science and the College at the University of Chicago. She is the author of *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (2019). Her writing has appeared in *Dissent*, *The Nation*, *London Review of Books*, and *The New York Times*.

JENNIFER PITTS is Professor of Political Science and in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Her previous publications include *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Liberal Imperialism in Britain and France* (2005) and *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (2018). She is co-editor of *The Law of Nations in Global History* (2017) and the editor and translator of *Alexis de Tocqueville: Writings on Empire and Slavery* (2001).

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

General editor

QUENTIN SKINNER
Queen Mary University of London

Editorial board

MICHAEL COOK
Princeton University

HANNAH DAWSON
King's College London

ADOM GETACHEW
University of Chicago

EMMA HUNTER
University of Edinburgh

GABRIEL PAQUETTE
University of Oregon

ANDREW SARTORI
New York University

HILDE DE WEERDT
Leiden University

Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought is firmly established as the major student series of texts in political theory. It aims to make available all the most important texts in the history of political thought, from ancient Greece to the twentieth century, from throughout the world and from every political tradition. All the familiar classic texts are included, but the series seeks at the same time to enlarge the conventional canon through a global scope and by incorporating an extensive range of less well-known works, many of them never before available in a modern English edition, and to present the history of political thought in a comparative, international context. Where possible, the texts are published in complete and unabridged form, and translations are specially commissioned for the series. However, where appropriate, especially for non-western texts, abridged or tightly focused and thematic collections are offered instead. Each volume contains a critical introduction together with chronologies, biographical sketches, a guide to further reading and any necessary glossaries and textual apparatus. Overall, the series aims to provide the reader with an outline of the entire evolution of international political thought.

*W.E.B. Du Bois:
International
Thought*

W. E. B. DU BOIS
ADOM GETACHEW
University of Chicago
JENNIFER PITTS
University of Chicago



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-49164-8 — W. E. B. Du Bois: International Thought
W. E. B. Du Bois, Edited by Adom Getachew, Jennifer Pitts
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108491648
DOI: 10.1017/9781108869140

© Cambridge University Press 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Library of Congress Control Number: 2022933880

ISBN 978-1-108-49164-8 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-108-79877-8 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	viii
<i>Note on the Text</i>	xiii
<i>Democracy and Empire: An Introduction to the International Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois</i>	xv
<i>Select Chronology of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois</i>	lviii
1 The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind (1900)	1
2 To the Nations of the World (1900)	18
3 The African Roots of War (1915)	22
4 Of the Culture of White Folk (1917)	36
5 Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to President Woodrow Wilson (1918)	50
6 To the World (Manifesto of the Second Pan-African Congress) (1921)	55
7 Worlds of Color (1925)	66
8 Liberia and Rubber (1925)	91
9 Liberia, the League and the United States (1933)	100

Contents

10 Where Do We Go from Here?: Address to the Rosenwald Economic Conference (1933)	117
11 Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View (1935)	131
12 The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes (1936)	144
13 The Union of Colour (1936)	150
14 What Japan Has Done (1937)	154
15 Black Africa Tomorrow (1938)	159
16 The Realities in Africa: European Profit or Negro Development? (1943)	173
17 Prospect of a World without Race Conflict (1944)	189
18 Colonies and Moral Responsibility (1946)	203
19 A Cup of Cocoa and Chocolate Drops (1946)	215
20 <i>An Appeal to the World: A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities</i> , Introduction (1947)	229
21 Colonies as Cause of War: Address to the World Peace Congress, Paris (1949)	250
22 On the West Indies: Address of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois at the St. Thomas Chamber of Commerce (1952)	256
23 To the World Peace Council, Budapest (1953)	261
24 Colonialism and the Russian Revolution (1956)	272
<i>Index</i>	280

Figures

1	“The journey of W. E. B. Du Bois, 1924”	<i>page</i> 65
2	“Political Africa, 1939”	172

Acknowledgments

In preparation for the publication of this volume, we held a one-day workshop on the international writings of W. E. B. Du Bois at the University of Chicago. We thank the Committee on Social Thought and the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory (3CT) for their generous funding of the workshop, and we are grateful to Anna Searle Jones at 3CT and Cameron Cook for organizing the day. Participants at the workshop read through the essays in the volume and helped us to shape the themes of our introductory essay. For generously sharing their critical insights, we thank Lawrie Balfour, Adam Dahl, Derrick Darby, Andrew Douglas, Julian Go, Robert Gooding-Williams, Daragh Grant, Jared Loggins, Bill Mullen, Christopher Taylor, Inés Valdez, and Robert Vitalis.

As reviewers for Cambridge University Press, Bob Gooding-Williams and Bob Vitalis made this volume possible with their enthusiasm and constructive feedback. We thank them for their early support. We are also grateful to Quentin Skinner and the other series editors for welcoming this project, and to Liz Friend-Smith, who warmly embraced the project and has expertly moved the book through the Press's process.

At an early stage in writing the introduction, we had the opportunity to present a draft at Georgetown University's Political Theory Workshop. We thank Stefan Eich and Mark Fisher for extending an invitation to both of us and to the workshop participants, especially our discussant Terrence Johnson, for their perceptive comments and questions.

Lawrie Balfour, Bob Gooding-Williams, and Brandon Terry provided incisive comments on a draft of the introductory essay. Daragh Grant

Acknowledgments

read the entire manuscript and made invaluable suggestions about the editorial notes and the volume as a whole. We thank each of them for taking their time to provide feedback. David Armitage, Sarah Balakrishnan, Arnulf Becker Lorca, Madeleine Elfenbein, Caroline Elkins, Alison Frank Johnson, Ibrahim Khan, Thomas Knock, David Levering Lewis, Erez Manela, Phillip Sinitiere, James Sparrow, Natasha Wheatley, Chad Williams, and Gabriel Winant helped with queries related to specific historical episodes that Du Bois mentions or with which he was engaged. Loretta Deaver and Bruce Kirby of the Library of Congress, Will Clements of Princeton University Library Special Collections, Caroline White of the UMass Amherst Special Collections and University Archives, Susan Edwards of University of California, Berkeley Libraries, and Nancy Spiegel of the University of Chicago Library assisted us with archival queries. We are grateful to each of them for enthusiastically lending their expertise.

This volume builds on the work of generations of scholars who collected and anthologized Du Bois's writings. We want to acknowledge in this regard the late Herbert Aptheker, Nahum Dimitri Chandler, Bill Mullen, and Eric J. Sundquist. Our introductory essay and editorial notes have also benefited enormously from David Levering Lewis's magisterial two-volume biography of Du Bois.

We owe special thanks to Abigail Bazin for her resourceful, extensive, and tireless work on the editorial notes, to Stephanie Yu for research assistance, and to Raghuvver Nidumolu for proofreading the entire manuscript. We are grateful to Kenny Chumbley for his expert help in securing permissions, to Heather Jones for preparing the index, and to Kathleen A. Kelly and Llinos Edwards for copyediting.

While working on this project, Adom was on leave at Harvard University's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics. She thanks the director of the center, Danielle Allen, and the center's staff, particularly Emily Bromley, for welcoming her to Cambridge and supporting her work.

For permission to reproduce Du Bois's works, we are grateful to these organizations and their representatives:

The Afro-American Newspapers (ch. 10)

The David Graham Du Bois Trust (chs. 5, 19, 21, 23 and Figure 1 are reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, LLC on behalf of the David Graham Du Bois Trust)

The Journal of Negro Education and Howard University (ch. 18)

Acknowledgments

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 (ch. 20)

Oxford University Press (Figure 2)

The New Republic (ch. 8)

The Pittsburgh Courier (ch. 14)

The University of Chicago Press (ch. 17)

The Virgin Islands Daily News (ch. 22)

The essays, articles, and figures collected here first appeared in the following publications; in line with Press policy, their original house styles have been retained. Several pieces have been drawn from manuscripts in the collection of the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, a remarkable and fully digitized resource to which we refer frequently in the footnotes. The common citation for these resources is *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312)*. *Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries*; our citations to these archives appear in the notes as Du Bois Papers and include the item's unique identifier and permanent URL. In addition to copying the URL provided, interested readers can locate each document by searching the Du Bois Papers website (<https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums312>) with the item's unique identifier.

1. "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind," *A.M.E. Church Review* 17 (1900): 95–110.
2. "To the Nations of the World," Pan-African Association. Report of the Pan-African Conference, ca. 1900. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. mums312-0004-i321. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-0004-i321>.
3. "The African Roots of War," *Atlantic Monthly* 115 (May 1915): 707–714.
4. "Of the Culture of White Folk," *The Journal of Race Development* 7.4 (April 1917): 434–447.
5. "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to President Woodrow Wilson, ca. November 1918." W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. mums312-0013-i174. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-0013-i174>.

Acknowledgments

-
6. “To the World (Manifesto of the Second Pan-African Congress),” *The Crisis* 23.1 (November 1921): 5–10 and 18.
 7. “Worlds of Color,” *Foreign Affairs* 3.3 (1925): 423–444.
 8. “Liberia and Rubber,” *The New Republic* 44 (November 18, 1925): 326–329.
 9. “Liberia, the League and the United States,” *Foreign Affairs* 11.4 (July 1933): 682–695.
 10. Where do we go from here? Address to the Rosenwald Economic Conference, 1933; reprinted in *The Afro-American* (May 20, 1933): 3.
 11. “Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View,” *Foreign Affairs* 14.1 (October 1935): 82–92.
 12. “The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes,” *Aryan Path* 7.3 (March 1936): 111–115.
 13. “The Union of Colour,” *Aryan Path* 7.10 (October 1936): 483–484.
 14. “What Japan has Done,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (March 20, 1937): 10.
 15. “Black Africa Tomorrow,” *Foreign Affairs* 17.1 (1938): 100–110.
 16. “The Realities in Africa: European Profit or Negro Development?” *Foreign Affairs* 21.4 (1943): 721–732.
 17. “Prospect of a World without Race Conflict,” *American Journal of Sociology* 49 (March 1944): 450–456.
 18. “Colonies and Moral Responsibility,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 15.3 (Summer 1946): 311–318.
 19. “A Cup of Cocoa and Chocolate Drops” (1946). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. mums312-b213-io65. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b213-io65>.
 20. *An Appeal to the World: A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1947).
 21. “Colonies as Cause of War” (April 1949). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. mums312-b199-io54. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b199-io54>.
 22. “Address of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois at the St. Thomas Chamber of Commerce, 27 February, 1952,” *Daily News*, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands (March 1, 1952).
 23. “To the World Peace Council, Budapest” (1953), W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. Special Collections and University Archives, University of

Acknowledgments

- Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. mums312-b203-i033. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b203-i033>.
24. “Colonialism and the Russian Revolution,” *New World Review* (November 1956): 18–21.

Figures:

1. “The journey of W. E. B. Du Bois,” *The Crisis* 28.1 (May 1924): 34.
2. “Political Africa, 1939.” W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of The Negro Race* ([New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders. Any outstanding claims to copyright may be addressed to the publisher.

All URLs were current as of March 1, 2022.

Note on the Text

Most of the essays in this collection were previously published in social science journals and other press outlets, often with few footnotes; where possible, we have supplied sources for Du Bois's quotations. We have largely left intact Du Bois's capitalizations and spellings of proper and place names to reflect the usage of his time, though names appear under current spellings in the Index. We have silently corrected typographical and printers' errors.

In this volume, the editors capitalize the term "Black" but not the term "white." Du Bois's own usage with respect to the capitalization of Black was variable and is preserved throughout the volume. He believed strongly that the word Negro should be capitalized; given that the term Negro has passed out of common usage, we have taken into account his views about its capitalization in our decision to capitalize Black. As Du Bois put the argument about the word Negro in a famous footnote of 1899, "I believe that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter."¹ We also follow the style adopted by the Associated Press, the *New York Times*, and other publishers. Du Bois occasionally invoked racial slurs, generally in quotation marks, to indicate and criticize white supremacist views; at such points we have left his text as he wrote it.

For ease of reference, and because it is anticipated that readers may encounter essays in isolation from one another, the editors' footnotes supplying biographical and historical context sometimes repeat basic information supplied in other essays. For more extensive explanations,

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia, PA: Published for the University, 1899), 1; reprinted in *The Philadelphia Negro*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

Note on the Text

readers are referred to footnotes in previous essays by essay name, page, and note number. We have retained Du Bois's footnotes in the few essays in which he used them, where they are numbered separately from the editors' notes and appear in boldface.

Democracy and Empire

An Introduction to the International Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois

In the closing months of the Korean War in 1953, an eighty-five-year-old William Edward Burghardt Du Bois prepared to address the World Peace Council in Budapest. He spoke of the Cold War and the new American century “with a certain clairvoyance which is vouchsafed the outsider who lives within, and the insider who does not belong.”¹ The claim of African American clairvoyance was by then a well-worn theme of Du Bois’s writings, but his standing as an internal outsider had gained new meaning in the Cold War context. Two years before he wrote these words, he had been indicted as an unregistered agent of a foreign state for his anti-nuclear activism. Though he was acquitted, his passport was revoked in 1952, making it impossible to address the Council in person. His prepared remarks characterized the United States as a young and reckless country that had rushed headlong into global dominion. In the course of its new hegemony, the United States “forgets that she was once a colony dominated by an empire and gained autonomy only by violent revolution; by throwing off just such bonds as she now helps to impose on peoples of Asia and Africa.”² The tragedy of this amnesia for Du Bois was not only the international violence of the United States’ global posture, but also the ways in which the “religious dogma” of anticommunism unleashed an internal “Reign of Terror” in the jailing of those deemed

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “To the World Peace Council” (1953), p. 262. ² *Ibid.*, p. 262.

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

communist sympathizers, the disciplining of the labor movement, and the closing of the public sphere to dissenting voices.³ In tying the United States' imperial power abroad to the winnowing of democratic freedoms at home, Du Bois restaged a critique of empire that he had honed over five decades.

With essays that span the period from 1900 to 1956, this volume charts the development of Du Bois's anti-imperial thought, attending to both his persistent preoccupation with the relationship between democracy and empire and illustrating the divergent inflections of this theme in the context of a shifting geopolitical terrain, unprecedented political crises, especially during the two world wars, and new opportunities for transnational solidarity. Reflecting on the rise of a new imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois came to view territorial and economic expansion as raising a distinctive set of dilemmas for democratic politics. He posed three interrelated questions: (1) Why and how did ostensibly democratic states come to embrace imperial expansion, (2) how does imperial expansion undermine democracy at home, and (3) how might an anti-imperial and transnational politics offer new resources in transforming and expanding democratic politics?

For Du Bois, the first two questions emerged from the simultaneous democratization of politics in the North Atlantic and resurgence of imperial rule, especially in Africa. In situating these two developments within the same analytic frame, he catalogued the economic processes and ideological discourses that held democracy and empire together. A key joint at their nexus was Du Bois's famous formulation of the global color line. Racial hierarchy held together the alchemy of democracy and empire, justifying the delimitation of democracy to the world's few and generating popular investments in white supremacy.

Though the color line was remarkably durable, in Du Bois's view the combination of democracy and empire was unstable. His writings and political projects seek to pry them apart in order to make democracy's reconstitution and remaking possible. As we shall see, most striking in Du Bois's analysis is the way in which he transforms the color line from the ideological alibi that tethers together democracy and empire to a political and analytical resource that can overcome imperialism.

This was not always a successful venture. Du Bois's commitment to color as the basis of solidarity contributed to or coincided with such failures of

³ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

political judgment as a strident defense of Japanese imperialism in the 1930s, a blindness to the authoritarianism of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union, and the neglect of settler colonialism. But Du Bois remains an exemplary theorist of the imperial precisely due to his sustained attention to the fragility of democratic ideals. He traced the ways that universal ideals could come to accommodate empire, which in turn eroded and undermined those very ideals. This attunement to the instability of the enterprise of democratic politics that nonetheless retains an almost utopian faith in its promise of equality and self-rule marks Du Bois as an instructive model of anti-imperial thinking well after the specific historical conditions that gave rise to his interventions have passed.

By taking up empire as a political and analytical cartography that preceded and exceeded the nation-state, Du Bois also productively refused a disaggregation of the domestic and international. He remained equally attentive to the domestic causes and consequences of empire as well as its international reverberations. It is important to acknowledge here that the invocation of “international thought” as an organizing theme may be misleading in this respect. In contemporary discourse, “the international” often reflects an *opposition* to the domestic, a bifurcation that coincided with the rise of the nation-state. Most of the writings collected here emerged prior to the gradual consolidation of the world of nation-states after World War II. To appreciate the enduring significance of Du Bois’s writings and their distinctive contribution to the “international turn” in political theory, it must be emphasized that his reflections on global affairs always unfold with a commitment to theorizing racial domination as a global phenomenon with important connections and resonances across national boundaries.

Writing before and just as national independence became the global counterpoint to empire, Du Bois carefully delineated the permutations of imperial rule. The conjunctural character of his interventions is another important lesson of his international thought. That is, what makes Du Bois a productive thinker of the international and the imperial is not that he articulates in advance a set of anti-imperial principles that only have to achieve wider circulation, elaboration, and application over time. Instead, he is a thinker who wrestles with empire *in time*, recognizing the mutable character of imperial formations. To capture and analyze the shifting constellation of his triad – empire, democracy, and race – Du Bois often turned to the protean form of the essay, a form open to revision and improvisation. It should be noted that “essay” as noun and verb played

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

a central role in Du Bois's self-understanding.⁴ Two of his most significant books, *Souls of Black Folk* and *Darkwater*, are collections of essays, while two others, *Black Reconstruction* and *Dusk of Dawn*, include subtitles that introduce their subject with the phrase "an essay toward." In the 1953 speech and elsewhere Du Bois also describes himself as essaying, indicating the provisional and experimental quality of his writing. As essayist Du Bois draws further attention to his self-revision by citing, correcting, and expanding on his earlier formulations. Attending to this practice acknowledges the transformation of his thought over time without subscribing to a view that Du Bois's thought is marked by periodic ruptures.

Encountering the New Imperialism

Reflecting on his youth and especially his choice of Germany's first Chancellor Otto von Bismarck as the subject of his 1888 Fisk University graduation speech in the 1940 semi-autobiographical *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois noted, "I was blithely European and imperialist in outlook; democratic as democracy was conceived in America."⁵ His emergence in the first half of the twentieth century as one of the country's most prescient critics of empire's entanglements with democracy was thus not given in advance, but cultivated and revised over a lifetime. Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts on February 23, 1868, a mere five years after the Emancipation Proclamation and as the states of the reconstituted union ratified the Fourteenth Amendment. The son of Alfred Du Bois of Haitian ancestry and Mary Silvina Burghardt, who traced her family line to enslaved Africans bought by Dutch settlers, Du Bois spent his childhood at a remove from the drama of Reconstruction and Redemption. However, the American South would soon become the site of his intellectual and political development when he attended Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee.⁶ From Fisk, he secured his earlier aim of studying at Harvard where he took a second undergraduate degree in 1890 and started graduate work for a PhD in 1891.⁷ A year later with

⁴ Lawrie Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17.

⁶ David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 11–15, 59–66.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 100–103.

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

support from the John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen, Du Bois attended the University of Berlin where he studied with leading social scientists, such as Gustav Schmoller and Adolph Wagner, and overlapped with Max Weber, who attended some of the same seminars in economic history.⁸ Without sufficient funding to complete the PhD in Germany, Du Bois returned to Cambridge and submitted his dissertation, supervised by Albert Bushnell Hart, on “The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870.” He became the first African American to receive a Harvard PhD.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, a thirty-two-year-old Du Bois had published *Suppression* in 1896 while teaching at Wilberforce University and *The Philadelphia Negro*, a study of urban African American life in 1899, from a new position at Atlanta University. Based on the pioneering sociological model of *Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois organized the Atlanta University Studies and annual Atlanta Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems. In this context he produced studies on Black life that ranged from the exploration of the African American business community and southern land tenure to educational opportunity and economic cooperation. The findings and photographs from these studies would become the basis of the exhibit on the American Negro that Du Bois prepared for the 1900 Paris Exposition.⁹

In the *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, Du Bois had already pierced the barrier between the national and international, rendering US abolition of the slave trade derivative of the Haitian Revolution as fears of spreading insurrection inspired renewed anti-trade activism.¹⁰ But he only confronted the problem of *empire* as the dust settled on a new age of imperial expansion. In 1884, during the European scramble for Africa, Bismarck called the Berlin Conference to fix a common policy of

⁸ *Ibid.*, 142–143. On Weber and Du Bois, see Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 149–168.

⁹ For the data and images presented at the Paris Exposition, see Whitney Battle-Baptiste and Britt Rusert, eds., *W. E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America: The Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Hudson, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2018); Julian Rothenstein, ed., *Black Lives 1900: W.E.B. Du Bois at the Paris Exposition* (London: Redstone Press, 2019).

¹⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States, 1638–1870* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896); reprinted in Du Bois, *Writings*, ed. Nathan Higgins (New York: Library of America, 1986), 74–96. On the international themes in *Suppression*, see Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction*, 120–128.

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

colonization and preserve the European balance of power as it teetered under the weight of expansion in Africa. Representatives of Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, the Sweden-Norway Union, the Ottoman Empire, and the United States agreed to mutual recognition of new occupations, committed to free trade in the territories of the Congo basin, and required European powers to “watch over the conservation of the indigenous populations and the amelioration of their moral and material condition.”¹¹

Though the United States did not directly participate in this colonization of Africa, expansion beyond the North American continent was already in full swing when US representatives attended the Berlin Conference. By 1867, the United States had occupied several islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean. The Spanish-American War of 1898 only escalated this phase of expansion. In just two years the United States annexed Cuba, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico, all formerly part of the Spanish Empire, and also claimed the non-Spanish territories of Hawai’i, Samoa, and Wake Island.¹² When armed resistance to American rule broke out in the Philippines, proponents of US expansion echoed a newly entrenched vision of racial hierarchy, which rendered empire a natural and divinely sanctioned project. In 1900, one senator described “the American cause as nothing less than that of the ‘English-speaking and Teutonic peoples’ whom God had prepared for a ‘thousand years’ to become ‘the master organizers of the world.’”¹³

During the same year, Du Bois attended the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London while en route to the Paris Exposition. The newly founded African Association, created by the Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams and the South African equal-rights campaigner Alice Victoria Kinloch, organized the conference to assess and respond to this new wave of imperial expansion. Of particular concern for the Association was the South African context where the brutal Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) had introduced the use of concentration camps

¹¹ “General Act of the Conference of Berlin concerning the Congo,” *American Journal of International Law Supplement: Official Documents* 3 (January 1909): 7–25.

¹² Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 17.

¹³ Senator Albert Beveridge quoted in Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2.

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

and set the stage for the consolidation of imperial domination.¹⁴ At the gathering of thirty-seven delegates and ten observers, Du Bois gave an address to the nations of world, which included his prophetic and oft-repeated declaration that

the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, the question as to how far differences of race, which show themselves chiefly in the colour of the skin and the texture of the hair, are going to be made, hereafter, the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization.¹⁵

The central place Du Bois would come to play in the development of Pan-Africanism as well as his later reiteration and radicalization of this diagnosis has resulted in a backward projection that inflates Du Bois's role at the 1900 gathering and reads a later anti-imperial politics back onto the conference. Yet at this moment Du Bois and fellow conference participants aspired to secure the rights of colonial subjects *within* the British Empire.¹⁶ If Du Bois's address included the bold demand "as soon as practicable [for] the right for responsible self-government to the black colonies of Africa and the West Indies," he saw this aim as an extension and fulfilment of the British anti-slavery movement. Similarly, when considering America's new territorial empire at the 1899 convening of the American Negro Academy, he positioned American "ownership of Porto Rico, and Havana, our protectorate of Cuba, and conquest of the Philippines" as both an opportunity for African Americans to play a role in the new imperial project and an occasion to refashion the American polity as a multiracial society. African Americans, he argued, can "guard and guide" the new colonial subjects. Collectively, "Negro and Filipino, Indian and Porto Rican, Cuban and Hawaiian, all must stand united under the stars and stripes for an America that knows no color line in the freedom of its opportunities."¹⁷

¹⁴ On Williams's interests in South Africa and the country's role at the 1900 meeting, see Victoria Collis, "Anxious Records: Race, Imperial Belonging and the Black Literary Imagination, 1900–1946," unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University (2013), 16–17.

¹⁵ Du Bois, "To the Nations of the World" (1900), p. 19.

¹⁶ Victoria Collis-Buthelezi situates this position in a wider context of Black Victorianism that sought to secure racial fraternity and equality within the British Empire. Victoria Collis-Buthelezi, "Under the Aegis of Empire: Cape Town, Victorianism, and Early-Twentieth-Century Black Thought," *Callaloo* 39 (Winter 2016): 115–132.

¹⁷ Du Bois, "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind" (1900), p. 9. Du Bois references American expansion in the wake of the Spanish-American War twice in *Souls of Black Folk*. In chapter 3, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and others," he writes that

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

Given these positions, it is easy to see why Du Bois would later admonish himself as “imperialist in outlook.” But even in this early engagement, Du Bois modeled a critical approach to the civilizational discourses of the late Victorian era that sought to resignify the meaning of “civilization” without abandoning the term. Du Bois declared “that darker races are to-day the least advanced in culture,” but he qualified this in several respects.¹⁸ First this was only true when “European standards” were taken to be the basis of judgment. Second, writing against the calcification and naturalization of racial distinctions, Du Bois argued that Europe’s civilizational advancement was a historical development rather than the culmination of a natural endowment.¹⁹ Finally, drawing on his early account of race in the 1897 “The Conservation of Races,” Du Bois pluralized the concept of civilization, arguing that each race had its distinctive “spiritual message” for the world.²⁰

His reflection on US expansion evinced a similar set of tensions. Readers familiar with Du Bois’s domestic writings will notice echoes between the position of African Americans as guards and guides to colonial subjects and his ideal of a Talented Tenth, an educated and trained elite who would lead and rule the Black masses.²¹ At the same

proposals of African American emigration have been made “hopeless” given “the recent course of the United States toward weaker and darker peoples in the West Indies, Hawaii, and the Philippines.” W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. David Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1997), 68. In chapter 8, “Of the Quest of the Silver Fleece,” he ties together America’s “Reconstruction tragedies, its Spanish war interludes and Philippine matinees” (125).

¹⁸ Du Bois, “To the Nations of the World,” p. 19. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* In “Conservation,” Du Bois had identified races as distinguished by physical but more profoundly by “spiritual, psychical” differences, each given coherence by a shared history and a “conscious striving together for certain ideals of life”; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Conservation of Races* (Washington, DC: American Negro Academy, 1897); reprinted in Du Bois, *Writings*, 815–826 at 817–18. For debate about Du Bois’s cultural-historical account of race in the essay and its relation to his later and more political explanations, see, e.g., Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 21–37; Robert Gooding-Williams, “Outlaw, Appiah, and Du Bois’s ‘The Conservation of Races,’” in *W. E. B. Du Bois on Race and Culture*, ed. Bernard W. Bell, Emily R. Grosholz, and James B. Stewart (New York: Routledge, 1996), 39–56; Mia Bay, “‘The World Was Thinking Wrong About Race’: *The Philadelphia Negro* and Nineteenth-Century Science,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and the City: The Philadelphia Negro and Its Legacy*, ed. Michael B. Katz and Thomas J. Sugrue (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 41–60; Chike Jeffers, “The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois’s ‘The Conservation of Races,’” *Ethics* 123 (2013): 403–426.

²¹ Du Bois developed the idea of a talented tenth in a pair of essays published in the 1902 “Of the Training of Black Men,” reprinted as chapter 6 of *Souls of Black Folk*, and the 1903 “The

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

time, he transformed imperial expansion into an opportunity to refashion the American polity. Framing the question of imperial expansion as primarily one of the incorporation of new citizens, Du Bois articulated a deterritorialized and transnational view of American citizenship.²²

The Rise of Democratic Despotism

While Du Bois continued to entertain the possibility that extending citizenship as well as cultural recognition to colonial subjects could resolve the dilemma of imperial expansion, in the context of World War I and its immediate aftermath, he left behind this concern with incorporation to consider why democratic states had embraced imperial expansion. When war broke out in 1914, Du Bois was already the critically acclaimed author of the 1903 *Souls of Black Folk* and had cofounded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910. Leaving his academic post, he joined the new organization as Director of Publicity and Research and began to publish its monthly magazine, *The Crisis*, as editor in 1910. That year he also joined the original editorial board of the new *Journal of Race Development*, the “world’s first journal of international relations.”²³ (It would be renamed the *Journal of International Relations* in 1919 and *Foreign Affairs* in 1922, which together published some of Du Bois’s most significant essays on global affairs, beginning with “Of the Culture of White Folk” in 1917.) The move from Atlanta to New York City in the summer of 1910 marked a transition in which Du Bois increasingly combined the role of scholar and activist, as well as their respective methods of social science and propaganda.²⁴

Talented Tenth,” reprinted in Du Bois, *Writings*, 842–861. Beyond the standard critique that this account of leadership is elitist, Robert Gooding-Williams persuasively argues that the more deleterious consequence is the narrowing of what counts as Black politics to the dyad of ruler–ruled. Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 31–36.

²² Inés Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 128–130. This echoed Frederick Douglass’s nineteenth-century conception of a “composite nationality” grounded on Black emigration and US expansion in the Caribbean and Central America. See Juliet Hooker, “A Black Sister to Massachusetts’: Latin American and the Fugitive Democratic Ethos of Frederick Douglass,” *American Political Science Review* 109 (November 2015): 690–702.

²³ Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 45.

²⁴ Du Bois’s biographer David Levering Lewis describes this as “the fork in his career leading from science to propaganda,” from “mobilizing racial data to becoming the prime mobilizer of

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

From New York, Du Bois also reengaged the global problem of the color line. A year after the first issue of *The Crisis* appeared, he traveled to London to attend the Universal Races Congress in July 1911. Organized by the German-American ethicist Felix Adler and the Hungarian-born sociologist Gustav Spiller, the Congress convened “to discuss, in the light of science and modern conscience, the general relations subsisting between the peoples of the West and those of the East, between the so-called ‘white’ and the so-called ‘colored’ peoples, with a view to encouraging between them a fuller understanding, the most friendly feelings, and the heartier co-operation.”²⁵ Among the more than fifty delegates were the liberal critic of empire J. A. Hobson, fellow NAACP cofounder Mary White Ovington, Native rights advocate Charles Eastman, and the Nigerian proponent of independent African churches Mojola Agbebi, while the anthropologist Franz Boas presented a paper in absentia.²⁶

At the Congress, Du Bois addressed the audience three times: opening the first session with his poem “A Hymn to the Peoples,” delivering a paper on the subject of “Inter-racial Economics,” and appearing in the place of the ethnographer Sir Harry Johnston, who missed the meeting.²⁷ In a sign of the distinct direction on the economics of imperialism he would soon chart, Du Bois sparred with Hobson in his second appearance before the Congress. While Hobson diminished the role of race, arguing that “economic contacts were not primarily inter-racial at all,” with “race . . . entered as a qualifying factor, in respect of different capacities of labour,” Du Bois emphasized the centrality of racism in both suppressing wages for African Americans in the United States and structuring the “economic intercourse between forward and backward nations.”²⁸

a race.” Lewis, *Biography of a Race*, 408. Du Bois’s own self-representation in *Dusk of Dawn* suggests a combination of science and propaganda. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 2.

²⁵ “Summary of Speeches,” *Record of the proceedings of the First Universal Races Congress, held at the University of London, July 26–29, 1911* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1911), 22.

²⁶ Gustav Spiller, ed., *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems: communicated to the first Universal Races Congress, held at the University of London July 26–29, 1911* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1911) Du Bois had met Franz Boas when he gave a Commencement Address at Atlanta University in 1906. He would later recall the profound impression this encounter made. Boas’s history of “black kingdoms south of the Sahara” prompted Du Bois’s own rethinking of African history. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* ([1939]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), xxxi.

²⁷ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 115–116; Lewis, *Biography of a Race*, 440–441.

²⁸ “Fourth Session . . . Inter-racial economics; peaceful contact” in *Record of the proceedings of the First Universal Races Congress*, 42–43, 44.

Democracy and Empire: An Introduction

This disagreement notwithstanding, Du Bois returned from the Universal Races Congress with a renewed optimism that social scientific interventions would defeat ideologies of racial hierarchy. “When fifty races look each other in the eye, face to face, there arises a new conception of humanity and its problems,” Du Bois wrote to the subscribers of *The Crisis*.²⁹ Reflecting on the Congress in *Dusk of Dawn*, he recalled his optimism: “World peace, world organization, conference and conciliation, the gradual breaking down of trade barriers, the spread of civilization to backward people . . . seem[ed] to me the natural, inevitable path of world progress.”³⁰

But three weeks before the Congress, German gunboats had sailed into the port of Agadir in Morocco, sparking the second Moroccan Crisis in less than a decade. Four years later in his perceptive and pathbreaking essay “African Roots of War,” Du Bois listed this conflict along with battles in Fashoda, Adwa, Tripoli, Delagoa Bay, and South Africa as “the desperate flames” that ignited the Great War. Du Bois argued that the global scale of the war could be located in the political-economic transformations of the nineteenth century that birthed a new age of imperialism.

In Europe, “the divine right of the few to determine economic income and distribute the goods and services of the world has been questioned and curtailed.” This process of the progressive inclusion and incorporation of first the bourgeoisie and second the working classes, however, depended on “the dream of exploitation abroad.”³¹ The dilemma of empire and democracy was now reframed in Du Bois’s paradoxical and theoretically fecund phrase “democratic despotism.”³² The new age of imperialism, Du Bois argued, was distinctive in that rather than the merchant or company, the “new democratic nation composed of united capital and labor” participated in the exploitation of Black and Asian workers.³³

Du Bois’s approach in this essay mirrored J. A. Hobson’s 1902 study of imperialism in two respects.³⁴ First, writing in the midst of war (the

²⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Races Congress,” *The Crisis* 2,5 (September 1911): 207, quoted in Lewis, *Biography of a Race*, 441.

³⁰ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 116. ³¹ Du Bois, “The African Roots of War” (1915), p. 26.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 27. ³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* ([1902]; Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991).