

THE REACTION OF W. E. B. DUBOIS
TO EUROPEAN COLONIALISM, 1900-1950

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The relative merits of colonialism are questionable; its evils are manifest. To the African, perhaps the most harmful aspect of colonialism was the feeling that, psychologically, he had lost his homeland. This sense of loss arose from the "loss of independence, freedom and dignity."¹ As the Africans increasingly recognized themselves to be the "victims of white superiority, of colonialism, of imperialism and of discrimination," and as their resistance to such victimization grew, they sought, and received, help in their crusade for freedom from many different people, both black and white, European and American.² For the first fifty years of the twentieth century, Dr. William Edward Burghardt DuBois, was the most influential Afro-American who spoke out against colonialism.

Since his death in 1963, Dr. DuBois and his role in Afro-American and African history has undergone increasing critical examination. Yet whether or not scholars find

¹Colin Legum, Pan Africanism: A Short Political Guide, (New York: Praeger, 1962), 15.

²Ibid., 41.

him to have been a beneficial influence upon those histories, it cannot be denied that his impact was tremendous. As editor of the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Crisis, from its conception until his resignation in 1932, he greatly influenced the black American's fight for equality. It was from his position as editor that he also became the virtual Father of Pan-Africanism. Always seeking to attack racism in all of its diverse forms, DuBois, early in his career lashed out at colonialism and, until his death, continued at every opportunity to criticize that repressive domination.

DuBois' opinion of colonialism was, of course, obvious--he thought it loathsome. But his commitment against colonialism went deeper than simple loathing. It was the result of a comprehensive analysis of colonialism and the colonial powers. From his analysis he drew conclusions and opinions that did not change throughout his long life. When abstracted from his numerous books, articles, speeches and letters concerning colonialism, DuBois' thought is found to concern itself with four basic categories: the factors that produced colonialism; the kind of culture that tolerated it; the comparison and contrast of the two basic colonial systems; and suggestions about how to end colonialism. Underlying these areas of thought lay two important realities--racism and economics.

The racial aspect of his writing was always present, for, as Colin Legum wrote, "all his life his thinking was dominated by his colour."³ As early as 1900, DuBois drafted a memorial which the first Pan-African Conference sent "to the sovereigns in whose realm are subjects of African descent," and in which he made the prophetic statement "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line."⁴ This view marked the theme his writings were to contain for the rest of his life. Writing for Colliers in 1906, Dr. DuBois further developed his "color line" theory. He argued that European civilization equated "white" with "civilization." Recognizing the absurdity of such a belief, he went on to predict that the "brown and black races" would stir into self-consciousness, particularly since the yellow had started the process.⁵ In a veiled threat, he both defined the color line and pointed to the inevitability of the darker

³Ibid., 26.

⁴George Shepperson, "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism" in Independent Black Africa: The Politics of Freedom, ed., William J. Hana, (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), 201. This conference was the first of six in which Dr. DuBois was either an organizer or an active participant. His vigorous energy, enthusiasm and support, particularly for the conferences of the 1920's, earned him the undisputed title as the Father of Pan Africanism.

⁵His reference here is to the Japanese victory in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War.

race's rise to self-consciousness when he asked, "shall the awakening of these sleepy millions be in accordance with, and aided by, the great ideals of white civilization, or in spite of them and against them? This is the problem of the color line."⁶

It was the color line, DuBois thought, that was responsible for the economic exploitation of both American blacks and native Africans. He saw Marxism as the least evil solution to the economic plight of both peoples, and, for a limited time, even joined the American Socialist Party.⁷ Yet, Marxist doctrine did not satisfy DuBois. He believed that the "method of creating, controlling and distributing wealth" was horribly unjust and anticipated public control of wealth. He could not, however, anticipate the mechanism of such control as could dogmatic Marxists.⁸ He felt that the Marxian idea had to be radically modified if it were to work for blacks. The existence of two working classes, one of whom deliberately suppressed the other, severely hampered Marxism's chance

⁶W. E. B. DuBois, "The Color Line Belts the World," Colliers, 38 (1906), 20.

⁷DuBois joined the American Socialist Party in 1911 but resigned his membership in 1912 so that he could back the presidential campaign of Woodrow Wilson. Julius Lester, ed., The Seventh Son: The Thought and Writings of W. E. B. DuBois, vol. I, (New York: Random House, 1971), 137.

⁸W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion", The Crisis, 22 (1921), 103.

of success. For that reason, he argued that "a Marxian revolution based on a united class conscious proletariat" was not in the foreseeable future. Nor would it become possible while "race antagonism and labor group rivalry is still undisturbed by world catastrophe."⁹

DuBois not only doubted how well the Marxist objectives would satisfy the needs of blacks, he also questioned the extent to which blacks could trust the proletariat and its leaders. As evidence of his concern he pointed to the discriminatory policies of labor unions as well as those of Socialist parties, both American and European. He wondered how the Negro race could expect a sense of understanding and brotherhood from uneducated workers when even the educated upper classes held no such compassion and feeling. DuBois saw it as his responsibility "to convince the working classes of the world that black men, brown men, and yellow men are human beings and suffer the same discrimination that white workers suffer."¹⁰

Convinced that a redistribution of wealth was the only way to bring blacks to economic equality with whites and that the only way to achieve such a redistribution was to make the proletariat aware of its enslavement,

⁹W. E. B. DuBois, "Marxism and the Negro Crisis," The Crisis, 40 (1933), 103-4, 118.

¹⁰DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 22 (1921), 103.

DuBois saw capitalism as the causitive factor behind all social injustice and especially as the root of colonialism. Thus his chastizements of colonialism have a rather Marxian flavor despite the fact he did not accept the revolutionary aspects of Marxism until late in his life when he joined the Communist Party at age 93.

While he believed colonialism to be based on racism and economics, and thought a Marxian approach to economics could end it, he held firmly to one other tenet as well. Africa was to be for the Africans. He even went so far as to actively discourage emigration from America to Africa, particularly when it was a philanthropic action to aid African development. In a 1924 issue of The Crisis, he wrote that it was a common idea to consider going to Africa to help the Africans catch up to the western level of civilization. But, he cautioned those with that idea to be aware of three things. First, that Africa was full--as full as she could be given the current level of industrialization. Second, the Africans were civilized and moving consciously towards achieving the level of Western civilization. And third, people who went to give guidance ended up staying, and the Africans knew that. And Africans, DuBois claimed, were not about to give up

any of their territory for someone from outside Africa-- it was theirs and they meant to keep it.¹¹

Thus, DuBois attacked colonialism as a stronghold of racism and economic exploitation. He sought to end racism and to unite the peoples throughout the world in the fight for redistribution of wealth. At the same time he advocated self awareness on the part of Africans and anxiously awaited an African Africa.

¹¹DuBois, "Opinion", The Crisis, 28 (1924), 106.

CHAPTER II

THE UNDERLYING CAUSE

The European powers justified their colonial activities with arguments of international strategy, civilizing missions, and increased export markets which brought prosperity to the colonial areas--but to W. E. B. DuBois, colonialism was only labor exploitation in another guise. He believed that European capitalists had seen the people of Africa and Asia as a source of cheap labor and had sought to use that source to their advantage. Rather than bringing prosperity, the exploitation of colonial labor and resources fostered depravation and destitution among Africans and Asians. DuBois held the capitalists responsible for the colonial conditions and blamed them for making the colonies "the slums of the world" and "centers of helplessness, of discouragement of initiative . . . and of legal suppression of all activities or thoughts."¹ As he recognized that the economic suppression intensified racism in the colonies, DuBois was repeatedly to attack the practices

¹W. E. B. DuBois, Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1945), 17.

behind that suppression. In a speech delivered before the Phillippine Independence Demonstration in Cooper Union, New York on February 23, 1925, DuBois made his position quite clear when he remarked that dark labor was dominated by a spreading propaganda that declared they were not human in the same sense as whites and thus could not be allowed to govern themselves or enjoy self-determination. He claimed that the money for that propaganda campaign came from the profits yielded by the exploitation of that same dark labor force. In keeping with his commitment of fighting racism and its accompanying economic suppression, DuBois advocated a propaganda campaign to counteract the effects of white capitalism.² His writings illuminating the economic foundations of colonialism were a part of his efforts to wage such a counter campaign. His intent was to make the public, both black and white, aware of exactly why major white capitalists wanted the darker races kept in a state of limited development.

→ As he viewed the world around him, DuBois came to believe that the great problem of the twentieth century was the color line--a barrier which he saw imposed on a world-wide basis. For the native labor force in the colonial areas, he thought the most serious problem the

²Herbert Aptheker, ed. The Correspondence of W. E. B. DuBois, vol. I; Selections, 1878-1932. (University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 303.

color-line produced was the use of their labor for the sole benefit of whites, and most especially the European whites.³ He saw such exploitation as a very major difficulty because it was obvious that the tradition of using the labor of non-white races for personal profit did not end with the nineteenth century abolition of slavery, particularly in the British colonies. To understand why the British continued that tradition, and the twentieth century labor situation in general, DuBois felt it necessary to explain what had really been responsible for the success of the English abolition efforts.⁴ According to DuBois, during the eighteenth century England was deeply involved in the slave trade and its exploitation of African labor, yet in the nineteenth century she divested herself of all traffic in people. DuBois thought this a rather curious reversal, and the historian in him asked how and why abolition occurred. His investigations led him to believe that, while philanthropic attitudes were largely responsible for the campaigns against both the slave trade and the institution itself, parliament would never have passed the necessary legislation had it.

³W. E. B. DuBois, Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1940; reprint ed., New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 261.

⁴W. E. B. DuBois, "The Realities of Africa," Foreign Affairs, 21 (1943), 721. Hereafter, Foreign Affairs will be cited as FA.

not been for "the diminishing returns of the African slave trade itself, the bankruptcy of the West Indian sugar economy through the Haitian revolution, the interference of Napoleon and the competition of Spain." The bitter pill of abolition was also softened by the fact that other areas of investment were opening up, notably China and India because of the "consolidation of the empire" in those areas.⁵ Thus, he thought, the outcome of the great humanitarian effort to end the subjugation and exploitation of African labor was actually determined by economics. But the labor force remained and the profits were still to be had--thus exploitation never stopped.

→ It was patently clear to DuBois that the "new-imperialism" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a deliberate effort once again to use African labor to Europe's advantage. To him, the Berlin Colonial Congress which divided Africa into spheres of influence was simply a meeting of the imperialistic powers designed to work out the details of the split. The result of that meeting and of the scheming and maneuvering to attain their preconceived exploitation was the partition of Africa and what is often referred to as the Scramble for Africa. He also felt that:

⁵Ibid., 721-22.

"it was equally clear [to those imperialistic powers] that unless there was political domination of these colonies to insure a virtual monopoly of material and labor, the colonial investment there would not be secure. The almost complete partition of Africa followed, settling in the hands of England a vast colonial empire and yielding to France and Germany less valuable but nonetheless large imperial domains."⁶

Once the colonial powers entered a new territory, DuBois believed the initial goal of the "European investors" and their representatives was to gain title to land. He thought their reasoning was two-fold: "to establish plantations on which cocoa, coffee, tobacco, grain, and other profitable products could be raised; and to sequester enough land to make it impossible for the natives to live without working for the outside capitalists."⁷ DuBois believed that from the beginning of their colonial ventures, the European capitalists and investors were aware of the unlimited potential that the colonies in Africa and Asia presented. "The investing countries realized that strong political control in African and Asian colonies would result in such a monopoly of labor and raw materials as to insure magnificent profits. The institution of colonialism, which allowed the European investor virtually

⁶Ibid., 723.

⁷W. E. B. DuBois, "Black Africa Tomorrow," FA, 17 (1938), 101.

total control of colonial raw materials, had as its very foundation the exploitation of the native labor force."⁸ Nor did DuBois see any change in colonial policy by 1944 that could prevent his writing that:

"The colonial organization today is primarily economic. It is a method of carrying on industry and commerce and of distributing wealth. As such, it not only confines colonial people to a low standard of living and encourages by reason of its high profits to investors a determined and interested belief in the inferiority of certain races, but it also affects the situation of the working classes and minorities in civilized countries."⁹

His firm belief was that Europe's ever increasing need to exploit the darker races stemmed from the inability to control the white working classes. Desperately striving to continue in their profit taking, the entrepreneurs grasped at the colonies, realizing therein lay an untapped labor source. Native laborers had no protection. They could be worked until they dropped, paid virtually nothing in wages (thus keeping costs low) and should they revolt could be "shot and maimed on 'punitive' expeditions."¹⁰

⁸DuBois, "Realities," FA, 21 (1943), 722-23, 721.

⁹W. E. B. DuBois, "Imperialism, United Nations, Colonial People," New Leader, 27 (1944), 5. See also, DuBois, "Realities," FA, 21 (1943), 721 for specific reference to Africa.

¹⁰W. E. B. DuBois, "The Culture of the White Folk," Journal of Race Development, 17 (1917), reprinted in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 440.

DuBois realized that the exploitation of the colonized people was made easier by the uncivilized nature (at least by Western standards) of the natives themselves-- particularly in the case of African tribes--and also that "the powerful technical organization created by whites . . . [facilitated] the rule of great industrial companies."¹¹ But working hand in hand with the capitalists were the missionaries. Yet DuBois did give credit to the missionary groups for bringing education to Africa. His main concern was that the education was insufficient in that it seldom went beyond the primary grades. Secondary education and professional training were all but unavailable. Those colonies offering such "advanced" education to the Africans (British and French West Africa) were severely hindered by a lack of funds.¹² The colonial powers did not like to expose large numbers of their wards to Western ideas and education, but as DuBois himself realized, slowly, increasing numbers of Africans were acquiring European knowledge.¹³ They were gaining this knowledge despite the fact that many schools taught only in the local vernacular and that they were "carefully

¹¹The People's Voice, September 6, 1947, 14.

¹²DuBois, "Black Africa," FA, 17 (1938), 107.

¹³DuBois, Color and Democracy, 19.

shielded from all outside influence." Indeed, changes that seemed to lead to a "social or political development along Western lines" were thought of as harmful to the status quo.¹⁴ It was such treatment of the Africans that convinced DuBois the white attitude toward their colonial peoples was one of keeping the darker races poor and ignorant lest they seek organization and then "demand to be treated as men."¹⁵ Nor could DuBois be dissuaded from his conviction by arguments that the colonial powers were civilizing the darker races. These arguments fell flat because to him education was the key to civilization and the education available to the colonial peoples was an ineffective civilizing agent. His comment, published in 1909, was as valid in the European colonies as it was in the United States:

"The exercise of benevolent tutelage cannot be urged for that tutelage is not benevolent that does not prepare for free responsible manhood Nor does selfish exploitation help the underdeveloped; rather it hinders and weakens them."¹⁶

¹⁴The Peoples Voice, September 6, 1947, 14.

¹⁵W. E. B. DuBois, "Prospect of a World Without Race Conflict," American Journal of Sociology, March 1944, reprinted in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. 2, 533.

¹⁶W. E. B. DuBois, "The Legacy of John Brown," from John Brown (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs, 1909) reprinted in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. I, 446.

For DuBois then, imperialism and the resultant colonialism, were not civilizing missions. Nor were they aspects of international strategy. To him, they were simply national programs of 'take as much land as can be taken and do whatever is necessary to squeeze as much profit out of that land as is possible.' That is why he repeatedly argued that colonialism in Africa, was at its very base, "cheap land in Africa and large manufacturing capital in Europe with the resultant opportunity for the exercise of pressure from home investors and the press."¹⁷ As far as he was concerned, any argument to the contrary was not worth listening to, and any statement that the colonies were not profitable or that the main purpose of imperialism was not to support the wealth of the mother country was "at best self-deception and at worst deliberate lying."¹⁸ Such arguments had to be lies because he could see no way in which the value of African exports would not be low "since in a market controlled by the manufacturers the labor cost is depressed so as to yield high profit." He knew that the items exported from Africa were

¹⁷W. E. B. DuBois, "Worlds of Color," FA, 3 (1925), 424.

¹⁸W. E. B. DuBois, "A Programme of Emancipation for Colonial People," Division of the Social Sciences, The Graduate School, Howard University, Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories: Papers and Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Conference, (Washington, D.C.: 1948) VI, 98.

items the world would purchase even if the price went up. He reasoned that, since current investors were making enormous profits and labor was virtually enslaved, if the labor received a proper wage instead of that wage becoming profit, "the potential value of African raw material runs into the billions."¹⁹

DuBois also realized that a colonial power's income from her colonies was not derived solely from capital invested in those colonies. The many industries at home which supported those in the colonies also brought in high revenues.

"Capital according to the classical theory comprises the machines and materials used in production. But while labor as a commodity is paid according to its market price with no floor to that price save the cost of reproduction of the species, the price of capital is boxed by the capitalists' demands which are practically unlimited in regions where wages and conditions of work can be pushed down to the lowest depth."²⁰

DuBois realized that, in addition to providing capital to colonial producers at outrageous prices, home industries could also buy raw materials from the colonies cheaper than they could from traditional suppliers. They could buy cheaply because the production costs were lowered as

¹⁹DuBois, "Realities," FA, 21 (1943), 721.

²⁰DuBois, "Programme," Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, 100.

a result of the near "starvation wages" paid to native workers.²¹ Regardless of which method domestic capitalists used to gain their profits, DuBois knew they and their investors were growing rich at the expense of native labor.

Colonialism then, as DuBois understood it, was a manifestation of greed. That greed was inherent in the materialistic culture that capitalism had produced. Greed, or the desire for profit, had led European capitalists to the underdeveloped areas of the world because there the labor force could be totally controlled. Kept ignorant and poor, the native labor force was too concerned with mere survival to attempt removing their oppressors. It was this exploitation about which DuBois tried to make the world aware.

²¹National Guardian: The Progressive Weekly, March 14, 1949, 9.

CHAPTER III

THE TOLERATING CULTURE

As DuBois saw it, colonialism was nothing less than the deliberate exploitation of colored labor. Colonialism and its horrors were accepted by the Europeans because their culture recognized and abided by the color line of racism. Ever angered by intolerance, DuBois was sharply critical of those aspects of European culture that fostered, or were produced by the artificial barriers of both colonialism and racism. Underlying his criticism of that culture was the undying belief that if the white culture did not readjust its values, as the oppressed colored races began their rise to self-consciousness those races would totally reject that culture.

He did not care much for the European culture after it became heavily influenced by colonialism. He thought it a "gracious culture" with a "delicate literature" that dwelt on "the little intellectual problems of the rich and well-born, discussed small matters of manners and convention, and omitted the weightier ones of law, mercy, justice, and truth."¹ Nor did he care for the European

¹DuBois, The World and Africa, 37.

"gentleman" who was a product of that culture. Indeed, DuBois found such a man to be

". . . well bred and of meticulous grooming, of knightly sportsmanship and invincible courage even in the face of death; but one who did not hesitate to use machine guns against assagais and to cheat 'niggers'; an ideal sportsman . . . indulging in lying, murder, theft, rape, deception, and degradation . . . [of] colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world."²

The most frustrating aspect of this European culture was the misconceptions it fostered. During the first fifty years of the twentieth century the ordinary individual knew relatively little about the colonial territories. The knowledge they did have came from the accounts of colonial officials, explorers, occasional travellers, missionaries, or from newspaper reports. DuBois was very much aware of the public's ignorance and he accused those who had reasons for maintaining colonies of intentionally taking advantage of that ignorance to give the public an erroneous impression of the native people. One specific example he cited as about the "natural" condition of backward people. According to DuBois, the European colonial powers reported that the colonies were full of "disease, ignorance and crime", and tried to create the

²DuBois, "Culture," in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 439.

impression that poverty was the natural state of backward people who had not been exposed to Western civilizing influences. DuBois believed that it was the influx of European colonists who, through their exploitation, produced the poverty and it was the poverty that caused the disease, ignorance and crime.³

He also thought that the Europeans accepted these misconceptions because they wanted to believe Africans and Asians were inferior to them and he took them to task for it. He castigated them for the Social Darwinism that was inherent in their culture. He accused them of willfully and knowingly suppressing the darker races and of categorically refusing to recognize any type of equality. He informed them that the "superiority" on which they based their suppression was artificial and resulted from "hyperbole, ignorance, rumor, inuendo, superstition and tradition."⁴ Hoping to point out to the Europeans how foolish their actions were, he wrote that they felt as though they had some kind of moral obligation to "raise" the dark-skinned people in "sober and in limited ways" so that "to the limited extent of their shallow

³W. E. B. DuBois, "The Souls of White Folk," in Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920) reprinted in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. I, 494.

⁴DuBois, "Prospect," in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 529.

capacities . . . [they could] be useful to whites." He went on to warn Europe that "slowly but surely white culture is evolving the theory that 'darkies' are born beasts of burden for white folk."⁵

DuBois thought that the European belief in the inferiority of all darker races was so ingrained it was basic to the European character. He was saddened by his realization that the European sincerely believed the non-white races were "biologically different," and as a result of that difference, the non-white races suffered from a "congenital inferiority." Thus he believed that, to the European, it was inability and not a lack of training that kept the darker races from adopting Western civilization. He feared that such racism would interfere with, if not prevent, any attempt at reform.⁶

The manner in which the Europeans had obtained their colonial territories horrified him--they were "contemptible and dishonest beyond expression." In his eyes the colonial powers not only had perpetrated, but continued to perpetrate, atrocity after atrocity--rape, murder, torture, mutilation--crimes against humanity that were so disgusting the only way the world could tolerate them was to ignore them--to

⁵W. E. B. DuBois, "The African Roots of War," Atlantic Monthly, 65 (1915), 707-14.

⁶DuBois, The World And Africa, 22.

turn a deaf ear to any talk of them. And why ignore them? Because of the increased wealth and profit received from the exploitation of the "darker nations of the world."⁷

Despite its severe shortcomings, DuBois felt that European culture was better than anything Africa or Asia had produced, but better in a specific sense. He did not think European culture was superior because the Europeans were, but rather because of the "width of the stage on which she played her part and the strength of the foundations on which she builded." He did not think European civilization had become so triumphant from any intrinsic qualities. Indeed, the foundations that he thought to be so strong were "the iron and trade of black Africa; the religion and empire building of yellow Asia; the art and science of the 'dago' Mediterranean shore."⁸ In his opinion, Europe was making the same grave mistake that preceding African and Asian cultures had made, that of hating and despising other men. There was one essential difference, however, Europe should know better. "Europe has the awful lesson of the past before her, has the splendid results of widened areas of tolerance, sympathy,

⁷Ibid., 23.

⁸DuBois, "Culture," in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 437-38.

and love among men and she faces a greater, an infinitely greater, world than men of any preceeding civilization ever faced."⁹

Because he thought Europe had the lessons of the past to learn from, DuBois thought it disgraceful that the respect, the relations and the mutual estimation between "the main groups of mankind" were "determined chiefly by the degree in which one can subject the other to its services". That labor was virtually enslaved, ignorance encouraged, religion and culture deliberately disrupted, and self-government denied "so that the favored few may luxuriate in the toil of the tortured many" was the most disappointing aspect of twentieth century Europe to DuBois.¹⁰ If the state of the world showed nothing else, it showed him that Europe was ignoring the experiences of other civilizations. Europe, to her folly, placed herself above history.

With racism a very real fact of life and the European powers firmly implanted in their colonies and showing no indication of changing their policies, DuBois grew very

⁹DuBois, "Souls," in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 499-500.

¹⁰W. E. B. DuBois, "Pan-African Ideals," Nation, 113 (1921), 357. Originally published as "Manifesto to the World" in the August 30, 1921 edition of the Manchester Guardian, this article was a resolution written by DuBois and adopted by the Second Pan-African Congress. It was reprinted again the November 1921 number of The Crisis.

concerned that the whites might become so accustomed to imperialism that they would refuse to realize civilization could advance without the exploitation of the underdeveloped areas.¹¹ He believed the success of colonialism had 'gone to their heads', and he held Britain at fault. As he reasoned it, she had become rich and powerful and the other centers of European civilization envied her wealth and prestige. In their ignorance, these other countries believed Britain's position was based solely on her empire. Wanting the same for themselves, these countries set out to copy the Britain success.¹² Spain, France, Portugal, Belgium, Germany--they each copied the British example so well that by 1925 DuBois could write that virtually all European countries cast a colonial shadow¹³--a black shadow which darkened the very idea of civilization, indeed, it made civilization a farce. At the very heart of the shadow was white Europe's self-imposed obligation to control the "darker world and administer it for

¹¹W. E. B. DuBois, "The Black Man and the Wounded World," The Crisis, June 1924, reprinted in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 164.

¹²DuBois, The World and Africa, 16.

¹³DuBois, "Worlds of Color," FA, 3 (1925), 421. The exception, of course was Germany who had lost her colonies after her defeat in World War I. For an interesting, but semi-scholarly, account of the campaigns to capture German East Africa, see Charles Miller, Battle for the Bundu: The First World War in East Africa, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974).

Europe's good." Or, more simply stated, "the divine right of white people to steal."¹⁴

DuBois was always hostile toward European colonial powers, yet he did realize that much of the inhuman treatment of the natives resulted more from the ruling white minorities of the colonies themselves than from official European colonial policy. He felt that colonial administrators, while not necessarily having identical interests with the colonists themselves, were virtually at their mercy because of pressure that could be brought to bear in the country's Colonial office by the firms and large investors the white minority in the colonies represented. But nevertheless, DuBois placed the overall blame with the European governments for allowing such a situation to arise in the first place, and even more so for permitting it to continue. And as far as he was concerned, European governments not only allowed the situation to continue, they were helping it by regarding colonies as "property investments" which they "guarded and often subsidized . . . but administered primarily in the interest of the investing . . . public." From his point of view, the interests of the investing public meant anything that maintained the peace, prosperity and social development

¹⁴DuBois, "Souls" in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 494, 498.

that produced a desirable level of profits.¹⁵ DuBois was so thoroughly convinced his understanding of the colonial situation was correct, he refused to be put off or mollified when governments, and particularly the British government, financed any form of colonial development. He did not recognize such activities as "pure philanthropy," instead, he referred to them as "handing back to the colonies a small part of the huge profit which private investors have taken out of the colonies under government protection."¹⁶

Believing that all elements of European civilization fostered colonialism through either their direct involvement or their acquiescence, DuBois also castigated the European working classes for their attitudes. He did admit that, unlike their employers, the workers were not as aware of what was happening in the colonies, but, by willfully subjecting themselves to the policies of capitalism, the workers

". . . are voluntarily refusing to know; they are systematically refusing to listen; they are blindly voting armies and navies and hidden diplomacy, regardless of the result, and while the individual white employee in Europe . . . is less to be

¹⁵W. E. B. DuBois, "A Chronicle of Race Relations," Phylon, IV, (1943), 166.

¹⁶Ibid., 277.

condemned than the individual capitalist for the way in which the darker nations have been treated, he cannot escape his responsibility. He is co-worker in the miserable modern subjugation of over one half the world."¹⁷

It was obvious to DuBois that the development and unparalleled success of Western European civilization was predicated on colonialism, and colonialism was founded on the exploitation and the "poverty and ignorance of its own proletariat and of the colored world." Once the workers and the colonial peoples became aware of their exploitation the white "industrial imperialism" would collapse.¹⁸ It was DuBois's intention to make those people aware of their exploitation and his warning to the colonial powers was clear. If Europe did not rapidly and voluntarily abandon its belief in artificially imposed barriers of race and its preoccupation with profit and cease its deliberate subjugation of darker races, those races would rise against their masters, and when they did, they would totally and justifiably reject Western civilization.

¹⁷W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion", The Crisis, 22 (1921), 246-7.

¹⁸W. E. B. DuBois, "The White World," from Dusk of Dawn, reprinted in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 525.

CHAPTER IV

COLONIAL SYSTEMS

DuBois recognized that although colonialism resulted from racism and the desire for economic gain, it existed in two separate forms. In one form, colonialism denied the subject peoples their basic rights as human beings--those same rights held so sacred by the Western powers. In the other form, the colonial powers appeared, at least superficially, to grant the natives their rights and to recognize and treat them as men. As DuBois examined the state of the world, the British colonial empire appeared to him to be the foremost example of the first system while France administered her colonies under the principles of the second. Thus when DuBois attacked the colonial policies of the European powers, he was particularly hostile to Britain and would offer, by way of comparison, examples of how the French treated the natives of their colonies. It is important to remember, however, that the French system of colonial administration did not make the idea of colonies acceptable--it was merely the lesser of two evils.

That colonialism was evil, DuBois had no doubt, and, throughout all his writings that compared the two administrative systems he posed indirectly an unmentioned question: why were there two systems? He admitted that as a youth, he had respected the British people and had been taught to admire their empire. But as he aged his perspective changed. He began to see through the thin veneer that covered British colonial behavior. He believed that in reality the British colonies were centers for the callous and cruel treatment of the darker-skinned races. He wondered, for instance, how the governor of India could, in good conscience, propose a budget for colonial expenditures which allocated 48% of the total revenue for defense at the same time that India contained so many starving people.¹

DuBois not only questioned the British priorities, but also their moral values. He could not understand the high regard that England had for Sir Leander Starr Jameson. Although Jameson had conspired to start a war against two African peoples by submitting falsified reports to the High Commissioner, he had been knighted and had held the office of Prime Minister of Cape Colony. That such an unscrupulous man could be so highly honored by the British

¹W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 19 (1920), 108-9.

deeply disturbed DuBois and, in venting his frustration, he wrote that he and all blacks had "a right to suspect a land that honors the thief of 90 million acres."² Nor could he quite fathom the British opinion of the South African statesman Jan Smuts whom he felt the British regarded as one of their greatest leaders in the empire. DuBois' opinion of him was somewhat different. "Smuts, that curious, provincial mind--German in sympathy, suspicious of France and its black armies, liberal towards all white folk but hating 'niggers' and fearing East Indians."³

Sadly disappointed with British colonial policy, DuBois used the occasion of the Second Pan-African Congress in 1921 to lash out at their inhumanity to their fellow man. In his "Manifesto to the Second Pan-African Congress" he accused Britain of "systematically fostering ignorance" among the natives and, despite her judicial system, her economic activities and her "apparent recognition of native law and customs" he charged Britain with enslaving native labor. Finally, she refused "even to try to train black and brown men in real self-government, to recognize civilized black folk as civilized, or to grant to colored

²Ibid., "Opinion," 238.

³W. E. B. DuBois, "Sketches From Abroad," The Crisis, 27 (1924), 203.

colonies those rights of self-government which it freely gives to white men."⁴

Education was the key to self government and the proper liberal education was impossible for the Africans to obtain. It was impossible to obtain according to DuBois because the British did not want to teach the English language to Africans. Instead, they provided education only in the vernacular of each particular tribe.⁵ Thus deprived of the English language, the Africans stood little chance of expanding the rudimentary knowledge they gained in their colony in either a foreign secondary school or possibly in a university. This deliberate denial of higher education is why DuBois accused the British of "fostering ignorance." Yet it was not only the colonial administrators he held at fault, equally frustrating was the attitude of the English philanthropists, especially the missionaries. It was they, the missionaries, who were largely responsible for native education. DuBois distrusted their motives, especially since he recognized that their greatest victory, the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery in the British empire, "would have met with greater resistance had it not been working along lines favorable to

⁴W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 23 (1921), 7.

⁵W. E. B. DuBois, "Postscript," The Crisis, 38 (1931), 65.

English investment and colonial profit."⁶ Thus, no matter what the various philanthropic and missionary societies announced in public, DuBois remained convinced that British imperialism and philanthropy were symbolically joined, in that they both believed the profit-making ventures of the imperialists and sound colonial administration were the mechanisms that would lead the heathen out of his savage ways.⁷

But what was this sound administration really doing? DuBois believed, if British colonialism was doing anything, it was definitely not leading the heathen out of his savage ways. In the Kenya colony, the British were segregating the natives "into the worst and least habitable parts of their own land." Once the good land was vacated by the Africans, the whites seized it for themselves. The whites in Kenya "established a government based on white suffrage. Not only were the Africans denied participation in the colonial government, a sizeable contingent of East Indian laborers could not have any "decisive voice in the government," nor could the Indians develop many of the choicest farmlands. The land and the government were solely the white man's domain. In 1924, DuBois summed up the entire British effort in the Kenya colony with the following

⁶DuBois, "Realities," FA, 21 (1943), 722.

⁷Ibid., 722-23.

prophetic statement. "It is an attempt to found white supremacy in Africa It will never succeed but it will cause endless bloodshed and misery before it fails."⁸

Nor was DuBois alone in his opinion of British policy in Kenya. During the 1920's DuBois devoted a section of The Crisis to reviews of contemporary literature on blacks and on Africa. Here he examined and reviewed for his readers as many books as he could and either praised the books and authors for their honesty and insight or damned them for their hypocrisy and ignorance. In 1926 he had occasion to review a then recent book by the British missionary Norman Leys entitled Kenya. Leys' work was an analysis of Kenya and an indictment of the administration of that colony, as was DuBois' review; DuBois using that opportunity to again reemphasize his criticisms of British colonialism with its landgrabbers, forced work levies, and inadequate educational policies.⁹

Kenya was not the only British colony in Africa where DuBois saw the inequities of the British system. In 1924, he returned from a brief visit to West Africa, during which he had stopped briefly in the British colony Sierra Leone.

⁸W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 27 (1924), 151-52.

⁹W. E. B. DuBois, "Kenya: A Study of English East African Conditions as revealed by Norman Leys," The Crisis, 31 (1926), 188-91.

Dissatisfied with the conditions he witnessed, DuBois published an article in Current History in which he related what he had seen. And he has seen what he had expected to see--illiteracy, exploitation, land theft, and disfranchisement. "Manifestly . . . there was social and residential segregation by race; there was a degree of disfranchisement that left the negro almost without political power; there was a peonage of the great masses of natives that kept them at work at low wages with little profit, and there was very little popular education."¹⁰ He did not care for the British attempts to "civilize" the West Africans.

DuBois also criticized the British presence in India. Indeed, he considered India to be the best example of "modern colonial imperialism." Because of the profits received from "the African slave trade and on the sugar, tobacco, and cotton crops of America, investment in India grew and spread for three hundred years, until there exists the greatest modern case of the exploitation of one people by another." Nor did he think the British would readily abandon India. They would try to keep India for two reasons: they did not think the Indian race capable of self-government and, equally important, the

¹⁰W. E. B. DuBois, "Britain's Negro Problem in Sierra Leone," Current History, 21 (1925), 693.

"prestige and profit" gained from controlling India "have made it impossible for the British to conceive of India as an autonomous land."¹¹

Although Britain was the most frequent target of DuBois' invective, she was not alone. Belgium was also subjected to his criticism. The "Manifesto to the Second Pan-African Congress served as a vehicle for his attack. In the "Manifesto" he accused Belgium of allowing "banks and great corporations" to control the treatment of her colonies. He realized that Belgium had only recently been given authority over what had been King Leopold's personal empire and that in a very short time she had ended several of the "worst abuses of the king's domination. But DuBois was not satisfied with gestures. He wanted total commitment by the Belgians, and thus he criticized the fact that they had "not confirmed to the people the possession of their land and labor" and that she gave no hint of permitting "the natives any voice in their own government."¹²

The empires of both Britian and Belgium were repressive, and DuBois criticized them for being so. But the French empire was different, at least in DuBois' opinion. For him,

¹¹DuBois, "Prospect," in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 528, 527.

¹²W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 23 (1921), 7.

France had always represented "civilization."¹³ He continued to accord France this honor despite her colonial holdings because of her treatment of the colonial peoples-- she regarded them as men. The colonized people, and particularly the Africans, responded by "thinking French" which was, for DuBois, a good argument for the other colonial powers to treat their colonized people as men rather than as some form of miscreant.¹⁴ Nor was the French behavior toward blacks a new phenomenon. On the contrary, DuBois argued that "since the eighteenth century [France had] . . . insisted on recognizing the social equality of civilized men despite race."¹⁵ Why did the French recognize the "social equality of civilized men"? Because the French, unlike the other colonial powers, neither "loved or hated Negroes as such; they simply grew to regard them as men with possibilities and shortcomings of men, added to an unusual natural personal appearance."¹⁶

DuBois was pleased with the French outlook toward their colonies. He was so taken by the French attitude

¹³W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 31 (1926), 215-6.

¹⁴W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 23 (1922), 200.

¹⁵DuBois, "Prospect," in Lester, The Seventh Son, vol. II, 531.

¹⁶DuBois, "Worlds of Color," FA, 3 (1925), 428.

that, while he criticized the British and Belgians in his "Manifesto to the Second Pan-African Congress," he hailed France, who of all "the great colonial powers has sought to place her cultured black citizens on a plane of absolute legal and social equality with her whites and given them representation in her highest legislature. In her colonies she has a widespread but still imperfect system of state education."¹⁷ He went on to express hope that the educational system would be expanded, native participation in politics increased, native ownership of land authorized and native labor protected from exploitation.¹⁸ Four years later, he again praised French colonial policy in an article for Current History. He commented that France continued to follow her own unique policy of refusing to create the artificial barriers of a color line and she, "in refreshing contrast to the other powers," continued to allow a few Africans French citizenship.¹⁹

The emphasis DuBois placed on the French attitude toward their colonies was especially important in his comparison of the two colonial systems. Very seldom did he refer to the motivation behind French colonialism; instead,

¹⁷W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 23 (1921), 8.

¹⁸Ibid., 10.

¹⁹W. E. B. DuBois, "France's Black Citizens in West Africa," Current History, 22 (1925), 559.

his comments focused on the opportunities the natives had available to them under the French system. Superficially, it could appear that he did not care how much the European powers exploited their colonies as long as they treated the natives as human beings and granted them the basic rights and dignities Europeans granted each other. Such was not the case. DuBois recognized that France was consciously placing culture in the forefront of her colonial policy, but he also knew that "in some parts of French Africa the exploitation of the natives . . . already rivaled that of Belgium."²⁰ He was well aware that the "foundations of a state education system" were merely foundations and that like the political system it was not expanding to include more natives. He freely admitted that the French made it possible for "educated and ambitious natives to be absorbed into the French nation," and that, unlike the British colonies, the education available in French colonial areas was integrated into the educational system of France itself. But, he argued, those facts made absolutely no difference because the French denied their education to all but a select few of the natives. He held labor exploitation responsible for this denial and was afraid that, because so few natives received a proper education, the end result would be "to

²⁰Ibid., 562.

drain off and Frenchify the native leadership of the blacks. This class of educated natives [then] becomes a part of the ruling French caste and leaves little to choose between white and black exploitation."²¹ He decried the bleeding off of native leadership as deliberate and as early as 1921 wrote that while France may have recognized the equality of the African, she also acknowledged "the equal rights of her citizens, black and white, to exploit by modern industrial methods her laboring classes . . . and the crying danger to black France is that its educated and voting leaders will join in the industrial robbery of Africa rather than lead its masses to education and culture."²²

DuBois criticized colonialism as an evil despite its different guises. At their base, both systems, the British and French, had economic gain as their motivating principle and they always suppressed and exploited the natives. The British suppressed them by refusing to consider them equal, the French by granting them equality but keeping them leaderless. For DuBois, the French attitudes indicated that racism did not have to exist and his hope was that

²¹W. E. B. DuBois, "The Inter-racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View," FA, 14 (1925), 91.

²²W. E. B. DuBois, "A Second Journey to Pan-Africa," The New Republic, 29 (1921), 41.

the other colonial powers could be made to recognize that fact. If racism could be ended, the demise of colonialism would be much easier.

CHAPTER V

THE SOLUTIONS

The majority of DuBois' criticisms of colonialism focused on the relationship between the colonies and their mother countries. But DuBois did more than simply criticize, he also suggested methods to bring the colonies up to the level of contemporary Western civilization. His plans, of course, required that the colonial powers relinquish their economic strangle hold on the colonies and then provide education and training to the natives in order that they might become self-governing. Because the prevalent white attitude was that the people in the colonized areas, and especially sub-Saharan Africa, were incapable of self-government, DuBois worked to bring about a change in that attitude with the weapons available to him. He regarded as the colonial world's chief weapons commerce, education, religion and propaganda, with propaganda being his speciality. While he was concerned that his attempts to change the world's attitude might prove futile against the military might of the colonial powers, he hoped for some success, and produced a three part program to be followed once the misconceptions about the

abilities of the Africans were erased.¹ The first objective of his plan was to develop an educational system staffed by native people who had been educated in Western schools. The system was to provide both liberal and technical education. The second goal was to establish a series of congresses in which the "leading Negroes of the world" could come together and learn from each other. The final objective was to create and "promote industry, commerce and credit among black groups."²

The end of the First World War provided DuBois with his first opportunity to offer a solution to the colonial situation in Africa. Sponsored by the NAACP, he travelled to France ostensibly to talk to black American servicemen stationed there. While on his voyage across the Atlantic, DuBois granted an interview to the editor of Advocate of Peace in which he outlined his solution in the form of recommendations to the leaders who were to meet at Versailles and draft the peace treaty. Since the German East African colony had been conquered during the recent war, DuBois advocated giving that colony to the Africans in addition

¹Although DuBois fought against colonialism regardless of where it occurred, his primary loyalties were to the blacks of Africa. Thus his plans for the end of colonialism specifically applied to black Africa, although they could also have been used in other colonial areas as well.

²W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion," The Crisis, 23 (1922), 251-52.

to contiguous areas of Portuguese Africa and the Belgian Congo. Such a territory, he hoped, would be the beginning of Africa for the Africans. He proposed the territory have an international governing commission with representatives of all aspects of civilization. He admitted that "while the principle of self-determination which has been recognized as fundamental by the Allies cannot be wholly applied to semi-civilized peoples . . . it can be partially applied." To him, partial application meant that the initial government would have both white and black officials and a scheduled program for replacing the white officials with Africans until the entire governmental process was in African hands. From the beginning, the new government should have as its policy "the newer ideals of industrial democracy, avoiding private land monopoly and poverty, promoting cooperation in production and the socialization of income."³

DuBois earnestly believed that a transitional white and black government that adhered to the "ideals of industrial democracy" could not but benefit the Africans as they strove to develop. But such a government was only an initial step, he also recognized that the government of the new state would need something more:

³W. E. B. DuBois, "The Future of Africa," Advocate of Peace, LXXXI, (1919), 13.

". . . the practical policies to be followed out in the government of the new states should involve a thorough and complete system of modern education built on the present government, religion and customary law of the natives. There should be no tampering with the curiously efficient African institutions of local self-government through the family and the tribe; there should be no attempt at sudden 'conversion' by religious propoganda. Obviously deleterious customs and unsanitary usages must be gradually abolished. . ."⁴

But to DuBois, regardless of whether any aspect of his plan was acted upon by the major world powers, by far the most important suggestion he made in this interview was that the "desires, aspirations and grievances" of the African should be heard and considered in any reconstruction plan that might come out of the Versailles conference.⁵ While in Paris, DuBois himself created a vehicle through

⁴Ibid., 12.

⁵Ibid.

which Africans could make known their desires--he founded the First Pan-African Congress.⁶

DuBois viewed the Pan-African Congresses as a "step toward the civilization and emancipation of Africa by persons of Negro descent." The Congresses were not gatherings whose purpose was to plot out a scheme of continental revolution. They were open forums for the exchange of ideas and opinions among people of African descent.⁷ For DuBois, the aim of the Congresses was to make blacks throughout the world realize that no matter how their problems may have seemed different, those problems all stemmed from the same sources: "the political disfranchisement of Negro blood; the distortion of the facts of Negro history and accomplishment; racial discrimination in everyday life; limitation of education so as to

⁶There has been some confusion about the numbering of the Pan-African Congresses. Some historians argue that, because those who attended the 1919 Congress referred to it as the first Congress, it should be considered as such. Other historians believe that, since the five Congresses between 1919 and 1945 actually continued the theme of the Congress DuBois had attended in 1900, historically speaking there were six Pan-African Congresses and therefore begin their numbering with the 1900 meeting. For the purposes of this paper, the numbering system adopted by the participants of the 1919 and subsequent Congresses shall be used. The role of W. E. B. DuBois in Pan-Africanism has been well documented. This paper will not repeat the findings of that scholarship, rather, it will briefly discuss what DuBois expected of the movement and how it affected him.

⁷W. E. B. DuBois, "The Object of the Pan-African Congress," The African World Annual, 1921-1922, 99.

increase black serfdom and white profits; 'Jim-Crow' policies of all sorts and personal insult based on color of skin." Because Pan-Africanism sought unity among the world's blacks, DuBois tried to alleviate any suspicions the blacks might have had when he wrote that Pan-Africanism "does not involve in the slightest degree any attempt needlessly and ignorantly to interfere in the government, self-development or self-determination of the different groups or any widespread migration; but it does call for intelligence and co-operation in every possible way and on the broadest scale."⁸ Pan-Africanism was a peaceful movement designed to be mutually beneficial to its participants. Perhaps DuBois' clearest statement on the objectives of Pan-Africanism came in a 1921 article in which he wrote:

"The objectives of the Congress are simple: First, to have men of African descent the world over get into personal touch and acquaintance with each other. Secondly, to understand by personal conference and eventually by a series of careful sociological investigations exactly the status of each group of Negroes throughout the world. Finally, with this personal knowledge and these data to agree upon such plans of action as will lead to the emancipation

⁸W. E. B. DuBois, "Postscript," The Crisis, 37 (1930), 101.

of the Negro race and the placing of these people on a plane of equality with the rest of the peoples of the world."⁹

The Congresses were also a learning experience for DuBois. They were his first real opportunity in almost twenty years to learn first hand what the Africans wanted for themselves. The knowledge he gained strongly influenced his later writings. When he sailed for France in 1918 he had a grandiose scheme to give the former German colony to Africans for them to govern. That was the last time he ever advocated an arbitrary area of land be given to them. He became aware that the Africans wanted control of their own land and they wanted to be assured a role in the future of the world. The realization of their two desires became DuBois' goal as he fought to end colonialism.

The advent of the Second World War saw no substantial change in the colonial situation, and when the Atlantic Charter of 1941 made no mention of what was to become of the colonial territories at the war's end, DuBois sharply criticized it. He accused Churchill and Roosevelt of ignoring that opportunity to pronounce the end of colonialism because their sole interest was in peace among the whites so that together they might better dominate Africa and Asia. That the two leaders refused to head colonial

⁹DuBois, "The Object," The African World Annual 1921-1922, 99.

peoples' request for autonomy merely reaffirmed to DuBois that the white world intentionally sought the domination and suppression of the darker races in the hope of securing increased profits. Because he believed that modern war was nothing but disagreement among the exploiters of Africa and Asia on how to divide the spoils of imperialism, DuBois felt that, by their refusal to recognize that the white world had to change its attitude towards the rest of the world, Churchill and Roosevelt had missed their opportunity to eliminate the cause of both major wars of the twentieth century.¹⁰

Whatever hopes DuBois may have had that the United Nations alluded to in the Atlantic Charter would benefit the people in colonial areas were undoubtedly smashed as the organizational and planning conferences began. One particular conference, held at Dumbarton Oaks in 1944, failed, in his opinion, to address the colonial issue satisfactorily, and DuBois, speaking at a State Department meeting of Americans United for World Organization, criticized it accordingly. At one point in his criticism, he remarked that "the Dumbarton Oaks conference virtually says to six hundred million human beings, if not to a majority of mankind, that the only way to human equality is the philanthropy of masters who have historic and

¹⁰New York Amsterdam Star News, August 30, 1941, 14.

strong interest in preserving their present power and income."¹¹ DuBois returned to the theme of the colonies relying on the philanthropy of their masters in a December 1944 article for the New Leader that criticized the Dumbarton Oaks conference. He denied the ability of any "group" to develop "if the desires and initiative of its members are given no freedom, no democratic expression and if the will of the master is swayed by strong motives of selfish aggrandizement." He recognized that after the terrible destruction wrought by the conflict in Europe, the European countries would not readily abandon the source of profit and economic uplift their colonies represented. That a conflict of interest existed was obvious to DuBois and, in an effort to make his readers aware of it, he drew the following analogy: "It may be said that the interests of these colonial peoples will be represented in the world government by the master nations. In the same way it was said in 1787 in the United States that slaves would be represented by their masters."¹²

He knew that the idea of a world government was a good thing, but the plan drawn up at the Dumbarton Oaks conference did not provide a proper way of conducting such a government.

¹¹Pittsburg Courier, October 28, 1944, 4.

¹²DuBois, "Imperialism," New Leader, 27 (1944), 5.

In that same New Leader article he wrote: "the weakest point in this outline for a world government is the fact that at least one-fourth of the inhabitants of the world have no part in it, no democratic rights." Not only would the natives have no reliable representation in that government, those "six hundred million colored and black folk will have no rights that white people are bound to respect. Any revolt on their part can be put down by military force at the disposal of the Security Council. This mass of people will have no right of appeal to the Security Council or to the Assembly." Because the world government was going to be set up on a democratic basis, he challenged those United Nations to justify their plans and proposals when he wrote that "it cannot be reconciled with any philosophy of democracy that fifty million white folk of the British Empire should be able to make the destiny of four hundred and fifty million yellow, brown, and black people a matter solely of their own internal decision." DuBois not only very clearly pointed to the flaws and hypocrisy of the plans for the proposed world government, he also issued a prophetic warning that went unheeded: "To set up now an international order with nearly half mankind disfranchised and socially enslaved is to court disaster If this situation is not frankly faced and steps toward remedy attempted, we shall seek in vain

to find peace and security; we shall have the door open for renewed international rivalry for colonies--and eventually, for colonial revolt."¹³

Nor was the Dumbarton Oaks conference the only setback to DuBois' hopes. The Bretton Woods conference, called in 1945 to discuss and draft proposals for the economic restoration of the world after war, was also a disappointment. In a column he wrote for The Chicago Defender, DuBois expressed his own personal disappointment in the conference. He reported that the colonial issue was not once mentioned because the participants in the conference refused to acknowledge that colonies were economic problems. They considered colonies a purely political matter and thus felt no obligation to discuss them. The results of the conference, as DuBois saw them, were twofold--a fund would be established with the express purpose of stabilizing the world currencies and exchange rates while a second fund would be set up to stimulate reconstruction. The anticipation was that, since the second fund could by no means cover the full cost of reconstruction, private capital would furnish the remaining funds required as a source of investment. DuBois, of course, was livid at these proposals and wrote in his

¹³Ibid.

column, "Here you have the old dichotomy: is the restoration of the world after this war a matter of private profit or public welfare? Is the safe investment of capital more important than wages, health, and education for the masses of the peoples both in colonies and in civilized states?"¹⁴

Obviously, DuBois was upset at the white world's failure to deal with the colonial issue. They were ignoring what he knew to be the only solution, and he tried throughout the war years to offer guidelines. As early as 1942 he wrote that there had to be a change in attitude regarding race and Africa. The misconceptions of race had to be discarded because of irrefutable scientific evidence. Profits had to cease controlling international policies. African resources had to be administered for the benefit of the Africans because it was their wealth. The Africans had to be educated and trained to take part in the modern world. Finally, political control had to be removed from business and commercial interests.¹⁵ Again, in a 1943 article for Foreign Affairs he made recommendations for three post-war aims regarding Africa. The first aim was "to renounce the assumption that there are a few large groups of mankind called races with hereditary differences";

¹⁴Chicago Defender, March 17, 1945, 15.

¹⁵New York Amsterdam Star News, January 3, 1942, 13.

the second aim was that "the more or less conscious feeling, widespread among white peoples of the world, that other folk exist not for themselves, but for their uses to Europe" had to be ended; and the third was that "it must be agreed that in Africa the land and the natural resources belong primarily to the native inhabitants."¹⁶

When it became obvious after the Dumbarton Oaks conference that his guidelines were not to be followed, he offered a solution which he believed would satisfy the demands of colonial peoples and thus avoid the colonial revolts he knew would come. His three recommendations, of course, included colonial participation in the United Nations: his first recommendation was for "representation of the colonial peoples alongside the master peoples in the Assembly. Whether such representation should at first have a right to vote or only the right to complain and petition should be determined by the Assembly." His second suggestion was for "the organization of a Mandate Commission under the Economic and Social Council with power to investigate complaints and conditions in colonies and make public their findings." His third idea was his most important. He asked for "a clear statement of the intentions of each imperial power gradually but definitely

¹⁶DuBois, "Realities," FA, 21 (1943), 732.

to take all measures designed to raise the peoples of colonies to a condition of complete political and economic equality with the peoples of the master nations and eventually either to incorporate them into the polity of the master nations or to allow them to become independent free people."¹⁷

The Second World War failed to produce any immediate change in the status of the colonies and DuBois continued his campaign for the end of colonialism. His ideas for the needs of the colonial areas did not change however, as evidenced by a paper he presented before a 1948 Howard University seminar on Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories. In this paper he once again reiterated his position that "for the rehabilitation of the vast numbers of men who live in colonial regions the first step in reform must be the removal of foreign profit as the main object of colonial administration. In addition to the removal of the profit motive, he also said "it must be made immoral and illegal for any nation to be able to control the land, resources, and labor of another people for the main object of the well-being of the committant country. Nor must the owning country be allowed to be the sole judge as to what its policy in conquered lands means to the inhabitants." After these conditions had

¹⁷DuBois, "Imperialism," New Leader, 27 (1944), 5.

been met, DuBois wanted education for the natives. It was absolutely essential that the "education be planned not for its value in increasing the profit of investors nor for suppressing complaint and free speech, but for letting people know what science has learned in the last two centuries while the colonial peoples have been suppressed." But he recognized that education could be meaningless without freedom and he once again demanded that self-determination accompany the education.¹⁸

The solution that DuBois offered for the end of colonialism never underwent any real evolution. From the beginning he felt that Africa had to be for the Africans and that the only feasible way to achieve this aim was through a three part package. The economic motivation behind colonialism had to be recognized and discarded, the natives had to be educated and trained so that they would be capable of fulfilling their role in modern society, and they had to be granted the fundamental right of self-determination that they might discover for themselves what that role was to be. The only modification DuBois did make in his demands upon the world was that it apply his solution to each colony rather than to an arbitrary area as he had suggested after World War I, and

¹⁸DuBois, "Programme," Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, 98-102.

he made this modification after having been in personal contact with Africans through the Pan-African conferences he organized.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

While the purpose of this paper has been to examine DuBois' analysis of colonialism rather than to assess his impact upon developing African nationalism and white colonial policies, it must be admitted that he did strongly influence the former. The Pan-African movement, revived by DuBois during the 1920's, has been acknowledged by scholars and African nationalists alike, as very important to the developing African self-awareness during the inter-war years. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first leader of independent Nigeria, wrote in his autobiography that the 1920's and 1930's "saw the emergence of the New Negro movement in the United States, which subsequently took the shape of a new African movement in the continent of Africa." He credited the origins of these new movements to the "fermentation of ideas among scholars, intellectuals, writers, artists and politicians who sought for fair play and improved living conditions for the underprivileged people of African descent in all lands of the earth."¹

¹Nnamdi Azikiwe, My Odyssey: An Autobiography, London: C. Hurst & Co., 1970), 136.

In a 1965 letter to the editor of Freedomways, the President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, recognized the African's debt to DuBois when he wrote that "we in Ghana remember Dr. DuBois as a brilliant scholar, a great champion in the struggle for the rights of man, and an undaunted fighter against racial inequality, discrimination and injustice." To Nkrumah, DuBois represented "a source of inspiration in our struggle for freedom and the right of the African to govern himself."²

Any changes that were made in colonial policy by the imperial powers did not directly result from criticism by Dr. DuBois. His influence was indirect in that he increased and encouraged African self-consciousness, and it was the newly aware African who successfully agitated for reform and eventual freedom. But this is not to say that DuBois' attacks on the colonial powers were not read by representatives of these powers. They were read, and occasionally someone published a defense of colonialism. In a 1944 issue of Foreign Affairs, Margery Perham, defended colonialism and criticized the "American attacks" upon it. She directed her rebuttal specifically to sub-Saharan Africa where she did not expect to see any

²Letter from Kwame Nkrumah to Freedomways. Freedomways, 5 (Winter 1965), 7. See also Henry L. Bretton, The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah: A Study of Personal Rule in Africa. (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1966), 23.

significant change in the conditions existing in tropical Africa for quite some time. The "backwardness" of the Africans prevented any such change. She explained that time was needed for African development and that the British had been assisting in that development since they first arrived. At the outset of British occupation of the colonies, the Africans had suffered from extreme poverty brought about "not by any inherent racial inferiority but by the violent whims of a capricious climate," wild animals, enemies, and the ravages of disease. The British, she argued, were trying to overcome these conditions with social services and public works, but that it took time to prevail over the tribal areas, "suspicious chiefs and elders," and to change the economy from one of subsistence to one of exportation. Not until the economy was changed would there be enough money to support the socially uplifting programs on the scale they were needed. She believed the British had begun to succeed, but the world wars and the intervening depression had prevented the necessary full scale efforts.³ To her, the accusation that the British presence and exploitation produced the African poverty was "a blind sweeping blow," and she thought that such "American criticism seldom seems

³Margery Perham, "African Facts and American Criticism," FA, 22 (1944), 445-7.

to be very specific about economic exploitation. The strongest attacks on imperialism from an economic point of view, inspired by Communist doctrine, seem to come from Negro intellectuals who have grievances of their own against white capitalism."⁴

Perham's comment that American criticisms of colonialism as a form of exploitation were vague in an important point to consider when examining DuBois' reaction to colonialism. DuBois sought to make his readers aware of the racial injustice and inequality that existed in the colonies. First and foremost he was a propagandist. He described conditions as he saw them (his view was not altogether unbiased) and hoped to arouse world-wide indignation. He believed that the voting public once made aware of what was happening would bring pressure to bear upon their elected officials and thus end the tyranny of colonialism. To accomplish this aim, he deliberately wrote in vague terms, hoping the public's imagination would lead them to think the worst of colonialism.

He believed that men, when made aware of their inhumanity to each other, would change of their own volition. At least he felt this way until the outbreak of World War II. Then he saw his fellow man repeating the

⁴Ibid., 447-49.

same mistakes and refusing to recognize the cause of those mistakes, and he began to become disheartened. He became increasingly leftist in his thinking. More and more of his writings were for left-wing journals and periodicals. In 1948 he became honorary Vice-Chairman of Max Yergan's Council on African Affairs which, shortly thereafter, was placed by the Attorney General's office on its list of subversive organizations. In 1950 he was made the chairman of the Peace Information Center. He and the other officers of this organization were indicted for failing to register as agents of a foreign power. After his trial and acquittal, DuBois was ostracized by the black community for nearly ten years and these experiences increased his doubt in man's ability willfully to recognize and peacefully to end his inhumanity to man. Thus in 1961 DuBois applied for membership in the Community Party and then emigrated to Ghana.

Although in the last twenty years of his life DuBois' opinion of how to combat colonialism began to undergo a gradual change, for the first fifty years of the twentieth century, this influential leader of Afro-Americans, strove to make the world aware of the evils of colonialism--its exploitation, its racism, its denial of human dignity--and repeatedly offered his recommendations for its peaceful end.

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THE REACTION OF W. E. B. DUBOIS
TO EUROPEAN COLONIALISM, 1900-1950

by

Lawrence D. Gott

(ABSTRACT)

During the first fifty years of the twentieth century, W. E. B. DuBois was the most influential Afro-American to advocate the end of European colonialism and self-determination for the colonial people. The writings against colonialism fall into four basic areas: the factors that produced colonialism; the culture that tolerated it; the comparison and contrast of the two basic colonial systems; and suggestions about how to end colonialism.

DuBois found economics to be the cause of colonialism and the European culture that tolerated the economic exploitation and political domination of the colonial people did so because it was a racist culture. Both colonial systems were deplorable despite the apparently more humane attitudes of the French. DuBois believed that a three-step program of economic emancipation, education and political autonomy was the only way to

successfully end colonialism. For the first fifty years of the twentieth century his thoughts on colonialism were to remain virtually unchanged.