

A Biographical Sketch of W.E.B. DuBois

By Gerald C. Hynes



Introduction

William Edward Burghardt DuBois, to his admirers, was by spirited devotion and scholarly dedication, an attacker of injustice and a defender of freedom.

A harbinger of Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, he died in self-imposed exile in his home away from home with his ancestors of a glorious past—Africa.

Labeled as a "radical," he was ignored by those who hoped that his massive contributions would be buried along side of him. But, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "history cannot ignore W.E.B. DuBois because history has to reflect truth and Dr. DuBois was a tireless explorer and a gifted discoverer of social truths. His singular greatness lay in his quest for truth about his own people. There were very few scholars who concerned themselves with honest study of the black man and he sought to fill this immense void. The degree to which he succeeded disclosed the great dimensions of the man."

His Formative Years

W.E.B. DuBois was born on February 23, 1868 in Great Barrington,

Massachusetts. At that time Great Barrington had perhaps 25, but not more than 50, Black people out of a population of about 5,000. Consequently, there were little signs of overt racism there. Nevertheless, its venom was distributed through a constant barrage of suggestive innuendoes and vindictive attitudes of its residents. This mutated the personality of young William from good natured and outgoing to sullen and withdrawn. This was later reinforced and strengthened by inner withdrawals in the face of real discriminations. His demeanor of introspection haunted him throughout his life.

While in high school DuBois showed a keen concern for the development of his race. At age fifteen he became the local correspondent for the *New York Globe*. And in this position he conceived it his duty to push his race forward by lectures and editorials reflecting upon the need of Black people to politicized themselves.

DuBois was naturally gifted intellectually and took pleasurable pride in surpassing his fellow students in academic and other pursuits. Upon graduation from high school, he, like many other New England students of his caliber, desired to attend Harvard. However, he lacked the financial resources to go to that institution. But with the aid of friends and family, and a scholarship he received to Fisk College (now University), he eagerly headed to Nashville, Tennessee to further his education.

This was DuBois' first trip south. And in those three years at Fisk (1885–1888) his knowledge of the race problem became more definite. He saw discrimination in ways he never dreamed of, and developed a determination to expedite the emancipation of his people. Consequently, he became a writer, editor, and an impassioned orator. And in the process acquired a belligerent attitude toward the color bar.

Also, while at Fisk, DuBois spent two summers teaching at a county school in order to learn more about the South and his people. There he learned first hand of poverty, poor land, ignorance, and prejudice. But

most importantly, he learned that his people had a deep desire for knowledge.

After graduation from Fisk, DuBois entered Harvard (via scholarships) classified as a junior. As a student his education focused on philosophy, centered in history. It then gradually began to turn toward economics and social problems. As determined as he was to attend and graduate from Harvard, he never felt himself a part of it. Later in life he remarked "I was in Harvard but not of it." He received his bachelor's degree in 1890 and immediately began working toward his master's and doctor's degree.

DuBois completed his master's degree in the spring of 1891. However, shortly before that, ex-president Rutherford B. Hayes, the current head of a fund to educate Negroes, was quoted in the *Boston Herald* as claiming that they could not find one worthy to enough for advanced study abroad. DuBois' anger inspired him to apply directly to Hayes. His credentials and references were impeccable. He not only received a grant, but a letter from Hayes saying that he was misquoted. DuBois chose to study at the University of Berlin in Germany. It was considered to be one of the world's finest institutions of higher learning. And DuBois felt that a doctor's degree from there would infer unquestionable preparation for ones life's work.

During the two years DuBois spent in Berlin, he began to see the race problems in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and the political development of Europe as one. This was the period of his life that united his studies of history, economics, and politics into a scientific approach of social research.

DuBois had completed a draft of his dissertation and needed another semester or so to finish his degree. But the men over his funding sources decided that the education he was receiving there was unsuitable for the type of work needed to help Negroes. They refused to extend him any

more funds and encouraged him to obtain his degree from Harvard. Which of course he was obliged to do. His doctoral thesis, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in America*, remains the authoritative work on that subject, and is the first volume in Harvard's Historical Series.

Easing On Down The Road

At the age of twenty-six, with twenty years of schooling behind him, DuBois felt that he was ready to begin his life's work. He accepted a teaching job at Wilberforce in Ohio at the going rate of \$800.00 per year. (He also had offers from Lincoln in Missouri and Tuskegee in Alabama.)

The year 1896 was the dawn of a new era for DuBois. With his doctorate degree and two undistinguished years at Wilberforce behind him, he readily accepted a special fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania to conduct a research project in Philadelphia's seventh ward slums. This responsibility afforded him the opportunity to study Blacks as a social system.

DuBois plunged eagerly into his research. He was certain that the race problem was one of ignorance. And he was determined to unearth as much knowledge as he could, thereby providing the "cure" for color prejudice. His relentless studies led into historical investigation, statistical and anthropological measurement, and sociological interpretation. The outcome of this exhaustive endeavor was published as *The Philadelphia Negro*. "It revealed the Negro group as a symptom, not a cause; as a striving, palpitating group, and not an inert, sick body of crime; as a long historic development and not a transient occurrence." This was the first time such a scientific approach to studying social phenomena was undertaken, and as a consequence DuBois is acknowledged as the father of Social Science.

After the completion of the study, DuBois accepted a position at Atlanta University to further his teachings in sociology. For thirteen years there

he wrote and studied Negro morality, urbanization, Negroes in business, college-bred Negroes, the Negro church, and Negro crime. He also repudiated the widely held view of Africa as a vast cultural cipher by presenting a historical version of complex, cultural development throughout Africa. His studies left no stone unturned in his efforts to encourage and help social reform.. It is said that because of his outpouring of information "there was no study made of the race problem in America which did not depend in some degree upon the investigations made at Atlanta University."

During this period an ideological controversy grew between DuBois and Booker T. Washington, which later grew into a bitter personal battle. Washington from 1895, when he made his famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech, to 1910 was the most powerful black man in the America. Whatever grant, job placement or any endeavor concerning Blacks that influential whites received was sent to Washington for endorsement or rejection. Hence, the "Tuskegee Machine" became the focal point for Black input/output. DuBois was not opposed to Washington's power, but rather, he was against his ideology/methodology of handling the power. On one hand Washington decried *political* activities among Negroes, and on the other hand dictated Negro political objectives from Tuskegee.

Washington argued the Black people should temporarily forego "political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education of Negro youth. They should concentrate all their energies on industrial education." DuBois believed in the higher education of a "Talented Tenth" who through their knowledge of modern culture could guide the American Negro into a higher civilization. (See Chapter 4, "Science and Empire" in DuBois' *Dusk of Dawn*.)

The culmination of the conflict came in 1903 when DuBois published his now famous book, *The Souls of Black Folks*. The chapter entitled "Of Booker T. Washington and Others" contains an analytical discourse on the general philosophy of Washington. DuBois edited the chapter him-

self to keep the most controversial and bitter remarks out of it. Nevertheless, it still was more than enough to incur Washington's continued contempt for him.

In the early summer of 1905 Washington went to Boston to address a rally. While speaking he was verbally assaulted by William Monroe Trotter (a Harvard college friend of DuBois). The subsequent jailing of Trotter on trumped-up charges, apparently by Washingtonites, raised the wrath of DuBois. This incident caused DuBois to solicit help from others "for organized determination and aggressive action on the part of men who believe in *Negro freedom and growth*. (Emphasis mine)

Twenty-nine men from fourteen states answered the call in Buffalo, New York. Five months later in January of 1906 the "Niagara Movement" was formed. So called after the cite of the meeting place—the Canadian side of Niagara falls. (They were prevented from meeting on the U.S. side.) Its objectives were to advocate civil justice and abolish caste discrimination. The downfall of the group was attributed to public accusations of fraud and deceit instigated and engineered presumably by Washington advocates, and DuBois' inexperience with organizations and the internal strain from the dynamic personality of Trotter. In 1909 all members of the Niagara Movement save one (Trotter, who despised and distrusted whites and their objectives) merged with some white liberals and thus the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was born. DuBois was not altogether pleased with the group but agreed to stay on as Director of Publications and Research.

The main artery for distributing NAACP policy and news concerning Blacks was the *Crisis* magazine, which DuBois autocratically governed as its editor-in-chief for some twenty-five years. He was of no mind to follow pedantically the Associations views, and therefore wrote *only* that which he felt could lift the coffin lid off his people.

His hot, raking editorials oftentimes lead to battles within the ranks of the Association. Besides this, the NAACP was, at that time, under the leadership of whites, to which DuBois objected. He always felt that Blacks should lead and that if whites were to be included at all, it should be in a supportive role. The meteoric and sustained rise in the circulation of the *Crisis*, making it self-supporting, tranquilized the moderates within the Association. This afforded DuBois the ability to continue his assault on the injustices heaped upon the Blacks.

World War I had dramatic effects on the lives of Black folks. Firstly, the Armed Forces refused Black inductees, but finally relinquished and put the "colored folks" in subservient roles. Secondly, while the war was raging, Blacks in the southern states were moving North where industry was desperately looking for workers. Ignorant, frightened whites, led by capitalist instigators, were fearful that Blacks would totally consume the job market. Thus, lynching ran rampant. Finally, after the war, Black veterans returned home to the same racist country they had fought so heroically to defend.

Dr. DuBois, using the *Crisis* as his vehicle, hurled thunderbolts of searing script, scorching the "dusty veil," and revealing the innards of a country whose quivering heart beat bigotry. So vitriolic and eloquent was his pen, that subsequent reaction from his followers caused congressional action to:

1. Inaugurate the opening of Black officer training schools.
2. Bring forth legal action against lynchers.
3. Set up a federal work plan for returning veterans.

His articles never quit. The countryside was inundated with DuBoisian unmitigated protest. This period marked the height of DuBois' popularity. The *Crisis* magazine subscription rate had grown from 1000 in 1909 to over 10,000 in May of 1919. His "Returning Soldier" editorial climaxed the period.

"By the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight the forces of hell in our own land.

We return.

We return from fighting.

We return fighting!

Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why."

Shortly after the Armistice was signed, DuBois, sailed for France in 1919 to represent the NAACP as an observer at the Peace Conference. While there he decided it was an opportune time to organize a Pan-African conference to bring attention to the problems of Africans around the world. While this was not the first Pan-African Congress (the first one was held in 1900), he had long been interested in the movement.

While the concept was lauded by a few revolutionaries, it failed because of lack of interest by the more influential Black organizations.

DuBois realized that for Africans could be free anywhere, they must be free everywhere. He therefore decided to hold another Pan-African meeting in 1921. While this one was better organized, he was dealt double trouble. First, following the war, "a political and social revolution, economic upheaval and depression, national and racial hatred made a setting in which any such movement was entirely out of the Question." More importantly, however, was the encounter with the astonishing Marcus Garvey.

"Unlike DuBois, Garvey was able to gain mass support and had tremendous appeal." He established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) for the purpose of uniting Africa and her descendants. He instituted the visionary concept of buying ships for overseas trade and travel; he issued forth uncompromising orations on race relations and in-

spiration ("Up you mighty people. You can accomplish what you will!"); and held pageants and parades through "Harlems" with red, black, and green liberation flags flying (The colors symbolizes the skin, the blood, and the hopes and growth potential of Black people. The green is also symbolic of the earth.). His methodology was refreshing and inspiring. And it was in direct contrast to the intellectual style of DuBois.

DuBois' first efforts were to explain away the Garvey movement and ignore it . But it was a mass movement and could not be ignored.

Later, when Garvey began to collect money for his steamship line, DuBois characterized him as "a hard-working idealist, but his methods are bombastic, wasteful, illogical and almost illegal." Marcus Garvey, choosing to ignore the critiques of DuBois, continued with his undertakings until charges of fraud were brought forth against him. He was imprisoned and upon his release, he was exiled from the United States. He died in 1941.

The conflict between the two men was amplified by the white press. It also served to debilitate the progress of the future planned Pan-African Congress. Nevertheless, DuBois held his conference in 1923, and as expected the turnout was small.

When the conference was concluded, he set sail for Africa for the first time. During the trip through "the eternal world of Black folk" he made a characteristic observation—"The world brightens as it darkens." His racial romanticism was given free reign as he wrote—"The spell of Africa is upon me ..."

Ideology Change

Returning home from his African experience, DuBois had a chance to reflect upon his past. DuBois noted how America tactically side-stepped the issues of color, and how his approach of "educate and agitate" ap-

peared to fall on deaf ears. He felt that his ideological approach to the "problem of the twentieth century" had to be revised.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 illuminated and made clear the change in his basic thought. The revolution concerned itself with the problem of poverty. "Russia was trying to put into the hands of those people who do the world's work the power to guide and rule the state for the best welfare of the masses." DuBois' trip to Russia in 1927, his learning about Marx and Engles, his seeing the beginning of a new nation form with regard to class, prompted him to say—"My day in Russia was the day of communist beginnings."

"He could no longer support integration as present tactics and relegated it to a long range goal. Unable to trust white politicians, white capitalists of white workers he invested everything in the segregated socialized economy." (Shades of Washingtonianism?) His ideology carried over to his editorials in the *Crisis* magazine.

By 1930 he had become thoroughly convinced that the basic policies and ideals of the NAACP must be modified and/or discarded. There were two alternatives:

1. Change the board of directors of the NAACP (who were mostly white) so as to substitute a group which agreed with his program.
2. LEAVE THE ORGANIZATION.

By 1933 DuBois decided his financial, organizational and ideological battles with the NAACP were unendurable, and he recommended that the *Crisis* suspend its operation. (The *Crisis* magazine, however, is still in existence today.)

He resumed his duties at Atlanta University and there upon completed two major works. His book *Black Reconstruction* dealt with the socio-economic development of the nation after the Civil War. This masterpiece portrayed the contributions of the Black people to this period, whereas before, the Blacks were always portrayed as disorganized and

chaotic. His second book of this period, *Dusk of Dawn*, was completed in 1940 and expounded his concepts and views on both the African's and African American's quest for freedom.

As in years past, DuBois never relented in attacks upon imperialism, especially in Africa. (His book entitled *The World and Africa* was written as a contradiction to the pseudo-historians who consistently omitted Africa from world history.) In 1945 he served as an associate consultant to the American delegation at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco. He charged the world organization with planning to be dominated by imperialist nations and not intending to intervene on the behalf of colonized countries. He announced that the fifth Pan-African Congress would convene to determine what pressure could be applied to the world powers.

This conference was dotted with an all-star cast:

1. Kwame Nkrumah—dedicated revolutionary, father of Ghanaian independence, and first president of Ghana.
2. George Padmore—an international revolutionary, often called the "Father of African Emancipation," who later became Kwame Nkrumah's advisor on African Affairs.
3. Jomo Kenyatta—called the "burning Spear," reputed leader of the Mau Mau uprising, and first president of independent Kenya.

The congress elected DuBois International President and cast him a "Father of Pan-Africanism."

Thus, "W.E.B. DuBois entered into his last phase as a protest propagandist, committed beyond a single social group to a world conception of proletarian liberation."

Alienation

Always antagonizing and making guilty groups feel extremely uncomfortable, he wrote in 1949: "We want to rule Russia and cannot rule Alabama." As a member of the left-wing American Labor Party he wrote:

"Drunk with power, we (the U.S.) are leading the world to hell in a new colonialism with the same old human slavery, which once ruined us, to a third world war, which will ruin the world."

As the chairman of the Peace Information Center, he demanded the outlawing of atomic weapons. The Secretary of State denounced it as Soviet propaganda. Jumping at the chance to quiet "that old man," the U.S. Department of Justice ordered DuBois and others to register as agents of a "foreign principal." DuBois refused and was immediately indicted under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Sufficient evidence was lacking, therefore DuBois was acquitted. The subversive activity initiated by the U.S. government acted as a catalyst in the alienation DuBois already felt for the present system. His feelings were heard around the world in 1959. While in Peking he told a large audience—"In my own country for nearly a century I have been nothing but a NIGGER." By the time the U.S. press published the account, he was residing in Ghana; an expatriate from the United States. President Nkruma welcomed DuBois and asked him to direct the government-sponsored *Encyclopedia Africana*. The offer was accepted graciously and a year later, in the final months of his life, DuBois became a Ghanaian citizen and an official member of the Communist party.

Free At Last

On August 27, 1963, on the eve of the March On Washington, DuBois died in Accra, Ghana.

His role as a pioneering Pan-Africanist was memorialized by the few who understood the genius of the man and neglected by the many who were afraid that his loquacious espousals would unite the oppressed throughout the world into revolution.

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W.E.B. Du Bois

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Du Bois in 1918

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois ([pronounced](#) [dʊˈboɪz]) ([February 23, 1868](#) – [August 27, 1963](#)) was an [American civil rights](#) activist, leader, [Pan-Africanist](#), [sociologist](#), [educator](#), [historian](#), [writer](#), [editor](#), [poet](#), and [scholar](#). He became a [naturalized citizen](#) of [Ghana](#) in [1963](#) at the age of 95.

[David Levering Lewis](#), a biographer, wrote, "In the course of his long, turbulent career, W.E.B. Du Bois attempted virtually every possible solution to the problem of [twentieth-century racism](#)—[scholarship](#), [propaganda](#), [integration](#), cultural and economic [separatism](#), [politics](#), international [communism](#), [expatriation](#), [third world solidarity](#)."^[1]

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Early life

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Family history

W.E.B. Du Bois was born on Church Street on [[February 15 not the same day as kimishawn

]], [1868](#), in [Great Barrington](#) at the south-[western](#) edge of [Massachusetts](#), to Alfred Du Bois and Mary Silvina Burghardt Du Bois, whose [February 5, 1867](#), wedding had been announced in the *Berkshire Courier*. Alfred Du Bois had been born in [Haiti](#).^{[\[2\]](#)} W.E.B. Du Bois detailed his French Haitian background in his autobiography:

Of grandfather's life in Haiti from about 1821 to 1830, I know few details. From his 18th to his 27th year he formed acquaintanceships, earned a living, married and had a son, my father, Alfred, born in 1825. I do not know what work grandfather did, but probably he ran a plantation and engaged in the growing shipping trade to the United States. Who he married I do not know, nor her relatives. He may have married into the family of Elie Du Bois, the great Haitian educator. Also why he left Haiti in 1830 is not clear. It may have

been because of the threat of war with France during the Revolution of 1830 and the fall of Charles X.^[3]

Their son was born one year after the [Fourteenth Amendment](#) was ratified, and added to the [U.S. Constitution](#). Alfred Du Bois was descended from [free people of color](#), including the slave-holding Dr. James Du Bois of [Poughkeepsie, New York](#), a [physician](#). In the [Bahamas](#), James Du Bois had sired three sons, including Alfred, and a daughter, by his slave mistress.

Du Bois was also the great-grandson of Elizabeth Freeman (“[Mum Bett](#)”), a slave who successfully sued for her freedom, laying the groundwork for the eventual abolition of slavery in Massachusetts.^[4]

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Childhood

Du Bois was born free and did not have contact with his biological father. He blamed his maternal grandparents for his father’s leaving because they did not take kindly to him. Du Bois was very close to his mother, Mary. Du Bois moved frequently when he was young, after Mary suffered a stroke which left her unable to work. They survived on money from family members and Du Bois' after-school jobs. Du Bois wanted to help his mother as much as possible and believed he could improve their lives through education. Some of the neighborhood whites noticed him, and one allowed Du Bois and his mother to rent a house from him in Great Barrington.

While living there, Du Bois performed chores and worked odd jobs. Du Bois did not feel differently because of his skin color while he was in school. In fact the only times he felt out of place was when out-of-towners would visit Great Barrington. One such incident occurred when a white girl who was new in school refused to take one of his fake calling cards during a game. The girl told him she would not accept it because he was black. He then realized that there would always be some kind of barrier between whites and others.^[5]

Young Du Bois may have been an outsider because of his status, being poor, not having a father and being extremely intellectual for his age; however, he was very comfortable academically. Many around him recognized his intelligence and en-

couraged him to further his education with college preparatory courses while in high school. This academic confidence led him to believe that he could use his knowledge to empower African Americans.[6]

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University education

After graduating from [Fisk University](#) in [1888](#), Du Bois took a [bachelor's degree cum laude](#) from [Harvard College](#) in [1890](#) (Harvard having refused to recognize the equivalency of his Fisk degree), and in [1892](#) received a [stipend](#) to attend the [University of Berlin](#). While a student in [Berlin](#), he travelled extensively throughout [Europe](#), and came of age intellectually while studying with some of the most prominent [social scientists](#) in the German capital, such as [Gustav von Schmoller](#). In [1896](#), Du Bois became the first African American to receive a [Ph.D.](#) from [Harvard University](#). After teaching at [Wilberforce University](#) in [Ohio](#) and the [University of Pennsylvania](#), he established the department of sociology at Atlanta University (now [Clark Atlanta University](#)).

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Writing

Du Bois wrote many books including three major [autobiographies](#). Among his works considered most significant were *The Philadelphia Negro* in [1896](#), *The Souls of Black Folk* in [1903](#), *John Brown* in [1909](#), *Black Reconstruction* in [1935](#), and *Black Folk, Then and Now* in [1939](#). His book, *The Negro* (published in [1915](#)) influenced the work of pioneer [Africanist](#) scholars as [Drusilla Dunjee Houston](#) and [William Leo Hansberry](#).^{[7][8]}

In [1940](#), at Atlanta University, Du Bois founded *Phylon* magazine. In 1946, he wrote *The World and Africa: An Inquiry Into the Part that Africa has Played in World History*. In [1945](#), he helped organize the historic Fifth Pan-African Conference in [Manchester, England](#).^[9]

While prominent white voices denied African American cultural, political and social relevance to [American history](#) and [civic](#) life, in his epic work, *Reconstruction* Du Bois documented how black people were central figures in the [American Civil War](#)

and [Reconstruction](#). He demonstrated the ways [Black emancipation](#)—the crux of Reconstruction—promoted a radical restructuring of United States society, as well as how and why the country turned its back on [human rights](#) for African Americans in the aftermath of Reconstruction.^[10] This theme was taken up later and expanded by [Eric Foner](#) and [Leon F. Litwack](#), the two leading contemporary scholars of the Reconstruction era.

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Criminology

Du Bois began writing about crime in 1897, shortly after receiving his Ph.D. from [Harvard](#) (Zuckerman, 2004, p. 2). His first work involving crime was [A Program of Social Reform](#) was shortly followed by his second, [The Study of the Negro Problems](#) (Du Bois, 1897; Du Bois, 1898). The first work that involved in depth criminological study and theorizing was [The Philadelphia Negro](#), in which a large section was devoted to analysis of the black criminal population in [Philadelphia](#) (Du Bois, 1899).

Du Bois (1899) sets forth three significant parts to his criminological theory. The first major part is that Negro crime is caused by the strain of the ‘social revolution’ experienced by black Americans as they began to adapt to their new found freedom and position in the nation. This theory is very similar to [Durkheim’s](#) (1893) [Anomie](#) theory, but applied specifically to the newly freed Negro. This similarity is particularly interesting since Du Bois could not have read [Durkheim's](#) theory prior to publishing his own work. Du Bois (1900a, p. 3) credits emancipation with causing the boom in crime in the Negro population. He explains “the appearance of crime among the Southern Negroes is a symptom of wrong social conditions- of a stress of life greater than a large part of the community can bear”(Du Bois, 1901b, p. 745). He separates out the strains on southern Negroes from those on northern Negroes because the problems of city life were very different from those of the rural sharecropper.

Du Bois’ (1904a) theory’s second major part is that Negro crime declined as the American Negro population moved towards status. This idea, referred to later as stratification, is strikingly similar to [Merton’s](#) (1968) [structure-strain theory of devi-](#)

[ance](#). In *The Philadelphia Negro* and later statistical studies, Du Bois found direct correlations between level of employment, level of education and criminal activity.

The final part of the theory is that the [Talented Tenth](#) or the 'exceptional men' of the black race would be the ones to lead the race and save it from its criminal problems (Du Bois, 1903, p. 33). Du Bois sees the evolution of a class system within black American society as necessary to carry out the improvements necessary to reduce crime in the black population (Du Bois, 1903). He sets forth a number of solutions to crime that this Talented Tenth must endeavor to enact (Du Bois, 1903, p. 2). Du Bois postulated early in his career that Negro crime was caused by the strain of the 'social revolution' experienced by black Americans as they began to adapt to their new found freedom and position in the nation (1899). He is perhaps the first criminologist to combine historical fact with social change, and use the combination to postulate his theories. He credited the crime increase after the civil war to "increased complexity of life," competition for jobs in industry, and the mass exodus from the farmland and immigration to the cities (Du Bois, 1899). Du Bois (1899, p. 64) states in [The Philadelphia Negro](#):

"Naturally then, if men are suddenly transported from one environment to another, the result is lack of harmony with the new conditions; lack of harmony with the new physical surroundings leading to disease and death or modification of physique; lack of harmony with social surroundings leading to crime."

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Civil rights activism



W. E. B. Du Bois in 1904

Du Bois was the most prominent intellectual leader and political activist on behalf of [African Americans](#) in the first half of the twentieth century. A contemporary of [Booker T. Washington](#), the two carried on a dialogue about [segregation](#) and [political disenfranchisement](#). He was labeled "The Father of [Pan-Africanism](#)."



[African American](#) topics

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In [1905](#), Du Bois helped to found the [Niagara Movement](#) with [William Monroe Trotter](#) but their alliance was short-lived as they had a dispute over whether or not [white people](#) should be included in the organization and in the struggle for Civil Rights. Du Bois felt that they should, and with a group of like-minded supporters, he helped found the [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#) (NAACP) in [1909](#).

In [1910](#), he left his teaching post at Atlanta University to work as publications director at the NAACP full-time. He wrote weekly columns in many [newspapers](#), including the *[Chicago Defender](#)*, the *[Pittsburgh Courier](#)* and the *[New York Amsterdam News](#)*, three African-American newspapers, and also the Hearst-owned *[San Francisco Chronicle](#)*.

For 25 years, Du Bois worked as [Editor-in-Chief](#) of the NAACP publication, *[The Crisis](#)*, which then included the subtitle *A Record of the Darker Races*. He commented freely and widely on [current events](#) and set the agenda for the fledgling NAACP. Its circulation soared from 1,000 in [1910](#) to more than 100,000 by [1920](#).^[11]

Du Bois published [Harlem Renaissance](#) writers [Langston Hughes](#) and [Jean Toomer](#). As a repository of black thought, the *Crisis* was initially a [monopoly](#), David Levering Lewis observed. In [1913](#), Du Bois wrote *[The Star of Ethiopia](#)*, a historical pageant, to promote [African-American history](#) and civil rights.

The seminal debate between [Booker T. Washington](#) and Du Bois^[*citation needed*] played out in the pages of the *Crisis* with Washington advocating an accommodational philosophy of [self-help](#) and [vocational training](#) for [Southern](#) blacks while Du Bois pressed for full educational opportunities. Du Bois thought blacks should seek

higher education, preferably liberal arts. Du Bois believed blacks should challenge and question whites on all grounds, but Washington believed assimilating and fitting into the "American" culture is the best way for Blacks to move up in society. While Washington states that he didn't receive any racist insults until later on his years, Du Bois said Blacks have a "Double-Conscious" mind in which they have to know when to act "White" and when to act "Black". Booker T. Washington felt that teaching was a duty but Du Bois felt it was a calling.

Du Bois became increasingly estranged from [Walter Francis White](#), the executive secretary of the NAACP, and began to question the organization's opposition to racial segregation at all costs. Du Bois thought that this policy, while generally sound, undermined those black institutions that did exist, which Du Bois thought should be defended and improved, rather than attacked as inferior. By the [1930s](#), Lewis said, the NAACP had become more institutional and Du Bois, increasingly radical, sometimes at odds with leaders such as [Walter White](#) and [Roy Wilkins](#). In [1934](#), after writing two essays in the *Crisis* suggesting that [black separatism](#) could be a useful [economic strategy](#), Du Bois left the magazine to return to teaching at Atlanta University.



Du Bois seated with college members of the [Beta](#) Chapter of [Alpha Phi Alpha](#) at [Howard University](#) in [1932](#).

During [World War I](#), Du Bois was offered an [Army commission](#) as an officer. He accepted but failed to pass the physical. [\[citation needed\]](#)

Du Bois was a member of [Alpha Phi Alpha](#), a fraternity with a civil rights focus, and the first intercollegiate [Greek-letter fraternity](#) established for African Americans.

[\[edit\]](#)

American Historical Association

In [1909](#), W.E.B. Du Bois addressed the [American Historical Association](#) (AHA). According to David Levering Lewis, "His would be the first and last appearance of an African American on the program until 1940."[\[12\]](#)

In a review of the second book in Lewis's biographies of Du Bois, Michael R. Winston observed that, in understanding American history, one must question "how black Americans developed the psychological stamina and collective social capacity to cope with the sophisticated system of racial domination that white Americans had anchored deeply in law and custom."[\[13\]](#)

Winston continued, "Although any reasonable answer is extraordinarily complex, no adequate one can ignore the man (Du Bois) whose genius was for 70 years at the intellectual epicenter of the struggle to destroy [white supremacy](#) as [public policy](#) and social fact in the United States."[\[14\]](#)

[\[edit\]](#)

Imperial Japan

Du Bois became impressed by the growing strength of [Imperial Japan](#) following the Japanese victory in the [Russo-Japanese War](#). Du Bois saw the victory of Japan over [Tsarist Russia](#) as an example of "colored pride". According to historian [David Levering Lewis](#), Du Bois became a willing part of Japan's so-called "Negro Propaganda Operations" run by Japanese academic and Imperial Agent Hikida Yasuichi.[\[15\]](#)

After traveling to the United States to speak with University students at [Howard University](#), [Scripps College](#) and [Tuskegee University](#), Yasuichi became closely involved in shaping Du Bois's opinions of Imperial Japan. In [1936](#), Yasuichi and the Japanese Ambassador arranged a [junket](#) for Du Bois and a small group of fellow [academics](#). The trip included stops in Japan, [China](#), and the [Soviet Union](#), although the Soviet leg was canceled because Du Bois' diplomatic contact, [Karl Radek](#), had been swept up in [Stalin's purges](#). While on the Chinese leg of the trip, Du Bois commented that the source of [Chinese-Japanese enmity](#) was China's "submission to white aggression and Japan's resistance", and he asked the Chinese people to

welcome the Japanese as liberators. Du Bois joined a large group of African American academics that cited the [Mukden Incident](#) to justify Japan's occupation and annexation of the formerly European held southern [Manchuria](#).

During 1936 Du Bois also visited [Nazi Germany](#). On his return to the United States, he was ambivalent toward the regime, expressing his admiration for the manner in which the Nazis had improved the German economy but also his horror at their treatment of the Jews.^[16]

[\[edit\]](#)

Later life

[\[edit\]](#)

Communist Party

Du Bois was investigated by the [FBI](#), who claimed in May of [1942](#) that "[h]is writing indicates him to be a [socialist](#)," and that he "has been called a [Communist](#) and at the same time criticized by the Communist Party."^{[\[citation needed\]](#)}



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Du Bois visited [Communist China](#) during the [Great Leap Forward](#). Also, in the [16 March 1953](#) issue of *The National Guardian*, Du Bois wrote "[Joseph Stalin](#) was a great man; few other men of the 20th century approach his stature."

Du Bois was chairman of the Peace Information Center at the start of the [Korean War](#). He was among the signers of the Stockholm Peace Pledge, which opposed the use of [nuclear weapons](#). In [1950](#), he ran for the [U.S. Senate](#) on the [American Labor Party](#) ticket in [New York](#) and received 4% of the vote. He was indicted in the United States under the [Foreign Agents Registration Act](#) and acquitted for lack of [evidence](#). W.E.B. Du Bois became disillusioned with both black [capitalism](#) and racism in the [United States](#). In 1959, Du Bois received the [Lenin Peace Prize](#). In [1961](#), at the age of 93, he joined the [Communist Party USA](#).

[\[edit\]](#)

Citizen of Ghana

Du Bois was invited to [Ghana](#) in [1961](#) by [President Kwame Nkrumah](#) to direct the *Encyclopedia Africana*, a government production, and a long-held dream of his. When, in [1963](#), he was refused a new U.S. passport, he and his wife, [Shirley Gra-](#)

[ham Du Bois](#), became citizens of Ghana, making them dual citizens of Ghana and the United States. Du Bois' health had declined in [1962](#), and on [August 27, 1963](#), he died in [Accra, Ghana](#) at the age of ninety-five, one day before [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)'s "[I Have a Dream](#)" speech.

[\[edit\]](#)

Works published

[\[edit\]](#)

Books

- *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* by W. E. Burghardt Du Bois , with introduction by Du Bois biographer David Levering Lewis. 768 pages. (Free Press: 1995 reissued from 1935 original) [ISBN 0684856573](#). This is the longest work by Du Bois.
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- *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899)
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- *Darkwater* ([1920](#))

- *The Gift of Black Folk* ([1924](#))
- *Dark Princess: A Romance* ([1928](#))
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- *Africa: Its Place in Modern History* (1930)
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Articles

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Published as

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Biography

- [David Levering Lewis](#) *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (Owl Books 1994). Winner of the [1994 Pulitzer Prize for Biography](#)^[2] and winner also of the 1994 [Bancroft Prize](#) and the [Francis Parkman Prize](#) for historical research and writing.
- [David Levering Lewis](#) *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century 1919-1963* (Owl Books 2001). Covers the second half of the life of W.E.B. Du Bois, charting 44 years of the culture and politics of race in the United States. Winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Biography ^[3]

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Legacy

In 1992, the [United States](#) honored W.E.B. Du Bois with his portrait on a [postage stamp](#).

On [October 5, 1994](#), the main library at the [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#) was named after him.

Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African-American Experience (New York: Basic-Civitas, 1999, Hardcover, 2144 pp. [ISBN 0-465-00071-1](#)) was inspired by and dedicated to W.E.B. Du Bois by its editors, [Kwame Anthony Appiah](#) and [Henry Louis Gates, Jr.](#)

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References in popular culture

[Hip hop](#) artist [Talib Kweli](#) refers to him in "Gun Music" with:

*Bringing the funk of dead bodies, go ahead bring in your boys
You'll see the souls of black folk like W.E.B Du Bois.*

A character from the cartoon program [The Boondocks](#) is named Thomas Du Bois, a possible reference to W.E.B. Du Bois.

[\[edit\]](#)

See also



[African American Portal](#)

- [African American literature](#)
- [Marvel Cooke](#) Secretary to Du Bois when he was editor of [The Crisis](#).
- [Double Consciousness](#)
- [W. E. B. Du Bois Institute](#)
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- [11. ^ The Baltimore Sun, June 8, 1997, "A New and Changed NAACP Magazine"](#)
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- [The Talented Tenth](#)
- [W.E.B. Du Bois and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity](#)
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