

**THE WORLD AND**

# **AFRICA**

**An inquiry into the part which Africa  
has played in world history**

**by W. E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS**

**An enlarged edition, including  
essays on the personalities  
and future of the nations of Africa**

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W. E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS

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*An enlarged edition, with new writings  
on Africa by W. E. Du Bois, 1955-1961*



INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS  
*New York*

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**TO  
NINA  
FOR  
OUR GOLDEN WEDDING**

**NEW ENLARGED EDITION**

This printing, 1992

**SBN (cloth) 7178-0222-1; (paperback) 7178-0221-3**

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## FOREWORD

SINCE the rise of the sugar empire and the resultant cotton kingdom, there has been consistent effort to rationalize Negro slavery by omitting Africa from world history, so that today it is almost universally assumed that history can be truly written without reference to Negroid peoples. I believe this to be scientifically unsound and also dangerous for logical social conclusions. Therefore I am seeking in this book to remind readers in this crisis of civilization, of how critical a part Africa has played in human history, past and present, and how impossible it is to forget this and rightly explain the present plight of mankind.

Twice before I have essayed to write on the history of Africa: once in 1915 when the editors of the Home University Library asked me to attempt such a work. The result was the little volume called *The Negro*, which gave evidence of a certain naïve astonishment on my own part at the wealth of fact and material concerning the Negro peoples, the very existence of which I had myself known little despite a varied university career. The result was a condensed and not altogether logical narrative. Nevertheless, it has been widely read and is still in print.

Naturally I wished to enlarge upon this earlier work after World War I and at the beginning of what I thought was a new era. So I wrote *Black Folk: Then and Now*, with some new ma-

terial and a more logical arrangement. But it happened that I was writing at the end of an age which marked the final catastrophe of the old era of European world dominance rather than at the threshold of a change of which I had not dreamed in 1935. I deemed it, therefore, not only fitting but necessary in 1946 to essay again not so much a history of the Negroid peoples as a statement of their integral role in human history from pre-historic to modern times.

I still labor under the difficulty of the persistent lack of interest in Africa so long characteristic of modern history and sociology. The careful, detailed researches into the history of Negroid peoples have only begun, and the need for them is not yet clear to the thinking world. I feel compelled nevertheless to go ahead with my interpretation, even though that interpretation has here and there but slender historical proof. I believe that in the main my story is true, despite the fact that so often between the American Civil War and World War I the weight of history and science supports me only in part and in some cases appears violently to contradict me. At any rate, here is a history of the world written from the African point of view; or better, a history of the Negro as part of the world which now lies about us in ruins.

I am indebted to my assistant, Dr. Irene Diggs, for efficient help in arranging the material and reading the manuscript.

I feel now as though I were approaching a crowd of friends and enemies, who ask a bit breathlessly, whose and whence is the testimony on which I rely for something that even resembles Authority? To which I return two answers: I am challenging Authority—even Maspero, Sayce, Reisner, Breasted, and hundreds of other men of highest respectability, who did not attack but studiously ignored the Negro on the Nile and in the world and talked as though black folk were nonexistent and unimportant. They are part of the herd of writers of modern history who never heard of Africa or declare with Guernier "*Seule de tous les continents l'Afrique n'a pas d'histoire!*"

For chapters one and two I have relied upon my own travel and observation over a fairly long life. For confirmation I have resurrected William Howitt's *Colonization and Christianity*, a popular history of how Europeans treated the natives in their colonies. The book was published in London in 1838, and since then imperial Europe had tried to forget it. I have also made bold to repeat the testimony of Karl Marx, whom I regard as the greatest of modern philosophers, and I have not been deterred by the witch-hunting which always follows mention of his name. I like Robert Briffault's *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (1938) and George Padmore's *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936). I have mentioned the work of Anna Graves, who is usually ignored because she does not follow the conventions of historical writing and because no publisher has thought that he could make money out of her work.

In chapter three, on the slave trade, I have especially relied on Eric Williams' new and excellent work, *Capitalism and Slavery*; also on Wilson Williams' work published in the first number of the Howard University *Studies in the Social Sciences*. My own *Suppression of the Slave Trade* has continued to be of service. Rayford Logan's work on the United States and Haiti and Chapman Cohen's *Christianity, Slavery, and Labor* (1931) have also been used. Reginald Coupland's *East Africa and Its Invaders* (1938) has been valuable. But my greatest help in this chapter after Eric Williams, has been E. D. Moore's *Ivory: The Scourge of Africa* (1931); it is an invaluable book and I am deeply indebted to its author for facts.

In chapter four I have relied on Edwin W. Smith, now Editor of *Africa* and Julian Huxley; also on C. G. Seligmann, whose *Races of Africa* (1930), is priceless and marred only by his obsession with the "Hamites."

In chapter five on Egypt there is naturally the greatest diversity of opinion. My attention to the subject was first aroused by the little pamphlet published by Alexander F. Chamberlain in 1911, "The Contribution of the Negro to Human Civilization."

Naturally one must read Maspero, Breasted, Rawlinson, and the other earlier and indefatigable students; but I have mainly depended upon W. M. Flinders Petrie's *History of Egypt* and on the sixth volume of the work on Egypt in the Middle Ages by E. Stanley Lane-Poole edited by Petrie. The travels of Ibn Batuta and Duarte Barbosa form a firm background to the modern research of Arthur Thomson, David Randall-MacIver, and Grace Caton-Thompson. Especially *Egyptian Civilization* by Alexandre Moret, published in French in 1927 and shortly thereafter in English has been illuminating. I have looked through the splendid reproductions of Karl R. Lepsius' *Denkmäler*. I have read Eduard Meyer's *Geschichte des Altertums* (1910-13); but of greatest help to me has been Leo Hansberry. Mr. Hansberry, a professor at Howard University, is the one modern scholar who has tried to study the Negro in Egypt and Ethiopia. I regret that he has not published more of his work. The overwhelming weight of conventional scientific opinion on Africa has overawed him, but his work in manuscript is outstanding. Arthur E. P. B. Weigall's *Short History of Egypt* has also been of use.

In chapter six I have depended upon Hansberry. One always turns back to Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man* for renewal of faith. The works of Sir Ernest Budge, George A. Reisner, A. H. Sayce, and F. L. Griffith have naturally been of use when they were not indulging their opinions about Negroes.

I should like to have used the researches on the Negro in classic Europe of Dr. Frank Snowden of Howard University. But classical journals in America have hitherto declined to publish his paper because it favored the Negro too much, leaving the public still to rely on Beardsley's stupid combination of scholarship and race prejudice which Johns Hopkins University published. I tried to get Dr. Snowden to let me see his manuscript, but he refused.

In chapter seven I have relied upon Leo Frobenius. Frobenius is not popular among conventional historians or anthropol-

ogists. He indulged his imagination. He had strong beliefs; but he was a great man and a great thinker. He looked upon Africa with unprejudiced eyes and has been more valuable for his interpretation of the Negro than any other man I know. The many works of Robert S. Rattray and Meek, Westermann and Schapera, cannot be ignored. African students like Soga and Caseley-Hayford have helped me, and younger men like Orizu. Mbadiwe, and Ojiki. Basic is the fine unprejudiced work of Maurice Delafosse. I have used Flora Lugard, although she is not a scientist; and also a new young Negro writer, Armattoo.

In the eighth chapter I have naturally depended upon Sir Harry H. Johnston and his study of the Bantu languages; the splendid work of Miss Caton-Thompson. I have learned much from James A. Rogers. Rogers is an untrained American Negro writer who has done his work under great difficulty without funds and at much personal sacrifice. But no man living has revealed so many important facts about the Negro race as has Rogers. His mistakes are many and his background narrow, but he is a true historical student.

In chapter nine there is reliance on Lane-Poole and Cooper, whom I have mentioned before, and on the new points of view brought by Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Autobiography* (1940) and his *Glimpses of World History* (1942). The study of Egypt and the East by Alfred T. Butler and Palon have shed much needed light; and general anthropology is gradually revealing the trend of the Negro in Africa as we emerge from the blight of the writers of current history.

Chapter ten is built on the work of Maurice Delafosse and of William D. Cooley (1841), with help from H. R. Palmer, Flora Lugard, and many others.

Chapter eleven depends on current thought and documents; and books like Leonard Barnes' *Soviet Light on the Colonies* (1944) and Harold Laski's *Rise of Liberalism* (1936).

In fine, I have done in this book the sort of thing at which every scholar shudders. With meager preparation and all too



general background of learning, I have essayed a task, which, to be adequate and complete, should be based upon the research of a lifetime! But I am faced with the dilemma, that either I do this now or leave it for others who have not had the tragedy of life which I have, forcing me to face a task for which they may have small stomach and little encouragement from the world round about. If, out of my almost inevitable mistakes and inaccuracies and false conclusions, I shall have at least clearly stated my main issue—that black Africans are men in the same sense as white European and yellow Asiatics, and that history can easily prove this—then I shall rest satisfied even under the stigma of an incomplete and, to many, inconclusive work.

W. E. B. DuBois

New York

May 1946



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## CHAPTER I

# THE COLLAPSE OF EUROPE

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*This is a consideration of the nature of the calamity which has overtaken human civilization.*

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WE ARE face to face with the greatest tragedy that has ever overtaken the world. The collapse of Europe is to us the more astounding because of the boundless faith which we have had in European civilization. We have long believed without argument or reflection that the cultural status of the people of Europe and of North America represented not only the best civilization which the world had ever known, but also a goal of human effort destined to go on from triumph to triumph until the perfect accomplishment was reached. Our present nervous breakdown, nameless fear, and often despair, comes from the sudden facing of this faith with calamity.

In such a case, what we need above all is calm appraisal of the situation, the application of cold common sense. What in reality is the nature of the catastrophe? To what pattern of human culture does it apply? And, finally, why did it happen? In this search for reasons we must seek not simply current facts or facts within the memory of living men, but we must also, and especially in this case, seek lessons from history. It is perhaps the greatest indictment that can be brought against history as a science and against its teachers that we are usually indisposed

to refer to history for the settlement of pressing problems. We realize that history is too often what we want it to be and what we are determined men shall believe rather than a grim record of what has taken place in the past.

Manifestly the present plight of the world is a direct outgrowth of the past, and I have made bold to add to the many books on the subject of our present problems because I believe that certain suppressions in the historical record current in our day will lead to a tragic failure in assessing causes. More particularly, I believe that the habit, long fostered, of forgetting and detracting from the thought and acts of the people of Africa, is not only a direct cause of our present plight, but will continue to cause trouble until we face the facts. I shall try not to exaggerate this thread of African history in the world development, but I shall insist equally that it be not ignored.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when I was but ten years out of college, I visited the Paris Exposition of 1900. It was one of the finest, perhaps the very finest, of world expositions, and it typified what the European world wanted to think of itself and its future. Wealth and Science were the outstanding matters of emphasis: there was the new and splendid Pont Alexandre crossing the Seine, named for the Czar of Russia; there was an amazing exhibit of Russian industry at Jaroslav; and I had brought with me, as excuse for coming, a little display showing the development of Negroes in the United States, which gained a gold medal. All about me was an extraordinary display of wealth, luxury, and industrial technique, striking evidence of a Europe triumphant over the world and the center of science and art, power and human freedom.

It was easy to see what the great countries of Europe thought of themselves: France stood pre-eminently for art, for taste in building, technique, and pure expression; Germany stood for science and government; England for wealth and power with a high level of comfort; and America for freedom of human initiative.

There was even in this French exposition a certain dominance of the British Empire idea. The British paper promise-to-pay was actually worth more to the traveler than gold. British industry was unrivaled in efficient technique. British investments were the safest; and Great Britain was the widest and most successful administrator of colonies. Every kind of tribute was paid to her; she was the acknowledged leader in such various things as men's cloth and clothing, public manners, the rate of public expenditure—and all this showed in the deference a British subject could demand everywhere throughout the world.

Then came five crashing events in quick succession. First, in 1905, at Saint Petersburg, the shooting down in cold blood of Russian workingmen in the first organized attempt of the twentieth century to achieve relief; and by that murderous volley the Czar killed the faith of working Russia in the Little White Father. He revealed that Russian industry was paying 50 per cent and more in profits to Germans and other investors, while the workers starved. The Czar himself thus sowed the seeds of revolution.

Second, in 1911 a German warship sailed into Agadir, North Africa, and demanded in the name of the Emperor that the German Reich be consulted concerning the future of Morocco. I remember how the incident startled London. I was there at the time, attending the First Races Congress. It is a meeting now forgotten, but it might have been of world significance. Its advice might have changed the course of history had not World War I followed so fast. Meeting at the University of London was probably the largest representation of the groups of the world known as races and subraces; they were consulting together under the leadership of science and ethics for a future world which would be peaceful, without race prejudice; and which would be co-operative, especially in the social sciences. Among the speakers were world leaders—Giuseppe Sergi, Franz Boas, John A. Hobson, Felix Adler, Sir Sidney Olivier, and Wu Ting-fang. A hymn to the peoples was read:

So sit we all as one  
So, gloomed in tall and stone-swathed groves,  
The Buddha walks with Christ!  
And Al-Koran and Bible both be holy!

Almighty Word!  
In this Thine awful sanctuary,  
First and flame-haunted City of the Widened World,  
Assoil us, Lord of Lands and Seas!

We are but weak and wayward men,  
Distraught alike with hatred and vainglory;  
Prone to despise the Soul that breathes within—  
High-visioned hordes that lie and steal and kill,  
Sinning the sin each separate heart disclaims,  
Clambering upon our riven, writhing selves,  
Besieging Heaven by trampling men to Hell!

We be blood-guilty! Lo, our hands be red!  
Let no man blame the other in this sin!  
But here—here in the white Silence of the Dawn,  
Before the Womb of Time,  
With bowed hearts all flame and shame,  
We face the birth-pangs of a world:  
We hear the stifled cry of Nations all but born—  
The wail of women ravished of their stunted brood!  
We see the nakedness of Toil, the poverty of Wealth,  
We know the Anarchy of Empire, and doleful Death of Life!  
And hearing, seeing, knowing all, we cry:

Save us, World-Spirit, from our lesser selves!  
Grant us that war and hatred cease,  
Reveal our souls in every race and hue!  
Help us, O Human God, in this Thy Truce,  
To make Humanity divine! <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *Darkwater* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), pp. 275-76.

There were a few startling incidents. I remember with what puzzled attention we heard Felix von Luschan, the great anthropologist of the University of Berlin, annihilate the thesis of race inferiority and then in the same breath end his paper with these words: "Nations will come and go, but racial and national antagonism will remain; and this is well, for mankind would become like a herd of sheep if we were to lose our national ambition and cease to look with pride and delight, not only on our industries and science, but also on our splendid soldiers and our glorious ironclads. Let small-minded people whine about the horrid cost of dreadnoughts; as long as every nation in Europe spends, year after year, much more money on wine, beer, and brandy than on her army and navy, there is no reason to dread our impoverishment by militarism. *Si vis pacem, para bellum*; and in reality there is no doubt that we shall be the better able to avoid war, the better we care for our armor. A nation is free only in so far as her own internal affairs are concerned. She has to respect the right of other nations as well as to defend her own, and her vital interests she will, if necessary, defend with blood and iron." <sup>2</sup>

We were aghast. Did German science defend war? We were hardly reassured when in printing this speech the editor appended the following note: "To prevent the last few paragraphs from being misinterpreted, Professor von Luschan authorizes us to state that he regards the desire for a war between Germany and England as 'insane or dastardly.'" <sup>3</sup>

But it was in vain. In 1914 came World War I; in 1929 came the depression; in 1939 came World War II. The cost of these wars and crises in property and human life is almost beyond belief; the cost in the destruction of youth and of faith in the world and mankind is incalculable. Why did these things happen?

<sup>2</sup> Gustav Spiller, ed., *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems, Universal Races Congress, I* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1911), pp. 23-24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.



We may begin with the fact that in 1888 there came to the throne of Germany a young, vigorous German emperor of British descent. Wilhelm II had utter faith in the future of Germany. As a student I used to see him often on the Unter den Linden. Time and again we students swung to the curb, and through the central arch of the Brandenburg Gate came the tossing of plumes and the prancing of horses, and splendid with shining armor and blare of trumpet there rode Wilhelm, by the Grace of God, King of Prussia and German Emperor.

Back of Wilhelm's faith in Germany lay deep envy of the power of Britain. In his soul strove unceasingly the ambition of Bismarck of Prussia and the aristocratic imperialism of his mother, a daughter of Queen Victoria. The French-British *Entente Cordiale* of the new century was faced by a German demand for "a place in the sun," a right to extract from colonial and semicolonial areas a share of the wealth which was going to Britain. When Germany invaded Belgium, and with that invasion brought war with England, it must be remembered that by that same token Germany was invading the Belgian Congo and laying claim to the ownership of Central Africa.

World War I then was a war over spheres of influence in Asia and colonies in Africa, and in that war, curiously enough, both Asia and Africa were called upon to support Europe. Senegalese troops, for example, saved France and Europe from the first armed German onslaught. They were the shock troops brought to be slaughtered in thousands by the climate and cannon of Europe. The man who brought the African troops to the succor of France was Blaise Diagne. He was a tall, thin Negro, nervous with energy, more patriotic in his devotion to France than many of the French. He was deputy from Senegal in the French Parliament and had been selected as the man to whom the chiefs of French West Africa would render implicit obedience. Raised to cabinet rank, he was made the official representative of the French in West Africa. The white governor who found himself