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W. E. B. DuBOIS—THE HISTORIAN*

The life and career of W. E. B. Du Bois provide fundamental emphasis for the declaration that history deals not only with the dead past, but also directly and indirectly with the life-giving spirit of the present and the promise of the future. His talents were devoted in his time-span to all the avenues of literary expression as a prolific author, but his best historical efforts were at the beginning of his career. Basic to his writings was the profound influence of the historical and the philosophical-scientific methods of the social sciences, and it was rare for him to complete a book without involving historical backgrounds in it. It was along history's pathway that he made his literary route to the present and the future.

During the years 1883 to 1894, Du Bois was experiencing his formal education at high school in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the University of Berlin, Germany. As early as 1883, while in high school, he was writing "Great Barrington Notes" to the *New York Globe* and the *New York Freeman*.

This was the period also when American historians began their organization as professional groups. The American Historical Association was founded in 1884, and was preceded by the formation of local societies of scholars in history and the social sciences. *The Political Science Quarterly* was established in 1886.¹ Standards of scholarship in these fields were emphasized for the first time in the United States, and the

*Reprinted with the permission of Charles H. Wesley and *Freedomways*.

¹Michael Kraus, *A History of American History*. New York: Farrar & Rhinehart, 1937, p. 314.

works of scholars in history who were trained in American universities were published and were regarded not only as contributions to historical scholarship, but as stimuli to graduate students and the younger colleagues.² A committee of the American Historical Association was appointed in 1896 to recommend a course of history study for secondary schools.

As a student at Fisk University, 1885-1888, Du Bois was not affected by these happenings in history, and yet these years were regarded by him as "years of growth and development," during which he learned "new things about the world."³ Primarily, coming from North to South, he saw discrimination as he had not seen it before. He came in contact with disdain, abuse, and violence based upon color, while he studied at Fisk in courses in Latin, Greek, history, natural science, politics and religion. He served as editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, *The Fisk Herald*, 1887-1888. At his Fisk Commencement in 1888, his subject was "Bismarck," and his choice of this subject revealed to him, he wrote, "the abyss between my education and the truth in the world." His history courses had not led him to the understanding of European intrigue, the expansion of European power in Africa, the industrial revolution, the slave trade, colonialism, and the rivalries of European nations over the products of the lands of the darker people. As Du Bois said, "I was blithely European and imperialistic in outlook; democratic as democracy was conceived in the United States."⁴

At Harvard, he sat at the feet of writers of history, Albert Bushnell Hart and Justin Winsor, Psychologist William James, philosophers Josiah Royce and George Santayana, litterateurs George Lyman Kittredge, Charles Eliot Norton, and economist F. W. Taussig. Specialists in the single area of history were rare in this day. Du Bois states in this connection that his education at Harvard turned from philosophy, centered in history, and then gradually in economics and social problems. Sociology had not been recognized at this time, but

²F. N. Thorpe, "The Study of History in American Colleges and Universities." *Circular of Information*, Bureau of Education, Washington, D.C., 1887. No. 2, p. 252.

³W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn, An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940, p. 30.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 32.

Du Bois believed that this would have designated his course then although he had interests in history; but he realized that Harvard's faculty leadership was not yet fully centered in this field of study. His course papers at Harvard in 1891-1892, included such historical themes as "Lee," "Unrepresentative Men," "Historical Conference," "Methods in History." His early interest in economics was manifested in a paper entitled, "A Constructive Critique of Wage Theory; An Essay on the Present State of Economic Theory in Regard to Wages."⁵

After two years at Harvard, his second baccalaureate, *cum laude*, the first being from Fisk, was received at Harvard where he was one of six commencement speakers, with his subject, "Jefferson Davis As a Representative of Civilization." However, the original title of the address was "Jefferson Davis and the African." From 1890 to 1891, he pursued graduate courses in history and political science as a Fellow at Harvard and worked on a Master's thesis, "The Suppression of the Slave Trade." The degree of Master of Arts was awarded to him in 1891. His master's degree study was first published under the title "The Enforcement of the Slave Trade Laws," in the Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1891.⁶ From 1892 to 1894, through a grant from the Slater Fund, he studied at the University of Berlin where he united his studies in history, economics and politics, under Historian Gustav Schmoller. At this time, Du Bois believed that through the pursuit of truth by investigation, race problems would have their solutions. There was a manuscript in historical research which came from one of his Berlin seminars in 1892 entitled, "The Plantation and Peasant Proprietorship Systems of Agriculture in the United States."

The first of the major Du Bois historical works which earned for him the title of historian was through the publication of the volume, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*, in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy awarded in 1895 at Harvard University. Du Bois was twenty-four years

⁵Paul G. Partington, *W. E. B. Du Bois Bibliography*. (Unpublished).

⁶"The Enforcement of the Slave Trade Laws," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the year 1891*. Washington, D.C., 1892, pp. 161-174.

of age when he worked on this subject. There were twelve chapters and appendices embracing colonial and state legislation and typical slave trade cases in 335 pages, with voluminous footnotes and a bibliography. The title page showed that situation at Wilberforce, as it relates to Du Bois as a historian, is that he was not teaching history classes and was not designated as a Professor of History. He was instead a Professor of Latin and Greek, 1894-1896,⁷ or as he says, "the chair of classics," which he accepted with gratitude at the annual salary of \$800.⁸

This volume was issued as the first of the Harvard Historical Studies, published under the direction of the Department of History and Government. The volume with two additional ones issued in 1896, and three announced for 1897, were to "comprise works of original research selected from the writings of teachers and graduate students in the Department of History and Government in Harvard University."⁹

This study was based upon historical sources, national and state, colonial statutes, Congressional documents, reports of anti-slavery societies and personal narratives. In his Preface, Du Bois states that there was difficulty in separating the suppression of the slave trade from the system of American slavery and colonial policy, and yet he endeavored to "avoid superficiality" and "unscientific narrowness of view." And he adds, "while I could not hope entirely to overcome such a difficulty, I nevertheless trust that I have succeeded in rendering this monograph a small contribution to the scientific study of slavery and the American Negro."

The volume was received with good reviews and had little criticism in the *American Historical Review*, 1897; the *Annals of the American Academy*, 1897; the *English Historical Review*, 1897; and the *Atlantic Monthly*, 1897. The *Nation's* reviewer stated that the volume would "long remain the authoritative work on the subject,"¹⁰ and the reviewer in the *Atlantic Monthly* asserted that although Du Bois had been

⁷*Who's Who in America*, Vol. 25, 1948-1949, p. 686.

⁸Du Bois, *The Dusk of Dawn*. New York, p. 49.

⁹Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co. London and Bombay, 1896.

¹⁰*The Nation*, Vol. 63, December 31, 1896, p. 468.

industrious in collecting his materials, his work disclosed “a lack of appreciation of the subject in its historical proportions.”¹¹ Another reviewer regarded him as “the advocate rather than the historian,” and it was true that he referred to the “cupidity and carelessness” of Americans and the lack of moral opposition “to the slave traffic.”

In *The African Methodist Church Review*, H. T. Kealing, editor (1897), declared that “the book is epochal” and that “certainly for faithful and full verification of every statement, for impartiality, for grasp, correct summarizing of the essential meaning of widely divergent actions and seemingly antagonistic motives in the same section, Professor Du Bois’ work is monumental among all the writings that the race has produced.”¹²

This volume has stood through the years as a solid piece of historical research and writing. All subsequent historical studies of value concerning the slave trade to the United States have included in bibliographies or footnotes this Du Bois study of 1896.

Fifty-eight years after this first printing, in 1954, another edition of this volume was published by the Social Science Press, New York. He added an “Apologia” of two and one-half pages to this new edition which the publishers placed in the back of the book. As an author looking back sixty years when he began the research, Du Bois has two major criticisms of it. The first is the separation of his subject from “the total flow of history” by an author, “when he knows nothing or little of the mass of facts of which his minute study is a part.” Another self-criticism by him was his lack of knowledge “of the significance of the work of Freud and Marx.” He had received some Freudian thought through William James but he did not “realize the psychological reasons behind the trends of human action which the African slave trade involved.” In Germany, he heard more of Marxism, but he added that this was more in rebuttal, and there was “no complete realization of the application of the philosophy of Karl Marx to my subject.” He concluded that he should

¹¹*Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 79, April, 1897, p. 479.

¹²*The African Methodist Church Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, January, 1897, p. 359.

have added to his research "the clear concept of Marx on the class struggle for income and power beneath which all considerations of right or morals were twisted or utterly crushed." Nevertheless he concluded that he was proud that at the beginning of his career in 1896 he had made no more mistakes than he did in this historical work.¹³

During the same year in which his first historical publication was issued, 1896, Du Bois accepted an appointment as Assistant Instructor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania in order to undertake a special investigation into the conditions of the colored people of Philadelphia. This opportunity was of great influence on his career. He regarded himself as being "pushed aside by forces which, if not entirely beyond my control, were yet of great weight." He had offered to teach social sciences at Wilberforce, although this course would have been beyond his required schedule, but he was denied this opportunity by the authorities. The University of Pennsylvania now gave him the opportunity of a research project in the social science. Of this opportunity, he said, "My vision is becoming clearer. The Negro problem was in my mind a matter of systematic investigation and intelligent understanding."¹⁴

The fact that he was designated an "assistant instructor," although a Ph.D., from Harvard, made no difference to him. He had his opportunity and he would use it effectively and efficiently, for here was the "chance to study an historical group of black folk and to show exactly what their place was in the community." The result was *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*.

Du Bois did not turn entirely from history to sociology, but there was more emphasis upon current social conditions and less upon the history of the Negro people in Philadelphia. His goals were directed to endeavors by white and black Philadelphians who were recipients of better opportunities and who should have reached and lifted the masses of Negroes. This was his concept of the challenge to the "Talented Tenth." His survey was revealing and became the basis for a history

¹³Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade, 1638-1870*. New York: The Social Science Press, 1954, p. 329. "The Apologia" pp. 327-329.

¹⁴Du Bois, *The Dusk of Dawn*. pp. 57-58.

of this section of the city. However, Gunnar Myrdal in his *American Dilemma*, closed his description of what a study of a Negro community should be by calling attention to the Du Bois study of the Philadelphia Negro, "which best meets our requirements, a study which is now all but forgotten."¹⁵

Du Bois in this Philadelphia study seemed to be moving away from history, as he was pressed more and more by the revelation of conditions affecting adversely the darker people. He was still the scholar but devoted less emphasis to history. He began to differentiate pure research from reform and change, and saw clearly the need for the latter in the light of expressed ideals. He stated this view more clearly in a paper, "The Study of Negro Problems," in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in 1899. He stated that "the sole aim of any society is to settle its problems in accordance with its highest ideals, and the only rational method of accomplishing this is to study those problems in the light of the best scientific research."¹⁶

The Philadelphia Negro, which Du Bois called "a huge volume of five hundred pages but not unreadable," was intended to be a first of a series of studies of the Negro population in several urban centers. He regarded it "as complete a scientific study and answer as could have been given with defective facts and statistics, one lone worker and little money." In 1901, he published a series in the *New York Times Magazine Supplement* of individual articles on New York City, Boston and Philadelphia. While Du Bois did not follow up this study in other areas, such studies as were made could not ignore the trail blazed by this distinguished scholar, and by this date, sociologist.¹⁷ Another brief study of this type was

¹⁵Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. p. 1132.

¹⁶Du Bois, "The Study of Negro Problems." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. XI, January, 1898. p. 16; Francis L. Broderick, *W. E. B. Du Bois, Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959. pp. 39, 40.

¹⁷Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, Together with a special report on domestic service by Irabel Eaton. Publications of the University of Pennsylvania. *Series in Political Economy and Public Law XLV*. Philadelphia: Published for the University of Pennsylvania, 1899.

“The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia,” under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Labor.¹⁸

From 1897 to 1910, he was associated with Atlanta University as Professor of Economics and History. He edited sixteen *Atlanta University Studies*, covering over two thousand printed pages dealing with Negro life and each of which had its basic background in history. However, this work was regarded as primarily sociological.¹⁹ Also while at Atlanta, his collection of essays with historical and sociological overtones, *The Souls of Black Folk*, was published in 1904 and passed subsequently through twenty-seven editions, and was reprinted in 1953. This volume was again reprinted in 1961 in the Premier Americana Series, Fawcett World Library.

The one excursion of Du Bois in historical biography was in his publication in 1909 of *John Brown*. In thirteen chapters with chronology and bibliography, the author tells his story in 409 pages, admitting that materials were scarce but that “even in the absence of special material the great broad truths are clear, and this book is at once a record of and a tribute to the man who of all Americans has perhaps come nearest to touching the real souls of black folks.” Du Bois said this book is “one of the best things that I had done,” for he had considered John Brown from the point of view of the Negro-American rather than as a fanatic who had interrupted the normal course of events in American life and history.²⁰

In 1915, Du Bois returned to history in a small volume in the Home University Library Series, entitled, *The Negro*. In the opening lines he wrote, “The time has come for a complete history of the Negro people. Archaeological research in Africa has just begun, and many sources of information in Arabian, Portuguese, and other tongues are not fully at our command; and, too, it must be confessed, racial prejudice against darker people is still too strong in so-called civilized centers for judicial appraisal of the peoples of Africa. Much intensive monographic work in history and science is needed to clear

¹⁸Du Bois, *The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study*. Bulletin of the U.S. Department of Labor, Vol. III, January, 1898, pp. 1-38.

¹⁹See his “The Laboratory in Sociology at Atlanta.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. XXI, May, 1903. pp. 160-163; New York, International Publishers, 1962.

²⁰Du Bois, *John Brown*. Philadelphia: George Jacobs Co., 1909.

mooted points and quiet the controversialist who mistakes present personal desire for scientific proof."²¹

The best historical sections of this book treat of African history, with emphasis on Ethiopia and Egypt, the West Coast of Africa, culture, the trade in men, the West Indies, and a chapter on "The Negro in the United States," and another on "Negro Problems." He included the theories of anthropologists Guiseppi Sergi and Franz Boas, criticized the Aryan myth, and stated the thesis of class conflict and the belief in the union of black and white workers for the creation of a better society. Writing vigorously and succinctly, Du Bois presented facts about African history and culture which were unknown in 1915, a time when the concept of racial inferiority and African savagery were rampant and dominant in the thought of the American people.

He returned to history in 1924, as a result of subvention from the Knights of Columbus and issued *The Gift of Black Folk; The Negroes in the Making of America*. This was a book of 349 pages in the Knights of Columbus Racial Contribution Series.²² The author admits that this book, "while basically sound, as I believe, but was too hurriedly done, with several unpardonable errors."²³

The Reconstruction Period had been a long time topic for consideration by Du Bois. As early as 1909, Du Bois expressed his interest when a letter was sent to him by James R. L. Diggs, President of Virginia Theological Seminary at Lynchburg, suggesting the rewriting in a series of ten volumes or more of Reconstruction in the Southern States. Diggs stated that "southern writers present our white brothers' side of the question, but I do not find the proper credit given our people for what of good they really find in those trying days." Du Bois replied that the plan was excellent and would fit into his encyclopedia project, and that he would take it up in the fall.²⁴

²¹Du Bois, *The Negro*. New York: Henry Holt, 1915. Preface.

²²Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America*. Introduction by Edward F. McSweeney. Boston: Stanford Co., 1924.

²³Du Bois, *The Dusk of Dawn*. p. 269.

²⁴Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. New York: Citadel Press, 1951. Vol. II, p. 874.

The next year, 1910, he prepared and presented a paper at the annual session of the American Historical Association on "Black Reconstruction and its Benefits."²⁵ Du Bois said that U. B. Phillips, defender of the South, was "greatly exercised," that William Dunning of Columbia University and Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard had praised it. As a result, Du Bois was convinced that Reconstruction had its "tragedy"—because here an attempt was initiated to make democracy and the tenets of the Declaration of Independence apply not only to white men but to black men."²⁶ While serving as Editor of the *Crisis*, and with a grant from the Rosenwald Fund, Du Bois had undertaken a history of Reconstruction from the Negro-American's point of view. After two years as Professor of Sociology at Atlanta University, the project was completed and was published as *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*.

This volume directed attention to the achievements of Reconstruction by Negroes after the Civil War who, despite opposition, were creating a better American life but were prevented by reactionaries; that their strike during the war and their use as soldiers helped win the war and freedom; that Negro legislators made contributions to national and local government, and that they did not deserve the criticism of historians; that Negro suffrage had failures because it was not supported, north or south, except by individuals and was finally defeated by force.

Du Bois also criticized the works on Reconstruction by James Ford Rhodes, John W. Burgess and William H. Dunning in particular. According to Du Bois' view, Rhodes was an exploiter of labor; Burgess was a slaveholder, and Dunning was a Copperhead. He said that around these historians there had assembled a post-war group of graduate students from the South, who were propagating these biased views. He wrote: "They had been born and reared in the bitterest period of Southern race hatred, fear and contempt. Their instinctive reactions were confirmed and encouraged in the best of Ameri-

²⁵*American Historical Review*, July, 1910.

²⁶Du Bois, *The Dusk of Dawn*, pp. 318-319.

can universities. Their scholarship, when it regarded black men, became deaf, dumb and blind. The clearest evidence of Negro ability, work, honesty, patience, learning and efficiency became distorted into cunning, brute toil, shrewd evasion, cowardice and imitation—a stupid effort to transcend nature's law."²⁷

Du Bois believed in the final section of his volume entitled "The Propaganda of History," that "historians of Reconstruction, with a few exceptions, had ignored the Negro, or had distorted, misinterpreted the part which the Negro had played in Reconstruction mainly because of their loyalty to the lost cause and to the ideals of the South and fidelity to clan and class." He added, "In propaganda against the Negro since emancipation in this land, we have faced one of the most stupendous efforts the world ever saw to discredit human beings; an effort involving universities, history, science, social life and religion."

Du Bois undertakes a volume of history and social interpretation, which is brilliantly written, in *Black Folk, Then and Now—An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (1939).²⁸ This volume was an expression and outgrowth of his volume in 1915 under the title, *The Negro*. The author advised his point of view when he stated:

I do not for a moment doubt that my Negro descent and narrow group culture have in many cases predisposed me to interpret my facts too favorably for my race; but there is little danger of misleading here for the champions of white folks are legion. The Negro has long been the clown of history; the football of anthropology; and the slave of industry. I am trying to show here why these attitudes can no longer be maintained. I realize that the truth of history lies not in the mouth of partisans but in the calm science that sits between. Her cause I seek to serve, and wherever I fail, I am at least paying Truth the respect of earnest effort.

The task before him then was not only an account of the history of the Negro people, but also a description of the bearing of these facts upon the inequalities of the modern world.

²⁷Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, p. 726.

²⁸Du Bois, *Black Folk, Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1939. 401 pp.

In this volume, as in others, Du Bois shows that his primary interest is in the Negro, and that he is not only writing history, but he is making a case for the Negro people.

Du Bois devotes the largest part of the volume to Africa and its civilization, endeavoring to give re-evaluations in the light of new materials which appeared in recent publications. He refers to the word "Negro" and reveals the error of those who endeavor to restrict the word to a group of Africans and to regard the black and brown folk of Ethiopia, Egypt and North Africa as "white." Such a division makes a sharp contrast with the American interpretation of including all persons of color as Negroes, even those who have only a remote kinship to any of the African peoples. Thus, the word "Negro" becomes a dual word to be used in accordance with the convenience of the writers.

Moving from Africa, the author continues the thesis of the quality of Negro contributions and intelligence into the modern period and endeavors to show that racial inferiority concepts are at the basis of anti-Negro manifestations. He also finds that the inferiority of the Negro is based primarily on economic causes which is manifested in his chapters on "The Trade in Men," and "The Western Slave Markets." Imperialism receives its share of criticism by him with a severe indictment of the European states which maintain their government and their exploitation for the benefit of themselves, but the author looks forward to the rise of the workers of Asia, Africa and America. At the same time, the contributions of Negroes to literature, the arts, music, industry and labor, receive recognition in the volume.

The book is reviewed by Carter G. Woodson in the *Journal of Negro History*, and the beginning lines are "This book is more black folk *now* than *then*," by which the reviewer meant that more space was devoted to the former period than the latter, and that in fact, "the space devoted to Africa is quite inadequate." Woodson also asserts that the work was written mainly from secondary sources, and he says that the author did not use the more important ones. But Woodson would have credit given to him "for using such data as he

has collected in the form of undigested quotations to show the culture of Africa . . .'²⁹

While Du Bois wrote considerably outside of the field of history, much of that which he wrote was based upon it. His imaginary writings grew out of basic history, extending from *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911) to *The Black Flame* trilogy (1957-62). As Editor of the *Crisis*, his editorials were frequently based upon historical backgrounds. There was continuing emphasis on Negro art, drama and literature. He advocated the study of Negro history in his first report on the Niagara Movement in *The Voice of the Negro*, 1905, which contained as one of its purposes, "to study Negro history." He urged even the use of pageantry in the demonstration of Negro history, so that there would be impressions left in the minds of viewers and hearers by these theatrical pictures of the Negro in history. He did not hesitate to criticize some Negro members of the Board of Directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People when he said that they were ashamed of their African heritage and wanted to regard themselves as Americans rather than Africans, resented and feared, as he declared, "any coupling with Africa."³⁰

The Dusk of Dawn, planned as a biography, contains only parts of history and is not an historical autobiography. While the book gives a general review of the life of the author, there is much that is repeated and which has been known of Dr. Du Bois from other writings. While we may think of Du Bois as having been a writer of history, his reputation does not rest on history alone as a special area of his career. James Weldon Johnson declares that "the great influence Du Bois has exercised has been due to the concentrated force of his ideas . . ."³¹ And yet historians must concentrate their ideas as do other scholars. This is his major claim to greatness associated with the fact that he has enfolded his ideas with historical backgrounds.

²⁹Carter G. Woodson, *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, January, 1939, p. 462.

³⁰Du Bois, *The Dusk of Dawn*, p. 275.

³¹James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way, The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*. New York: Viking Press, 1934, p. 204.

Following *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America*, there are few single valid and strictly historical works which have been produced. In fact, basically there has been history but it has been mingled with sociology, economics and a pro-Negro corrective purpose. The latter is important, and each of his involvements makes for the greatness of the man. If the historian is a writer of history, a chronicler, an annalist or one well-versed in history, or one who records and explains events and persons as steps in human progress, and pursues the truth as exact as he can get it, Du Bois would qualify, and more so than the specialized chronicler or annalist.

One of the last, and the earliest of the plans and programs of Du Bois was centered in the *Encyclopedia Africana*, originally launched by him as the *Encyclopedia of the Negro*, the concept of which was started in 1909. With the assistance of the Phelps-Stokes Fund in 1931, the *Encyclopedia of the Negro* was initiated, and in 1945, Du Bois and Guy B. Johnson of the University of North Carolina edited the small preparatory volume with references. This program lay dormant in Du Bois' planning until the sponsorship of the Ghana Academy of Science, and the Government of Ghana had underwritten the cost of beginning the work with headquarters at Accra, Ghana, and with Du Bois as the Secretariat for the *Encyclopedia Africana*. Correspondence with hundreds of persons brought promises of cooperation from scholars all over the world. It was decided that the *Encyclopedia Africana* should be written by African scholars from the considerable body of knowledge already produced, and that which was to be assembled and prepared. After Du Bois went to Ghana in 1961, information reports were prepared by him toward the *Encyclopedia Africana* and a draft plan was prepared for the conference on this work at the University of Ghana, December 18, 1962. This was a project of the sixties. In the meantime, *Color and Democracy, Colonies and Peace* appeared in 1945, and *The World and Africa* in 1947. The latter was intended as an inquiry into the part which Africa had played in world history.

Du Bois was more than a historian; he was an advocate, a crusader, a critic, a teacher, a booster of morale, and one

who continuously urged that the darker peoples in the United States need not be ashamed of being Negroes. He promoted this idea despite controversies, and did not hesitate to enter the lists of verbal battle whenever it was necessary. As historian, he first made a scientific historical study. Then he was drawn from research by the very facts collected by him, as well as by the anti-Negro views of white historians who were his contemporaries. As editor, sociologist, essayist, publicist and maker of history, he objected to the ways in which American historians had distorted the image of darker Americans in the writing of history. He found the Negro an average and ordinary American and a human being faced with pressures created by the masters of his environment, against which he was struggling almost in vain, but to him the struggle was worth it. He admitted his pro-Negro premises and proceeded to prove them. He was *for* Negroes in history, as so many others were *against* them. Du Bois knew that a people must believe in themselves, for, as he said, no people who did not had "written its name in history."³² He knew that it was through the mind and pen of the historian that the achievements of persons and peoples were rescued from the dead past, and that the ordinary can become extraordinary through the mind and purpose of the craft of the historian. To say that the scientific historian has no business dealing with the dramatic, or the picturesque or the literary or with current life and the promise of a people is an irrelevant definition of the people's historian. However, literary cleverness is never satisfactory to the historian or his reading public, and it is inevitable through human frailty that there is a relativity in all historiography.

In his literary endeavors, Du Bois moved from the status of specialist in history, with the earmarks and trappings of the historian, to the concentration of facts and ideas on race and racism, the use of creative imagination, the exercise of dramatic expression, and the mastery of the style of the poet, the dramatist and the phrase-maker, which moved him into the world of art and letters so that he could write :

³²Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races." *American Negro Academy Occasional Papers*. No. 2.

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what souls I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn or condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from the last Pisgah between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?³³

And likewise, we who now march toward our Promised Land of Freedom and Opportunity should be basing our endeavors upon the worthy historical heritage created and developed in the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois!

CHARLES H. WESLEY

Washington, D. C.

³³Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk, Essays and Sketches*, New York: The Blue Heron Press, 1953.