

# W. E. B. Du Bois: Ethiopia and Pan-Africanism

Journal of Black Studies  
2019, Vol. 50(3) 251–272  
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DOI: 10.1177/0021934719833394  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jbs



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## Abstract

This article examines Du Bois's interactions with Ethiopian government representatives who were sent to America during the first half of the 20th century, and identifies numerous ways in which Du Bois provided direct and indirect support to Ethiopia and Ethiopian causes. Previous works in this genre emphasize Du Bois's vast and varied contributions to Pan-Africanism and African American political and social thinking. However, this essay adds new information to existing narratives on Du Bois's Pan-African focus by unearthing his specific focus and contributions to Ethiopia. Ultimately, the findings reveal the extent of Du Bois's contributions to Ethiopia and debunk some old myths regarding his Pan-African agenda.

## Keywords

Ethiopian and American relations, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ras Tafari, Emperor Haile Selassie I, World War I, World War II

William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois is noted among the leading American philosophers, sociologists, historians, political activists, Pan-Africanists,<sup>1</sup> and prolific writers and editors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (The Pan-African Association Statute, 1921). He was also one of America's leading champions for Ethiopian causes during the first half of the 20th century. Much is already written and theorized about Du Bois's works,

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thoughts, advocacies, and on the nature of his Pan-African interest. This article complements existing narratives on *Du Bois's Pan-African work* or Du Boisian Pan-Africanism<sup>2</sup> and provides new information on his interest in Ethiopia and his contributions to and advocacies for various Ethiopian causes.

In examining Du Bois's life and work, many historians and professionals from a variety of disciplines invariably emphasized the American landscape, the international landscape, or the Pan-African paradigm. Within the context of the American landscape, Du Bois tackled the questions of race, inequality, and poverty (Du Bois, 1946). On the international scene, Du Bois addressed world events as they unraveled and always tied them within the perspectives of labor, social justice, and European colonialism (Du Bois, 1918c). Within the Pan-African context, Du Bois's work transcended boundaries of space, race, and place. It envelops the experiential commonalities of all people of African descent, argues against the exploitation of people, and rejects the claims of racial superiority by others or their right to get rich at the expense of Africans. Du Bois envisioned a Pan Africa that preserves its own past, writes its own history, erases European lies, and distortions about Black folks from its literature, and most importantly, a Pan Africa that educates all of its youth in the broadest context, "making them modern, intelligent, responsible men of vision and character" (Du Bois, 1961, p. 400). This article is, therefore, not a comprehensive study of Du Bois's Pan-African work but an examination of the work he did in support of and relating to Ethiopia and Ethiopian causes.

Du Bois's Ethiopian consciousness is implicitly and overtly expressed in many of his early writings. Arguably, his very dissertation, "The Suppression of the African Slave-trade to the United States of America 1638-1870," which was later published as a book, was a significant increment along his journey of Ethiopian-race consciousness (Du Bois, 1936b),<sup>3</sup> Pan-Africanism, and social justice—all of which formed the fundamental challenges that became his life's mission. In his dissertation, Du Bois wrote of the challenge to America's progressive credibility, asserting that the "riddle of the Sphinx may be postponed, it may be evasively answered now; sometime it must be fully answered" (Du Bois, 1904, p. 199). Although the Sphinx is geographically located in Egypt, for Du Bois, Ancient Egypt and Ethiopia were culturally, politically, and racially intertwined. Also, the term Ethiopia was embraced by some Africans, including *Nelson Mandela, as representing their historical identity* (Mandela, 1994).<sup>4</sup>

In *The Negro* (1915), Du Bois cited Diodorus Siculus's statement that "Ethiopians conceive themselves to be of greater antiquity than any other nation . . . They affirm that the Egyptians are one of their colonies" (p. 37). Du Bois also stated that the Egyptians affirmed that "their civilization came

from the south and from the black tribes of Punt” (p. 37). He further noted that “when the dread Hyksos appeared [in Egypt], Ethiopia became both a physical and cultural refuge for conquered Egypt” (p. 38).

Wilson Jeremiah Moses noted that African civilization was a recurrent theme in “conservative black nationalism” and that Du Bois’s own *The Conservation of Races* was “the principal document of conservative black nationalism” (Moses, 1978, p. 11). Moses summarized that conservative Black-nationalism theory embodied an obligation to assist in uplifting both the African continent and all Black people. He also noted that Black-nationalism had a mystical and prophetic view of history based on Ethiopians unique relationship with God, which are the foundations of *Ethiopianism*.<sup>5</sup> On Ethiopianism, Moses noted that Du Bois used its thematic components of a rising Africa and a declining West throughout much of his early writings and in his deciphering of “The Riddle of the Sphinx” (Moses, 1978, pp. 159-160). More importantly, as Moses concluded, Du Bois used the power of his imagination, as reflected in his writings on Ethiopianism, *as a means* of changing public morality. Moses further cited Du Bois’s “fertile imagination” and use of Ethiopianism in transforming Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom into the figure of “the Black Mammy, one of the most pitiful of the world’s Christs” (Moses, 2002, p. 27). Although this use may seem counterintuitive to most of Du Bois’s narrative on Ethiopianism and Black elevation, it positively placed Blacks in the role of the selfless Christ, and *potential saviors of humanity*. By the end of the 19th century, Ethiopia was the savior of Black pride and dignity and had proved itself worthy of the admiration and support of Blacks across the African continent and the African diaspora.

The late 19th and early portions of the 20th century saw the occurrence of several important geopolitical activities that were of great significance to the development and progress of Pan-African ideals, especially among Blacks within the Americas. Primary among those events was Ethiopia’s 1896 defeat of Italy at *Adwa*.<sup>6</sup> Other important events included service to Emperor Menelik’s Court by *Benito Sylvain*,<sup>7</sup> the 1900 Pan-African Conference held in England (Juang & Morrissette, 2008),<sup>8</sup> World War I, and African American involvement in that conflict. Also important were Du Bois’s leadership in organizing Pan-African Congresses in 1919, 1921, and 1923; the 1936-1941 Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia; and African American support for Ethiopia during that period.

Emperor Menelik’s victory at Adwa secured the sovereignty of Ethiopia and elevated the morale of all Africans, especially those with Pan-African orientations. By galvanizing Ethiopians from all strata of the kingdom in successful defense of the empire, the Emperor created a model for Pan-African unity. Organizationally, he brought together Ethiopians from

various economic, religious, and ethnic persuasions in defense of Ethiopian independence. Menelik recognized and respected the value of diversity in his kingdom and through the example of his wife, Empress Taitu, promoted and supported the participation of women in leadership and decision making in the nation and the military. As models of Pan-Africanism, the Emperor and his multiethnic, multigender, and multireligious subjects responded to the defense of the empire and guaranteed victory over Italian aggression. The lesson in the example was quite clear to Pan-Africanists. It proved that strong organization, centrality and focus of work, and united efforts in utilizing the assets of the African personality are essential to defeating systems of oppression and aggression and to elevate the morale, social, and political ethos of the race. As William Scott in reflecting the Pan-African view noted, "Adwa signaled the coming of a new day for African people and identified Ethiopia as God's chosen instrument of Black redemption" (Scott, 1993, p. 21). Menelik's Adwa victory inspired a scramble for knowledge of Ethiopia by African Americans and Afro-Caribbean activists imbued with Pan-African thinking. Notably among them were Benito Sylvain and William Ellis,<sup>9</sup> who traveled to Ethiopia and served Ethiopian and Ethiopian American relations, respectively.

## **Engaging and Sharing Information on Ethiopia**

As Ethiopia emerged as a visible source and force of African pride and prestige, the children of African descent scattered across the Americas and parts of Europe took proactive steps toward unity and sociopolitical progress. They organized institutions of empowerment and learning, convened Pan-African conferences, and raised financial, moral, and political support in the defense of Ethiopia. Some even traveled or attempted to travel back to the African continent, and to Ethiopia in particular, to make their contributions to its development and progress. Du Bois organized, led, chaired, or otherwise participated in the major developments that involved Ethiopia and Africa's early 20th century engagements with the Western world. From his early writings, Du Bois noted that "The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia . . ." (Du Bois, 1903, p. 4). He shared the tale of Ethiopia with his readership and in doing so promoted Ethiopian and Black American relations and revitalized Pan-Africanism within ideological and practical compositions.

Du Bois used multiple mediums, individuals, and networks to engage his Pan-African ideas and demonstrate his support for Ethiopian and African American relations and Ethiopian causes. He contacted the State Department on issues concerning Ethiopia (Du Bois, 1919), and even wrote a letter to the Mayor of Addis Ababa on his intention to engage Ethiopia (Du Bois, 1921).

In 1907, Du Bois met with and enquired on Sylvain's work in Ethiopia and for a chance for them to cooperate in that work. He also introduced Sylvain to the Niagara Movement and invited him to become affiliated with it (Du Bois, 1907). Along with his academic and media writings, Du Bois also used the arts to inform his public on the virtues and resilience of Ethiopia and her scattered children in the Americas. Through the play *The Star of Ethiopia*, which was written in 1911 and first performed in 1913, Du Bois introduced his audiences to the "pomp and circumstance" of Ethiopia's contributions to the world. The play was initially staged in New York City and was additionally shown in Washington, D.C., in 1915, Philadelphia in 1916, and at the Hollywood Bowl, California, in 1925. In total, more than 35,000 people viewed the play (Du Bois, 1916). For Du Bois, the play was "a historic pageant of the history of the Negro race" (Du Bois, 1986, p. 753). The messages Du Bois communicated in the epic about Ethiopia were clear, resonant, and heralded in the first stanzas of the play: Ethiopia offered to the world "the six gifts of 'the Eldest and Strongest of the Races of men whose faces be black'" (Lewis, 1997, 302). Ethiopia's gifts were iron and fire, Egyptian civilization, faith in righteousness, humility, struggle toward freedom and freedom for the workers. These enduring gifts of Ethiopia perhaps served to further motivate and inform Du Bois's sense of commitment to the Ethiopian cause.

The Du Boisian Pan-African vision was motivated in part by the disappointments and failures of President Wilson and the American political apparatus in addressing the needs of Black Americans. This failure was clearly alluded to in a 1916 response letter to Du Bois from the White House. In the letter, the President's Secretary affirmed the White House's commitment to assurances Wilson made to African Americans but conceded that "he has tried to live up to them, though in some cases his endeavors have been defeated" (Tumulty, 1916). In reality, Wilson actively engaged in Federal discriminatory practices and even endorsed the anti-Black narrative propagated in the film by D. W. Griffiths titled, *The Birth of a Nation* (Cooper, 2009). Arguably, the film was a counter to Du Bois's *The Star of Ethiopia*; it received presidential endorsement when Griffiths was entertained by Woodrow Wilson in the White House. Wilson was quoted as declaring that the depraved characterization of Negroes preying on White women was "all so terribly true" (Stern, 2014, p. 396). This presidential endorsement is cited as giving justification for the rise of and renewed activities by the Ku Klux Klan against Black Americans during the first quarter of the 20th century. Although disappointed, Du Bois remained engaged in communications with the White House on racial matters with the hope of gradual reform of colonialism through the League of Nations. The potential for meaningful changes in the fortunes of Blacks in America and internationally eventually came with

African American participation in World War I. Du Bois was given the opportunity to visit Paris and cover Black participation in the War. He used his visit to mobilize Black intellectuals internationally to “ask what united actions can be taken” (Du Bois, 1936b, p. 3) for the betterment of the race and to develop plans for those united actions.

The ascension of Ras Tafari Makonnen<sup>10</sup> to the governance of Ethiopia was an important geopolitical activity that gave impetus to the development and progress of African American and Ethiopian relations. It also provided a platform for Du Bois’s work of sharing information on Ethiopia to his readership, and for his support of Ethiopia, as the nation emerged on the world stage. In early August of 1930, just months prior to the impending coronation of Ras Tafari as Emperor of Ethiopia, Du Bois met with two Ethiopian Commissioners, Malaku Bayen<sup>11</sup> and Kentiba Gabru.<sup>12</sup> He did so on the recommendation of Alain Locke, a major figure of the Harlem Renaissance. In a July 23, 1930, letter to Du Bois, Locke stated that he was sure that Du Bois would be “deeply interested [to meet the Commissioners] and will cooperate for racial and personal reasons . . .” (Locke, 1930). Locke also asked Du Bois to help the Commissioners in their American quest.

We do not have a record of the specific request made by the Ethiopian Commissioners to Du Bois during their meeting. It is, however, prudent to analyze Du Bois’s response to them and extrapolate from his responses the context of the Commissioners request vis-à-vis Du Bois’s contributions to Ethiopia. In an extensive letter, written after his initial meeting with the Commissioners, Du Bois presented what is arguably his most direct contribution to Ethiopia. The letter was framed as Du Bois’s “thought concerning your Commission and the future of Ethiopia,” and its stated purpose was “that we may be able in the near future to establish close connections of sympathy and cooperation between Ethiopia and her grandchildren beyond the seas” (Du Bois, 1930c).

As was already noted, precedence for African American support and engagement with the Imperial Court of Ethiopia predated Du Bois. In 1903, during Sylvain’s service at Emperor Menelik’s Court, William H. Ellis, a Black Wall Street stockbroker traveled to Ethiopia to pay homage to the Emperor. He convinced the Emperor to enter commercial relations with the United States. Subsequently, Robert Skinner, who served under President McKinley and encouraged the same idea, traveled to Ethiopia as an envoy for President Theodore Roosevelt. After Skinner met with Emperor Menelik II, they concluded a Treaty of Amity and Commerce and Friendship between Ethiopia and the United States on December 27, 1903 (Skinner, 2003). It is consistent with precedent and therefore reasonable to infer from the content of Du Bois’s response letter that the Ethiopians needed Du Bois’s input and

thoughts on the future of Ethiopia. It is also consistent with precedent that perhaps, they requested advice on the ways in which mutually beneficial Ethiopian and Black American collaborations could be established.

Du Bois's response letter to the Ethiopian Commissioners provided details on the advantages that an Ethiopian-Black American alliance would bring to the Ethiopian empire and the reciprocal benefits from Ethiopia to American Blacks and to the world. He also provided details on the achievements and struggles of Blacks in America and specific information on his work in organizing Pan-African Congresses. Among the many benefits, Du Bois opined that "Our [American Blacks] great advantage is citizenship and residence in a more modern country where vast opportunities are open to us for education and technical training equal to that which any white country can give its youth" (Du Bois, 1930c). He also mentioned his initiatives at networking with leaders from the colored races in India, China, Japan, and Egypt. He noted Ethiopia's direct involvement in the 1900 Pan-African Conference through the attendance and report from Benito Sylvain and Ethiopia's indirect representation at the 1919 Pan-African Congress through the attendance and report on conditions in Ethiopia by Dr. Vitellian.<sup>13</sup> These referrals indirectly placed Ethiopia at the table of Du Boisian Pan-Africanism and are interpreted by many historians as *de facto* participation of Ethiopia in the Pan-African Congresses (Metaferia & Milkias, 2005).

The response letter to the Ethiopian Commissioners also provided additional indirect contributions to the Ethiopian state through advice and recommendations on ways to strengthen the educational, health, economic, and infrastructural developments in the Ethiopian empire. First, Du Bois enumerated the three major assets of European control over the world as being capital, credit, and "knowledge of the technical processes which have been discovered for the manufacture and transformation of raw material" (Du Bois, 1930c). Du Bois then offered suggestions to the Commissioners on what he believed were feasible policies and programs to combat European domination of the areas mentioned. He advised on monetary policies, suggesting that Ethiopia

establish its currency on a gold basis; that the empire should carefully organize its national income and expenditure so as to provide for expenses of the state and pay its debts, and, must gradually establish for itself a banking and credit system. (Du Bois, 1930c)

Du Bois also acknowledged the fact that because American Blacks were not permitted to gain the requisite experience and knowledge for guiding his suggested Ethiopian monetary policy, they (American Blacks) had "no one to take charge of such programs" (Du Bois, 1930c).

With limitations to Black participation in Ethiopia's monetary affairs, Du Bois offered recommendations on a series of actions aimed at promoting an Ethiopian and Black American alliance and limiting European domination over Ethiopian monetary affairs. The recommendations included furnishing of Black men with a large amount of technical knowledge for service to Ethiopia. He also suggested that Ethiopia follow the example of Japan and China in hiring a White American or European expert, with verifiable sympathy with the aspirations of colored people. For Du Bois, the ideal White expert should be willing to work with an Abyssinian student and a well-trained Black American. More broadly, Du Bois was educating the Ethiopian Emperor and his court on the capacity and political and economic circumstances of Black Americans. His suggestions and recommendations were fundamental acknowledgements of the broad challenges African Americans faced in the lack of human resource capital to assist Ethiopia as it emerged within the modern era. However, Du Bois's response to the challenges envisioned a process through which both Ethiopians and Black Americans would be beneficiaries of the requisite monetary training needed for future successful and independent engagements in the world economy.

Du Bois provided further advice on Ethiopian monetary and economic policies by suggesting that funds were needed to establish Ethiopia's currency and provide capital for banking. He noted that such funds "must be borrowed from white nations" (Du Bois, 1930c), because Blacks were not in the position to loan capital. He also recommended the United States above France, England, or Italy, because the Europeans had a history of colonial designs on Ethiopia. This advice mirrored early Ethiopian preferences for American economic, social, and political relations over that of Europeans. Ethiopia was now interested in having African American institutions involved in providing financial investments in the empire. Unfortunately, it was the era of a major global depression and American Blacks did not have large expendable capital holdings to assist Ethiopia.

The 1929 Depression was devastating for most Americans, affecting financial institutions, businesses, and individual depositors. By 1930, many of the financial institutions in the United States, including banks, were on the brink of failure or had literally failed. The estimated bank failures by December 1930 were 981, with combined depository losses of US\$312,000,000 (Wintz, 2015). African American banks shared in the fate of the nation and their depositors suffered heavy financial losses and had their dreams of economic and social progress squandered in the speculative risk of the banking sector. It was small wonder then that in the advice given to the Ethiopian Commissioners, Du Bois encouraged them to secure loans from White American banks, as Blacks, and the banks they supported,

lacked the financial fortitude to assist Ethiopia on the scale required for national development.

The central apparatus for Ethiopian loan security, as perceived by Du Bois, was the development of Ethiopia's natural resources. He advised that after a careful study of Ethiopia's natural resources inclusive of mining; grazing; agriculture; transportation; the furnishing of power by coal, oil, and electricity; and the facilities for trade, "an appeal could be made for a limited loan carefully drawn to develop some of these resources" (Du Bois, 1930c). Du Bois also speculated that after such careful study, it would be possible to attract private funding capital from White nations, but reiterated his preferences of nations to be America and Germany.<sup>14</sup> He further suggested that even the study of Ethiopian natural resources must include "two to three carefully selected White Europeans and Americans, a half-dozen well-trained Abyssinians, and three or four technically educated American Negroes" (Du Bois, 1930c). This stipulation was arguably classic Du Boisian Pan-Africanism, tying the progress and development of Ethiopia to the progress, development, training, and contributions of African Americans.

Du Bois also offered advice to the Ethiopian Commissioners in the areas of diplomacy, the recruitment of young colored engineers, public health, modern education, and the use of soft diplomatic pressure through an American-based Pan-African Congress. He suggested that one of Ethiopia's fixed objectives should be an ocean port "which Ethiopia absolutely owns" (Du Bois, 1930c), which would enhance Ethiopia's facilities for trade to make the nation even more attractive to foreign capital. Next, Du Bois theorized that by attracting engineers with aviation backgrounds, Ethiopia could "develop airways all over the country" (Du Bois, 1930c). This could improve access to remote communities, expedite trade within Ethiopia and between Ethiopians and promote transportation of people, services, and goods across the region.

Du Bois also posited that Black Americans "could be of the greatest use" as metallurgists, iron and steel workers, chemists, physicists, and as electricians. He noted that an "electrical engineer has already applied to me and is ready to go to Ethiopia any time" (Du Bois, 1930c). The fact that an engineer made direct application to Du Bois to serve the empire of Ethiopia is very informative on Du Bois's influence over his readership and on his contributions to the Ethiopian state.

In addition, Du Bois provided practical advice to the Ethiopian Commissioners on the issues of public health and education by advocating for the establishment of hospitals and universities. He suggested increasing the numbers of Ethiopian students who studied abroad. He noted that about 200 Negroes graduated as physicians each year and that "a part of these could

be made available to Ethiopia” (Du Bois, 1930c). On education, he advised that the number of Ethiopians studying abroad should be increased from 100 to 500 “as soon as possible and women as well as men should be included” (Du Bois, 1930c). He suggested that the gradual aim of such policy, increasing the number of trained professionals, should be the establishment of a central university, “with a technical department, a department of modern languages, and a training school for teachers” (Du Bois, 1930c). The advice provided by Du Bois to the Ethiopian agents represented important and necessary assistance to the Ethiopian empire. He did not simply offer advice to the Ethiopian Commissioners and mobilized his readership for potential service to Ethiopia; he also engaged in the process of contacting people from within his financial network who could provide additional information and advice to *the Commissioners*.

On August 15, 1930, the day after meeting with the Ethiopian Commissioners, Du Bois sent a letter to C. Huti, President of the Dunbar Bank in New York, stating that a “delegation from Abyssinia has visited me twice for information and advice. I have promised them to talk to you” (Du Bois, 1930a). In a follow up letter to Bayen, Du Bois acknowledged his inability to see the banker, but further expressed his opinion that “nothing can be done with the banks of the United States at present” (Du Bois, 1930b). He also updated his advice about Ethiopian currency being pegged to the gold standard, noting,

you must remember that the gold basis in Europe and America is today uncertain on account of the war payments and the depression in industry. If your currency could in some way be stabilized without yet putting it on a gold basis, I believe it would be better to wait. (Du Bois, 1930b)

So, although Du Bois did not meet with Huti, or other bank officials, his effort at contacting and communicating with financial institutions and personnel, and his further advice on monetary policy, supports the theory of his proactivity in contributing to Ethiopia.

The reactions of the Ethiopian Commissioners to Du Bois’s advice and initiatives on behalf of Ethiopia also strengthens the narrative of Du Bois’s contributions to the Ethiopia cause. The Commissioners graciously thanked him for the many copies of *The Crisis* that were sent to them, noting that “We are clipping those excerpts that deal with Abyssinia and are going over them with great interest” (Bayen, 1930). They also expressed gratitude and appreciation for Du Bois’s advice on the establishment of Abyssinian currency and for his interest “in trying to confer with the President of Dunbar National Bank” (Bayen, 1930). It is clear that Du Bois was asked to provide some level of assistance and access to resources on behalf of Ethiopia. It is also clear that

the advice he offered and the actions he took on behalf of Ethiopia were well received and acknowledged by the Ethiopian agents. His support and contributions to Ethiopia began prior to his meeting with Bayen and Gabru, but with their August 1930 meeting, Du Bois's actions were now arguably quasi-sanctioned by the Ethiopian state.

On September 30, 1931, Du Bois sent his first direct official communication to Emperor Haile Selassie I, introducing the Emperor to his work, offering "three bound volumes of *THE CRISIS* magazine" (Du Bois, 1931). Du Bois also asked the Emperor "to send *THE CRISIS* magazine a statement of encouragement and greeting for the twelve million persons of African descent who live in America" (Du Bois, 1931). In closing the letter, Du Bois used the valediction, "I am Your Majesty's Obedient Servant" (Du Bois, 1931). This valediction was consistent with the era and appropriate because of the addressee. At the time of Du Bois's use of the valediction, he was an accomplished writer with significant command and mastery over the English language. Up to that point in his professional career, his mastery of words was used to build the readership of *The Crisis* and to inform his readers on issues of social, economic, and political importance to them. He also used his penmanship of *The Crisis* to endorse Woodrow Wilson and to swing the United States Congress in favor of the Democrats in 1912 (Du Bois, 1961; Lewis, 1997). Arguably, Du Bois's use of the valediction, though appropriate, was also an indication of his prior and future support of the Ethiopian state and its importance to Pan-Africanism.

## **Wars, Treaties, and Historicizing the Root Causes for Du Bois's Support of Ethiopia**

Although Du Bois encouraged African Americans to participate in World War I, he also recognized that some of the historical challenges experienced by Blacks were contributors to that conflict. Du Bois also recognized that European colonial aspirations toward Ethiopia contributed to World War II. In an article called "The African Roots of the War," Du Bois shared his perspective on the war, noting that Western capitalism, classism, and racism were the foundational causes of the conflict (Du Bois, 1936a). The Allied victory in World War I and the deliberations on former German colonies that immediately followed in the aftermath of the war created the impetus for Du Bois's Pan-African vision and the launching of the first Pan-African Conference in Paris. His previous agitations in the interest of Blacks earned him a place in Paris at the Peace Conference, where decisions on the post-World War I future of the world, including Africa, were being deliberated. Du Bois brought his Pan-African mission with him to this Conference. Prior to the Conference and

as evidence of Du Bois's Pan-African track record, he wrote several communications including letters to the American, French, and British Governments. In one letter to the French government, Du Bois presented the moral arguments in support of African self-rule and for the potential role for the League of Nations in protecting and guaranteeing the rights and liberties of African states and African people (Du Bois, 1918a). In a separate letter addressed to President Wilson, Du Bois argued that as the 1919 Paris Peace Conference sought to protect and safeguard smaller nations from the tyranny of exploitation, so too, the principles of the Conference should be applied to the Negro race (Du Bois, 1918b).

Within the trajectory of Du Bois's Pan-African vision and pursuant to his efforts at engaging Ethiopian, American Blacks, Caribbean, and continental African intellectuals, he consistently placed the origins and escalations of Italian (European) aggression toward Ethiopia as an evolving conspiracy between England, France, Germany, and Italy, as they sought to expand their holdings over East Africa. He noted that "in 1906, the agreement between Great Britain, France and Italy to respect and preserve the integrity of Abyssinia was really designed to prevent industrial concessions made to one from injuring the claims of any of the others" (Du Bois, 1936b). Harold G. Marcus noted that these European nations were concerned that as Emperor Menelik grew older and ill, and if he died without a clear successor, conflict for his throne would arise. They further theorized that the nation that backed the successor would have an advantage above its counterparts. Therefore, they established a secret pact to work in concert to protect their individual national interest (Marcus, 1964). Furthermore, Du Bois noted that

notes between Great Britain and Italy in 1925 secretly divided Ethiopia into spheres of influence with Great Britain dominant in the region of Lake Tsana and the headwaters of the Nile, and Italy along the borders of Eritrea and Somaliland. (Marcus, 1964)

In addition, Ethiopia and Italy signed a Treaty of Friendship on August 2, 1928, but Du Bois noted that this Treaty occurred during the ongoing political intrigues among Britain, France, and Italy. He further stated that it was after Britain failed in its attempt to bait the Abyssinians with access to the seaport of Zeila in British Somaliland that Italy made friendship overtures to Ethiopia. The substance of the Treaty of Friendship affirmed that disputes between the parties that could not be settled by "ordinary diplomatic methods" would be settled by conciliation and arbitration (Du Bois, 1916). Unfortunately, the Treaty was a deception, a ploy by the Italians to take control over Ethiopia. Through the Treaty, Italy used its land access in Ethiopia to study the layout

of the Ethiopian infrastructure and the border regions that were advantageous to its future colonial ambitions. They used this knowledge of the Ethiopian infrastructure to occupy a region along the Italian Somalia and Ethiopian border that was not well marked. Eventually, the Italians advanced their colonial troops within Ethiopia, then invaded, occupied, and annexed Ethiopia as part of its East African colonies.<sup>15</sup>

Du Bois blamed Italy for its failure to live up to the 1928 Italo-Ethiopian Treaty and noted that Ethiopia's trust in the League of Nations limited its options of playing one European nation against the other. He noted that the rise of Fascism in Germany changed the balance of power among the competing European interest in Ethiopia; France fearing the threat of war from Germany relinquished its interest in Ethiopia and supported Italy's actions. Again, Du Bois established an African *genesis* for both the 1936-1941 Ethiopian Italian war and the Second World War. He noted that had Mussolini respected the Treaty, "the war which later occurred would have been avoided" (Du Bois, 1916). This conclusion was further validated by Winston Churchill who in a radio broadcast to the Italian people stated the following:

The Ethiopian crisis, which resulted from breaking the law which we both had vowed to respect, has now brought Britain and Italy on the verge of death and destruction. The conflict between us, which started in Ethiopia, will not be a lasting one. . . (Du Bois, 1916, p. 138)

Although Du Bois commented on constraints that the League of Nations membership placed on Ethiopia, he also recognized the value of the League in securing the sovereignty of smaller nations, including Ethiopia. He stated that "In the formation of the League of Nations was the idea of a world tribunal where the lesser nations could at least be heard . . . and prevent at least the extremes of exploitation" (Du Bois, 1916). In this regard, Ethiopia and Emperor Haile Selassie I needed an international platform to argue for the sovereignty of Ethiopia and to fight the winnable battle of international morality. Unfortunately, the League of Nations failed Ethiopia but Du Bois's support and contributions to the Ethiopian cause was established by his writings and his international advocacy through the League.

## **Contributing to the Ethiopian Cause During Major World Conflicts**

As previously noted, Du Bois's *support of Ethiopia* included reflective and contemporary writings on Ethiopia's struggles and victories against European colonial aspirations. He linked *Adwa* and World War I to European actions

and instigations against Ethiopia and noted with admiration that Ethiopia's victory over colonial Italy occurred after Ethiopia repelled England, and *England urged Italy to attempt conquest of Ethiopia* (Du Bois, 1945a). With regard to the Second World War, Du Bois complimented Emperor Haile Selassie I and offered a scathing rebuke to some Western Governments, along with their religious and civic organizations for their inactivity in stopping Italian aggression against Ethiopia (Du Bois, 1936b). He stated that although Italy failed in 1896 to colonize Ethiopia, "she was encouraged to repeat the effort after the First World War, and her attempt precipitated the Second World War" (Du Bois, 1945a, p. 281). Concerning Emperor Haile Selassie I, Du Bois expressed admiration of his leadership, noting that the Emperor did a "shrewd and so far successful job. His plan is to pit the capitalist nations against each other" (Du Bois, 1945a, p. 281). Du Bois also cited Ethiopia as a model for African self-sufficiency, stating that "Ethiopians have a pretty nearly self-supporting economy. They raise most of their own food and are not poverty-stricken" (Du Bois, 1945a, p. 281).

Some of Du Bois's writings included editorials and letters in support of Ethiopia; many scholars commented on how those writings informed and increased awareness, especially among Blacks, about Ethiopia and the Italo-Ethiopian conflicts. Joseph Harris noted that Du Bois "captured both the historical significance of the war and the reality of the black condition" (Harris, 1994, p. 62). Harris also noted that Du Bois contributed to the *Voice of Ethiopia*, the media arm of the Ethiopian World Federation, which was an organization formed by Malaku Bayen to mobilize support for the Ethiopian cause. Others, including William Scott, noted that Du Bois wrote about the aroused emotions of Black and Brown people all over, in response to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. Du Bois stated that Black and Brown people saw Italy's imperialist intentions toward Ethiopia as antithetical to the "peace principles advanced at Versailles," and they produced "widespread alarm and activism among oppressed peoples of color" (Scott, 1993, p. 6). Scott also cited Du Bois's opinion that the White world was not inclined to come to support Emperor Haile Selassie I because of his skin color and that people of color "were justified in their efforts to mobilize various forms of aide for the black Ethiopians" (Scott, 1993, p. 6). According to David Lewis,<sup>16</sup> Du Bois traveled to Berlin, Germany 8 weeks after the 1936 Italian occupation of Ethiopia. However, by then, his writings, speeches, and advocacies along with that of other Pan-Africanist "*aroused millions of American Negroes to international consciousness as never before*" (Lewis, 1997, p. 599). Additional endorsements of Du Bois's knowledge and thoughtful *fact-sharing with African Americans on Ethiopia* was provided by Gerald Horne, who stated that Du Bois knew better than most *African Americans* of the bilateral relationship

between “black America and Ethiopia” (Horne, 2010, p. 135). Horne noted that in the autumn of 1935, Du Bois’s along with other African American leaders participated in a rally held at Madison Square Gardens in support of Ethiopia. He also noted that when Du Bois was asked why Blacks were so alarmed by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, he responded by saying, “the World War has taught most of Europe and America that the continuing conquest, exploitation and oppression of colored peoples by white[s] in unreasonable and impossible and if persisted will overthrow civilization” (Horne, 2010, p. 136). Arguably, Du Bois hinted that Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia created a new impetus in Black resistance to White colonial rule in Africa and its Diaspora. His words predated World War II, a War that began with the Ethiopian conflict (Selassie, 1999) and which nearly overthrew or ended Western civilization.

As Du Bois and Emperor Haile Selassie I predicted,<sup>17</sup> Italy’s violation of the principles of the League of Nations and its invasion and occupation of Ethiopia, along with Germany’s imperial quest caused the world to devolve into a global conflict, World War II. On May 5, 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie I returned victorious to his capital city, Addis Ababa, and Ethiopia became both the first victim and victor of World War II. As the War ended, Ethiopia joined the representatives of 49 other countries in San Francisco, at the United Nations Conference on International Organization to draw up the United Nations Charter.

After 10 years of absence from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Du Bois was once again invited by the organization’s Board to return and represent them at the United Nations. As in 1919, at the League of Nations, Du Bois was again the NAACP’s consultant to the United Nations. As in the past, Du Bois was positioned to lead the intellectual and moral advocacy for African self-determination, and for the human rights of African Americans and people of color. Although Du Bois shared his consultancy role at the United Nations with NAACP Secretary, Walter White, he maintained his Pan-African agenda. He protested the exclusion of colonial subjects from a prospective International Bill of Rights, advocated for the adoption of a preliminary statement asserting the equality of all people, and a clause guaranteeing civil freedoms to colonial peoples (Du Bois, 1945b) among other issues.

More importantly to this article was a letter written by Du Bois requesting a meeting with the Ethiopian Delegation and a subsequent column written by him on June 19, 1945, about that meeting. The column noted that Du Bois spoke primarily with a Dr. Abraham, Director General of the Ministry of Education, but Du Bois also met with the entire seven-man delegation from Ethiopia to the United Nations, whom he described as “a delegation of

intelligence and insight" (Du Bois, 1945c).<sup>18</sup> Included in the delegation were Ethiopia's Prime minister, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Vice Minister of Justice, the Minister to the United States and his Secretary, and the Minister of Finance. The conversation between Du Bois and Abraham covered the devastating effects of the War on Ethiopia and the nations of the world. They spoke about the war's impact on the developmental policies and their implementation in Ethiopia, and the preparation of African Americans to deal with the sacrifices of pioneering work in Ethiopia (Du Bois, 1945c). Some of those topics and policy initiatives were the ones for which Du Bois gave advice to the Ethiopian Commissioners in 1930.

The war severely restricted and in many areas reversed the trajectory of Ethiopia's infrastructural, economical, and social developmental initiatives, especially as pertained to Ethiopia's thrust toward African American involvement in its developmental programs. It is important to note that although the 1930 Commissioners inquired on and received advice from Du Bois on education, banking, and other economic and infrastructural developmental issues, Ethiopia was already engaged in establishing some of those institutions. The advice sought and assistance received from Du Bois, therefore, pertained specifically to Ethiopia's interest in working with America and African Americans in particular. Du Bois's advice also served Ethiopia in engaging American assistance to untangling the stranglehold that the colonial nations had over the Ethiopian economy.

As further relates to Du Bois's 1945 column on the meeting between him and the Ethiopian United Nations delegation, Du Bois stated that Abraham "stressed the fact that Ethiopia will restore its schools gradually and that they hope to begin by 1946 to send students to England and America for study" (Du Bois, 1945c). In addition, Abraham informed Du Bois that "The restoration of schools is severely hindered by the need of teachers" and that "Ethiopia had tried to get American Negro teachers and other trained people but so far without conspicuous success" (Du Bois, 1945c). This statement was directly related to the advice offered by Du Bois to the Ethiopian Commissioners in 1930. The statement also confirmed the fact that the Ethiopian government used Du Bois's advice in its national education policy initiative and made efforts to honor the spirit of Du Boisian Pan-Africanism by seeking to recruit African Americans as teachers and other professionals. Still, as in the cases of other professional positions that were available in Ethiopia, Du Bois's Ethiopian focused Pan-African objective was thwarted by Ethiopia's difficulties in attracting and retaining African American teachers and professionals to assist in its developmental goals.

A significant milestone in Du Bois's assistance to the Ethiopian cause and the acknowledgment of same occurred in the twilight of his life and

bears relevance to the initial advice and assistance offered by him to the 1930 Ethiopian Commissioners. As a point of recollection, in 1930 Du Bois advised the Ethiopian Commissioners to limit European domination over Ethiopian monetary affairs by the selective use of European and American capital and expertise. He also suggested that European nations and experts with sympathy to the Black cause receive preference above those nations who had historic colonial designs on Ethiopia. As a point of maturation in the trajectory of his contribution through his advice to Ethiopia, Du Bois was able to witness and acknowledge the utility of his 1930 advice to the Ethiopian Commissioners by Emperor Haile Selassie I. Citing a *New York Times* report, on June 17, 1960, Du Bois wrote the following to the Emperor:

I have read with great interest in the *New York Times* the report of your speech at the meeting of independent African nations. I write to thank you for the speech and especially for its warning to Africa not to become dependent upon loans from Europe and America. (Du Bois, 1960)

The Emperor's warnings to the newly independent African states mirrored the advice offered by Du Bois in 1930, to the Ethiopian Commissioners, Bayen and Gabru. Perhaps it was with pride and the sense of validation of his contributions to Ethiopia that Du Bois closed his 1960 letter with a similar valediction as used in his initial 1931 communication to the Emperor, asserting, "Your Obedient Servant" (Du Bois, 1960).

## Conclusion

For Du Bois, the starting point of a collective Black progressive trajectory called for the collaboration of African Americans, Afro-Caribbean, and continental Africans with Ethiopia at the core. His stated objectives were the creation of a Black intelligentsia to work through the formulae of Black existence within the modern era and the cooperation of Western Blacks in the development of Ethiopia and the rebuilding of Africa. His vision of social justice, Black solidarity, and economic and political empowerment remains only marginally fulfilled, and perhaps, significantly delayed. Others must now lead the charges of embracing and maintaining an African Ethos, tangible economic and social benefits for the masses of African peoples, and respect for the lives and humanity of Africans. Du Bois's Ethiopian agenda deserves to be revisited and attended to by scholars and historians in America, on the African continent, and across the African Diaspora.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Notes**

1. In the context of this article, the title of Pan-Africanist represents Du Bois's practical applications of the objectives of the 1921 Pan-African Association.
2. Du Bois's Pan-African work or Du Boisian Pan-Africanism is pegged to the objectives of the 1921 Pan-African Association's charter. Consistent with the Association's Charter, Du Bois placed strong focus on research, the collection and sharing of information, appeals to public opinion with the aid of the press, and the international fellowship and sympathy among members of the Black race. He also used Ethiopia's history and the accomplishments of Ethiopia's scattered children across the diaspora to promote an African epic narrative.
3. For Du Bois, Ethiopian-race consciousness was synonymous with Black racial identity. He noted that "Abyssinia is a word of Semitic origin, but Ethiopia is Negro." He also stated that Ras Tafari was determined to call his country "Ethiopia, the land of Burnt Faces."
4. While traveling to Ethiopia with the expectation of seeing and meeting Emperor Haile Selassie I, Mandela said that he felt like he was visiting his own genesis and unearthing the roots of what made him African. He said that meeting the Emperor would be like shaking hands with history.
5. Ethiopianism was a religious movement that began among sub-Saharan Africans. It embodied a Black liberation theology and challenges to the colonial political structures of the late 19th century. The movement gained traction in the 1880s, in South African, and was later diffused throughout the Americas, including the Caribbean.
6. Adwa was an important agricultural trade center in the Ethiopian province of Tigray in the late 19th century. It was also the battle site where Emperor Menelik II decisively defeated Italian invaders.
7. Benito Sylvain was a Haitian-born diplomat and Pan-African activist who served as Emperor Menelik's Aide-de-Camp. In 1897, Sylvain traveled to Ethiopia to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Haitian Revolution and Ethiopia's victory at Adwa. He was among the first Black World intellectuals too.
8. The 1900 Pan-African Conference was held from July 23 to July 25, 1900, in London's Westminster Hall. It was organized by Sylvester Williams and other members of the Pan-African Association.
9. William Ellis was a wealthy African American businessman and Wall Street stockbroker. In 1903, he visited Ethiopia and was introduced to Emperor Menelik by

- Benito Sylvain, who was acting in his capacity as Aide-de-camp to the Emperor. Ellis played an instrumental role in the completion of the American/Ethiopian treaty of 1904, by replacing Kent Loomis, brother of the Assistant Secretary of State, who died while in transit to Ethiopia. Ellis assumed the role of America's official envoy and delivered to Addis Ababa the American approved treaty.
10. Ras Tafari Makonnen was the precoronation title and name of Emperor Haile Selassie I. His rule of Ethiopia began in 1916, when he became Regent and heir apparent to the Ethiopian throne. On November 2, 1930, Ras Tafari was crowned, Emperor Haile Selassie I.
  11. Malaku Bayen was the cousin and a personal physician of Emperor Haile Selassie I. In 1937, after Ethiopia was invaded by Italy, Bayen was commissioned by the emperor to found and organize the Ethiopian World Federation in America and across the diaspora. Bayen was also the first Ethiopian to graduate with a medical degree from Howard University.
  12. Kentiba Gabru was an Ethiopian diplomat, theologian, and scholar who served his nation in various capacities, including Commissioner to the United States in 1919 and 1930.
  13. Dr. Vitellian was of Guadeloupean diasporic background and served as physician to Emperor Menelik II.
  14. Du Bois preferences was likely based on the fact that with the exception of the Liberia experience, America had no colonies in Africa, and although Germany initially had African colonies, it lost them after World War I. Du Bois may also have been suggesting the German preference prior to the rise of Hitler.
  15. Italy's incursion into Ethiopian Walwal near its Somali colony was used as a pretext to the invasion of Ethiopia.
  16. David Lewis is a historian who wrote a comprehensive, two-volume Biography on Du Bois's life and work.
  17. Emperor Haile Selassie I made a prediction concerning World War II when he addressed the League of Nations on June 20, 1936. In his address he stated, "I decided to come myself to bear witness against the crime perpetrated against my people and give Europe a warning of the doom that awaits it, if it should bow before the accomplished fact."
  18. Intelligence and insight were requisites from those targeted in the 1923 Pan-African Association Declaration and part of the Du Boisian Pan-African philosophy.

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