

**16<sup>th</sup> Distinguished W.E. B. Du Bois Lecture**  
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**‘W.E.B. DU BOIS IN GERMANY AND GERMANY IN W.E.B. DU BOIS’**

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On a bright June day in 1888, twenty year-old William Edward Burghardt Du Bois delivered his graduation address at Fisk University, a small liberal arts college in the southern United States founded for the benefit of men and women of color. “I ... took as my subject ‘Bismarck’,” he recalled somewhat sheepishly. Du Bois had come not to condemn Germany’s Iron Chancellor but to praise him lavishly. “Bismarck was my hero,” he said. Imperial Germany under Prussian rule would not have seemed to offer much promise for Du Bois and his brown and black classmates living in the bitter aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction Period. As they took leave of Fisk University, the baleful consequences of Bismarckian *realpolitik* to democracy and peace in Europe and of the scramble for Africa unleashed by the 1884 Berlin Conference might have been manifest to this gifted collegian. Later, Du Bois would reproach himself for an address that revealed, as he said, “the abyss between my education and the truth in the world.” But the peculiar fascination that Bismarck’s policy of “blood and iron” exerted upon the young man was profoundly significant. The chancellor had made a nation “out of a mass of bickering peoples.” It was a great achievement that American Negroes must try to emulate, Du Bois fairly exulted, “marching forth with strength and determination under trained leadership.”

This exhortation to disciplined mobilization and inspired leadership contains the essence of the Du Boisian credo of African American advancement---an intellectual conviction that would underpin seventy-five years to come of multifarious, often seemingly contradictory, socio-political advocacy. It is hardly an exaggeration to state that this remarkable American intellectual appeared to reinvent himself every decade: a genteel socialist at the beginning of the

last century; a Pan-Africanist in the wake of the Great War; a racial integrationist until the Great Depression; a Marxist during the Great Depression; and finally an apologist for Russian communism during the Cold War. It needs no great perspicacity to detect an elitist paradigm in the service of group triumph consistently animating Du Bois's evolving crusade for racial and economic justice for people of color in the United States and in other parts of the globe. It might be noted that if Du Bois admired Bismarck in college, he had been equally smitten in high school by the English conservative, Thomas Carlyle. Du Bois's was a temperament to which the top-down reforms of a Disraeli, a Bismarck, or a Lenin quite naturally appealed.

How a poor black boy born in a small town in the hills of western Massachusetts acquired his decidedly patrician views presents an interesting biographical challenge. Yet, it is evident that he possessed such a perspective from early days and continued to profess it publicly even as he was acclaimed the liberating voice of his own oppressed people. One even finds a jarringly patronizing passage or two in that great civil rights text, *The Souls of Black Folk*—as in the otherwise splendid essay, “Of the Dawn of Freedom”, where Du Bois still lingers over the notion of citizenship as a privilege rather than a right. Had the white South opposed full voting rights in preference to an honest restricted suffrage, he writes, “every sensible man, black and white, would easily have chosen the latter.” Du Bois's patrician understanding of the agency of social change would receive complicated German reinforcements after graduation from Harvard with a second baccalaureate, followed two years later by a Harvard master's degree in 1892.

Immediately, he set his sights on earning a German doctorate, then the gold standard of academic achievement for all *fin-de-siecle* Americans. To return to the United States with a coveted Heidelberg or Berlin doctorate would be the ultimate seal of professional standing, a personal triumph and a racial marker. Equipped with a unique fellowship to study overseas from an American educational foundation, Du Bois sailed into Rotterdam in August of 1892. For the first time in life he began to learn to interact with white people unselfconsciously. There was summer in Thuringia polishing his German below the Wartburg castle in the Marbach family

pension in Eisenach. He prided himself on mastering the libretto of Wagner's *Tannhauser*, set in the Wartburg. But what he mostly remembered was Herr Doktor Johannes Marbach's flax-haired daughter, Dora. According to our hero, Dora was so smitten that she asked him to marry her. How much of this is a young man's conceit is a fair question, but we can readily credit the salutary influence of Doktor Marbach's daughter in mitigating the "extremes of racial provincialism" and helping Du Bois to become "more human." Taking consolation in the German proverb "*Es war so schon gewesen/Es hat nicht sollen sein*," Du Bois tells us that he took painful leave of Dora as he went on his promising way.

Not quite two decades shy of celebrating its first century when Du Bois enrolled in the Friedrich\_Wilhelm III Universitat, its excellence was already world-famous in that short time. No other German university held the cachet for Du Bois of Friedrich Wilhelm. Its first rector magnificus, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, had returned to his duties from Danish self-exile after Napoleon's retreat in 1807 to deliver his cultural marching orders to the German people: the cathartic *Reden an die deutsche Nation (Addresses to the German Nation)*. Underscoring the virtues of courage and simplicity Tacitus had praised in them, Fichte told Germans that they had a special mission to redeem human culture. His influence was still in effect during Du Bois's time. Indeed, the two professors with greatest influence upon Du Bois, Gustav Schmoller and Adolf Wagner, were among the modernizing exponents of Fichte's *Vernunftstaat*, the rational state presiding over a planned economy as proposed in Fichte's *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat (The Closed Commercial State)*, the great philosopher's 1800 economics treatise. Hegel, holder of the first chair of philosophy, had drawn hundreds to his lectures, while Schopenhauer, competitively scheduling his lectures at the same hour, was said to have succumbed to depression in a near-empty hall. The study of history at Berlin took on scientific pretensions under Leopold von Ranke that transformed the discipline well into the twentieth century, even in the United States. "I sat under the voice of the fire-eating Pan-German, von Treitschke," Du Bois recalled. Reading between the lines of his *Autobiography* it seems clear that the explosive

nationalist and anti-Semite Treitschke insulted Du Bois with a racial slur on the first day of class.

On the morning of October 17th, 1892, wedging himself among some two hundred fellow Americans jabbering about football, Du Bois was almost giddy. As they quick-marched into the famous Room 33, he heard himself announced in German as a "most ornamented young man," whereupon Rector Magnificus Rudolph Virchow officially welcomed him as a member of the Philosophical Faculty, handing him an embossed, folio-sized document which he now had to present to what seemed an endless array of high-collared administrators and faculty. Du Bois departed the University registered for a daunting six lecture courses of twenty hours a week, among them von Treitschke's Politics and Adolf Wagner's Political Economy, plus independent research for Schmoller's economics seminar. He fairly floated on the way to his room at number 130 A Oranienstrasse, a neighborhood much favored by students.

Taking lodging with a German family rather than in one of the "American" boarding-houses (where he might not have been welcome), Du Bois mimicked the German student's strut and quickly cultivated a Wilhemine mustache. The surviving Oranienstrasse diary notebooks disclose feelings of sublime liberation---more liberated in these years than he would ever feel again. An occasional name bobs to the surface of a narrative river rich in travel and culture---an English classmate, a girl friend named Amalie, two or three other women friends. Mainly these notebooks read like a pageant to which only Du Bois has been invited. It was comforting to be solitary, an unmolested astute spectator in *fin-de-siecle* Europe.

On February 22nd, 1893, a Wednesday evening, Du Bois returned to Oranienstrasse from a Schubert concert and drew up elaborate plans for his twenty-fifth birthday the next day. After writing letters to the Massachusetts relatives, there was, as he described it, a "curious . . . little ceremony" of Greek wine, oil, song, candles, and prayer to the Zeitgeist at midnight. According to his diary, he went to bed "after one of the happiest days of my life." Agitated and probably lightheaded from the wine, he rose again to confide dark fears and wild aspirations to his notebook. The stream of consciousness entry began with a racing pen: "Night-

grand and wonderful. I am glad I am living. . . . These are my plans: to make a name in [social?] science, to make a name in literature and thus to raise my race.” Because the vows of that night would be realized in one form or another before his seventy-five remaining years ran out, Du Bois's effusions ought probably be construed as a manifestation of his particular genius, as well as of the *Sturm und Drang* literary tradition he and many German students of his generation relished in Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*.

This is the period in which Du Bois committed to memory those salient passage he would recite for a lifetime. He delved deeply into Goethe, Heine, and Schiller. In a lengthy letter in the September 1893 Fisk University literary magazine, he enjoined Fisk students to master the culture of Europe and immerse themselves in Goethe in order to speed “the rise of the Negro people.” Du Bois felt a similar affinity for Hegel, from whose *Phenomenology of Mind* he would borrow more or less intact notions of distinct, hierarchical racial attributes. For all the significance of William James's influence upon him while a Harvard student, Du Bois found a profoundly appealing concept in the Hegelian World-Spirit, dialectically actualizing itself through history. Hegel's lodestar essay, “Lordship and Bondage”, explicated a complex reciprocity of master and slave in which the identities of both could be fully actualized only to the extent that the consciousness of one was mediated through that of the other. If the master understood dominance, it was the slave who truly understood the sovereign value of freedom. This was a fecund meditation that Du Bois would reformulate in *The Souls of Black Folk* in racial terms peculiarly applicable to his own country.

During the spring semester break of 1893, Du Bois set out dutifully to familiarize himself with the Second Reich, traveling with an English university friend. They arrived aboard the Lubeck express singing a favorite passage from Beethoven's ninth: “*Aller Menschen werden Bruder*.” But Du Bois was emotionally quite unprepared for the spectacle his brown face created in the town market. “Heavens, but these Lubeckers are curious,” exclaims a diary entry. He found himself followed everywhere by staring, jabbering, laughing children. Then Du Bois

headed south alone to make the obligatory *Harzreise* up the Brocken to the peak where the Walpurgis Night revels take place on April 30<sup>th</sup>. Good news from America awaited him upon the return to Berlin. The foundation renewed his fellowship for two additional terms. The future secure again, he relocated to a large fourth-floor room in the more fashionable Schöneberger Ufer neighborhood and settled more dutifully into the rhythms of German life.

There were still those moments when European culture and racial identity warred within him. A case in point was the Kaiser prancing through the Brandenburg Gate. Du Bois was "thrilled at the sight" of William II gleaming and clanking down the Unter den Linden at the head of his "white and golden troops." Much later, though, Du Bois would speak of that "dichotomy which all my life has characterized my thought," asking himself; "how far can love for my oppressed race accord with love for the oppressing country?" Other diary entries caught the Prussian ethos in an unflattering light. "German ideals from king to lower orders appear at first sight to be clad in spurs and shoulder straps," he wrote.

Yet even as he recorded these quick, harsh impressions, Germany was in its second year of liberal reforms. Chancellor Leo von Caprivi, an unlikely Prussian aristocrat, legalized the socialist party, created arbitration courts in industry, and imposed lower agricultural tariffs on the flabbergasted Junkers of Silesia and Pomerania. The impressive Reichstag gains of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in June 1893 surprised Du Bois. He had assumed that "a strong military monarchy [was] indispensable" because Germany's geography dictated vigilant preparation to fight a war on two fronts. But now, with Caprivi's conciliatory policies and the meteoric rise in socialist voters from 1,427,000 in 1890 to almost two million, Du Bois was tempted to change his mind. The ideological distinctions between Karl Marx and the revisionist followers of Ferdinand Lassalle, August Bebel, and Karl Kautsky were "too complicated for a student like myself to understand," he admitted, but he began attending SPD meetings in the working-class Pankow district.

In August 1893, Du Bois was off again on vacation with his Baedeker guide in

hand. Hungarians were so intent upon thumbing their noses at Austrians that Du Bois had trouble finding officials who would admit to speaking German. More lessons in cultural nationalism came as he roamed the back roads of the Austro-Hungarian empire, always third class and frequently on foot. What he experienced in Poland of race hatred between Poles and Germans, with anti-Semitism evenly divided between both groups, he found truly depressing. Stanislaus Ritter von Estreicher, one of his Berlin colleagues, had dared Du Bois to visit him in Poland if he really wanted to see race problems. The lordly Estreicher family welcomed him to Cracow as it would have any *grand seigneur*. They showed him a world of ancient customs, glacial change, much learning and *gentillesse*, but also a world rotten with religious and class hatreds. "It was an interesting visit and an old tale," Du Bois decided, finding the lot of the people at the bottom and of the religiously persecuted one of "tyranny in school work; insult in home and on the street." Stanislaus von Estreicher would die in a concentration camp in 1940 for refusing to collaborate with the German occupiers.

When Du Bois left Germany for the United States in the summer of 1894, he boasted somewhat mystically in his confessional notebook: "I have finally proved to my entire satisfaction that my race forms but slight impediment between me and kindred souls. . . . I am here free from most of those iron bands that bound me at home." He carried away a part of Germany's intellectual culture within his very marrow. To his chagrin, however, a Berlin doctorate had eluded him because the foundation refused a second extension of his fellowship. His doctoral thesis, suggested by Schmoller, was to have been a comparative economic study of peasant agriculturists bearing the monster title, "*Der Gross und Klein Betrieb des Ackerbaus, in den Sudstaaten der Vereinigten Staaten, 1840-90*" ("The Large and Small-scale System of Agriculture in the Southern United States"). Lacking two more terms as required by the University, Du Bois departed without the doctorate. He lamented this development in a line from *Faust*: "*Entbehren sollst du, sollst entbehren*" ("Thou shalt forego, shalt do without."). As he sailed past the Statue of Liberty he wrote bitterly of "dropping back into nigger-hating America."

Despite his Harvard education and Berlin matriculation, the academic apartheid of the day compelled him to accept a position at a small, mediocre black religious college in Wilberforce, Ohio.

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The frequently curious effects of Germany in Du Bois were never more manifest than in a famous and influential paper he read in early 1897 at the inaugural meeting of the American Negro Academy in Washington, D.C. By that time, he had, as he rather smugly put it, settled for a mere Ph.D. in history from Harvard. His American Negro Academy paper, "The Conservation of Races," was a conceptual bombshell unlike any sociological thesis previously espoused by a Negro American intellectual. "The history of the world," contended Du Bois, "is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history." Most of Du Bois's countrymen and women---black and white---embraced a Jeffersonian optimism that historians recognize as American exceptionalism---the belief that the individual American can escape from history into a future of infinite self-reinvention. "While it may have been true in the past that closed race groups made history," observed Du Bois, "here in conglomerate America *nous avons change tout cela.*" But "all that" had not changed, Du Bois contended. Drawing on Herder's and Fichte's ideas of separate but equal contributions of the races and on Jakob Grimm's and von Treitschke's concepts of irreducible distinctions within the human family, Du Bois declared that "subtle, delicate and elusive" differences have "definitely separated men into groups." He cast each "race" as a unique past, present, or prospective player in a millennial pageant. Some actors, like the Japanese, were already beginning to play their part. Others, like the Negroes, must begin writing lines for the future.

But were not Negroes in America simply Americans who happened to be Negroes

in Melting-Pot America? Virtually no terminology for an American multiculturalism existed when Du Bois wrote "The Conservation of Races." The essay anticipated the writings of the American "cultural radicals"---of Randolph Bourne and Hutchins Hapgood, Horace Kallen and Waldo Frank, the heretical pluralists of the near future.---when it asked rhetorically: “[What] after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?” His forceful answer gave new language to ancient sentiment. It enveloped the Negro people’s deep belief in heavenly deliverance from earthly troubles with sociological agency. Salvation came to races in tune with the *Zeitgeist*, DuBois declared:

Here, it seems to me, is the reading of the riddle that puzzles so many of us. We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther than that, our Americanism does not go. At that point, we are Negroes, members of a vast historic race that from the very dawn of creation has slept, but half awakening in the dark forests of its African fatherland. We are the first fruits of this new nation, the harbinger of that black tomorrow which is yet destined to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic today.

Du Bois, the great progenitor of the African American civil rights movement to come, made it clear that in 1897 he advocated not integration but parallel development, "side by side in peace and mutual happiness;" not social equality, but "social equilibrium." Fundamentally different, races must above all safeguard their distinctiveness. It was the law of history," the German-trained scholar exhorted, and if, "among the gaily-colored banners that deck the broad ramparts of civilization is to hang one uncompromising black, then it must be placed there by black heads . . . and hearts beating in one glad song of jubilee."

Although Du Bois would later consider his Negro Academy paper an embarrassing

youthful effusion, its ideas comprised an enduring and highly significant element in his complex intellectual makeup, as the philosopher Anthony Appiah elucidates. Obviously "The Conservation of Races" was meant to counter the ruling Eurocentrist and omnipresent Negrophobic paradigms of the era with a proud Negro essentialism. In the acclamation following delivery of the paper, however, the speaker and most of his audience failed to realize that those who launched appeals to racial solidarity and racial purity risked being wounded by their own defense mechanisms. The raw racism perverted in the names of Fichte, Hegel, Herder, De Gobineau, and Nietzsche by the Germans and other Europeans was a stupendous irony awaiting not only Du Bois but large numbers of incredulous men and women whose intellectual maturity had come during the ebbtide of Victorianism.

Even as his problematic "Conservation" essay dismayed some and inspired others, Du Bois produced one of the pivotal works of American urban sociology: *The Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1898. Du Bois's announced goal was to put "science into sociology through a study of the conditions and problems of [his] own group." Historian Herbert Aptheker has calculated that Du Bois spent some 835 hours at eight hours per day to interview approximately 2,500 households over the three months period of field research. Du Bois had before him the tabulated life histories of the entire black population of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward---nearly ten thousand men, women, and children. Here was a historically contextualized, inductive methodology that a prize student of Gustav Schmoller's was superbly equipped to advance just six years after the founding at the new University of Chicago of the first department of sociology in the United States. Despite a good deal of manifesto prose in the brand new *American Journal of Sociology* about scientific "restraint," avoidance of "premature sociological opinion," and the like, the canon of empirically derived knowledge was still far more sinned against than it was obeyed. *The Philadelphia Negro* was among the first to break ranks with Spencerian sociology's analogizing of social processes to the laws of chemistry and genetics.

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Five years later, Du Bois's seismic little book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (*Die Seelen der Schwarzen*) redefined the terms of a three-hundred year interaction between black and white people in the United States and influenced the cultural and political psychology of peoples of African descent throughout the world. The scope of the book's fourteen essays was unforgettably framed by Du Bois's famous tag line about the relations between the races first uttered at an international conference in London in 1900: "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line"—"*ist das Problem der Rassentrennung.*" *The Souls of Black Folk* was an electrifying manifesto mobilizing a people for a bitter, prolonged struggle to win a place in history. The noted African American diplomat and man of letters, James Weldon Johnson, compared the book's impact to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Max Weber wrote Du Bois from Heidelberg offering to write an introduction to this "splendid book." Weber set about arranging for the German translation that would unfortunately not occur until 2003.

Central to *Souls* was Du Bois's concept of the Veil—"einen riesengen Schleier"—his controlling metaphor for the filmy partition behind which people of color strove to make their lives bearable. Equally central was the concept of double consciousness, which the author described in prose so vivid that for many decades almost any person of color in the United States could recite the signature passage on request. "It is a peculiar sensation this double-consciousness [—'dieses doppelte Bewusstsein'—] this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," Du Bois wrote in echo of his beloved Goethe's words in *Faust* and also those of Ralph Waldo Emerson's seminal essay, "The Transcendentalist". "One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings. . . ." This strife defined the Negro's existential condition, Du Bois stipulated—"this longing to attain self-consciousness manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self." Debate about

what people of color were and what they should aspire to become had been a perennial dispute ending in stalemate between assimilationists and nationalists. The genius of *Souls* was to transcend this dichotomy by affirming it as a tension that was destined ultimately to merge in dialectical transcendence.

The divided self was destined to cohere and to merge, yet, in Du Bois's special vision, "neither of the older selves [shall] be lost." What might have seemed to be a contradiction, Du Bois proposed to resolve in the following cogent teleology:

He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.

Here, it seems evident that the German influences upon his thinking are unmistakable with their suggestions of materializing spiritual and dialectical ascent, the whole surging process coming to concretion in *das Volk*---a mighty nation with a new soul. It has been insufficiently noted, I think, that Du Boisian double-consciousness also described the cultural tensions and hyphenations beleaguering the Irish, Jews, Italians, Slavs, and other ethnics as, variously determined to retain or surrender their cultural pasts, they negotiated their way into the Anglo-Saxon American mainstream.

A decade and one year after the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, the long nineteenth century ended at Sarajevo. Du Bois experienced the civil war among Europeans with a trenchancy many Americans could not have shared. Many of his Berlin classmates were in field grey officers' tunics on the Eastern front or in the trenches in France. "Civilization has met

its Waterloo," Du Bois solemnly declared in an editorial after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Like other Americans educated in Germany, he felt betrayed and angry. Thorstein Veblen blamed the war on the romantic, unscientific character of the German schools of philosophy. John Dewey somehow arraigned Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as the root of German militarism. It was as if they and Du Bois were driven to deny and recant the intellectual affections of their youth out of bitter, heartfelt disenchantment. Even so, Du Bois reminded American readers that despite the passions of war, he had "deep cause to love the German people." Twenty years ago, they had made it possible for him to "believe in the essential humanity of white folk when he was near to denying it."

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Du Bois would return to Germany when the Oberlaender Trust, a Philadelphia institution for the promotion of cultural relations between the United States and German-speaking countries, awarded him a travel fellowship in June 1935 that coincided with the publication of his magnum opus, *Black Reconstruction in America*. The decision of this German American philanthropy (a component of the Carl Schurz Foundation) to support an extended sojourn in the Third Reich by the leading Negro American intellectual was undoubtedly carefully deliberated. The Oberleander fellowship would take him to Germany for the first time since his brief transit of the country on his way to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1926. More than thirty years had elapsed since his Berlin university days, yet Du Bois had written surprisingly little about his Weimar interval. Clearly, Gustav Stresemann's Germany had held far less interest for him than Josef Stalin's Russian experiment. Now ten years later, Du Bois's research agenda had nearly as many heads as the mythological Hydra. After completing investigations of German

and Austrian educational and industrial institutions, he planned to visit Russia, China, and Japan. He intended to incorporate his observations into a book. It bore the working title, "A Search for Democracy." Curiously, the record is blank as to why Du Bois was not offered a publishers contract when he returned to the United States with more than a third of the manuscript written. Much of this material for "A Search for Democracy" was drawn from dispatches written for the large-circulation Negro weekly, the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

Although his thoughts are unrecorded as his express train rolled across Hitler's Germany to Berlin on the night of June 30, 1936, Du Bois would certainly have been intensely mindful that he was entering the eye of one of the deadliest political storms in modern times. Four months earlier, the Wehrmacht had invaded the demilitarized Rhineland in flagrant violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Little more than eight weeks before Du Bois disembarked at Berlin's Anhalter Bahnhof, Mussolini's legions had finally occupied the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, after months of poison gas attacks and indiscriminate aerial bombings that had brought forth impotent sanctions from the League of Nations. Many notable Jewish Americans had been dismayed to learn of the Oberlaender project. Invited by Franz Boas in the spring of 1935 to join other intellectuals in founding the American Committee for Anti-Nazi Literature, Du Bois had explained that the terms of the fellowship, as well as his own unarticulated objectives, precluded a public political gesture prior to visiting Germany. He assured the eminent anthropologist that he was appalled by the "terrible outburst of race prejudice in Germany" and argued that his contribution as a future member of the anti-Nazi committee would be greatly enhanced by "much useful accumulated knowledge" after his return.

The plight of Germany's 525,000 Jews (less than one percent of the total German population) could still be characterized as serious but not hopeless---desperate but not yet deadly in the summer of 1936. As Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda was then about to implement a

policy suspending all public manifestations of anti-Semitism for the duration of the Olympic games in August, it was even plausible to think that the worst might be over as an Oberlaender Trust emissary escorted Du Bois to a comfortable, modern flat Gruenwald. It became immediately evident to him, however, after a visit to the Oberlaender Trust offices on the morning after his arrival, that posing as a neutral scholar would become increasingly distasteful. "Don't use that name--it sounds Jewish," the tall, efficient secretary assigned to the half dozen Oberlaender Fellows courteously advised when Du Bois mentioned Gustav Schmoller, his old economics professor.

Most of his negative impressions would be withheld from his newspaper dispatches until after his departure, and Du Bois would strain mightily to make sense of what he saw, to distinguish between the German people and the totalitarian regime, to separate "good Germans" from "bad Germans." The conference with Diedrich Westermann, the world's premier student of African languages and director of the *Institut für Afrikanische Sprachen und Kulturen*, went extremely well. The director's blessings on Du Bois's "Encyclopedia of the Negro" project was a high priority of the Oberlaender fellowship opportunity. As for ordinary Germans, Du Bois found them to be among the warmest, most civilized of Europeans, and he took pains to emphasize that he could go to any hotel he could afford, that he dined where he pleased "and [had] the head-waiter bow [him] welcome." Indeed, Du Bois seemed to take a particular delight in contrasting the correct racial manners of Germans when meeting people of color to that of white Americans in the southern United States. He possessed an acute sense of the German people's suffering since the war. Standing before Hamburg's Denkmaal, that shaft of grey granite honoring the war dead, he had been deeply moved. The "most eloquent and ghastly memory" he had even seen, the inscription stated simply, "40,000 sons of this city gave their lives for you in 1914-18." No longer convinced of Germany's guilt in starting the Great War and fully sharing, as

many of his compatriots now did, the German outrage at the draconian indemnity imposed by the Allied Powers, Du Bois had not been surprised by the political turn of events in 1933.

The Pittsburgh *Courier* subscribers surely must have expected their distinguished columnist to serve as their eyes and ears at the Eleventh Olympiad. There was tremendous interest in the games among all classes of African Americans because of Ohio State University's Jessie Owens and the presence of twelve other black men on the 383-contender United States team. The games began on the morning of August 1, a Saturday, under a gray sky that soon brightened. Once the Fuhrer, garbed in a plain brown uniform, seated himself, the aged Richard Strauss raised his baton to conduct a monster orchestra and 3000-voice chorus in "Deutschland uber alles." On Monday, August 3rd, Jesse Owens avenged Max Schmelling's defeat of Joe Louis under the gaze of a flustered Hitler by winning the 100-meter dash. A perfect combination of muscle to mass, the incomparable Owens brought the spectators to their feet virtually every other day, winning four gold medals in the 100-and 200 meter dash, the broad jump, and the 400-meter relay.

Du Bois's two Olympics articles seemed decidedly more dutiful than interested. He wrote nothing in the *Courier* about Hitler's putative snub of Owens, rumors of which were soon rife in the United States and universally credited among Negroes. A possible inference is that Du Bois regarded the games as a Nazi variation of the bread-and-circus diversions favored by dictatorships since ancient days. Clearly, he thought the decrescendo of nationalistic propaganda and removal of anti-Semitic signs and grafitti were merely staged deceptions, and that, as he wrote, the insights of average non-German-speaking tourists were "worse than valueless in any direction."<sup>i</sup> They would have seen no overt oppression of Jews," he underscored, "Just as northern visitors to Mississippi see no Negro oppression." And perhaps a tinge of Du Boisian intellectual elitism was to be detected in his insistence that, although Olympic victories were

harbingers of future laurels, the Negro race "must be represented, not only in sports, but in science, in literature, and in art."

In Nazi Germany, the Jew was the Negro, Du Bois explained to *Courier* readers, although, as he stressed, the subjugation of Africans in America had a history quite different from the persecution of Europe's Jews. Indeed, he believed that anti-Semitism was embedded in the group psychology of Germans, that it was a centuries' old aversion grounded in self-fulfilling religious and economic enmities so visceral that Du Bois (with astonishing looseness for a sociologist) characterized it as a prejudice that was "nearer [to] being instinctive." But the National Socialist variant went far beyond the scourges of the past. Reading of Hitler's harangues at Nuremberg and the amplifications of Goebbels, Du Bois confessed that his long-held belief in German intellectual seriousness was profoundly shaken. "Every misfortune in the world is in whole or in part blamed on Jews---the Spanish rebellion, the obstruction of world trade, etc." These assessments of the Nazi persecution of Jews would be disclosed to *Courier* readers only after Du Bois left for Russia, when he would characterize the anti-Semitic campaign as "surpass[ing] in vindictive cruelty and public insult anything" he had ever seen. "It is an attack on civilization, comparable only to such horrors as the Spanish Inquisition and the African slave trade."

Yet, in the final analysis, Du Bois alleged that anti-Semitism was the German analogue of color-prejudice as ratified by law and practice in his own country. Jews had been reduced to a form of social death by the Nuremberg Laws of September and November 1935---stripped of citizenship, forbidden to marry or engage in sexual relations with gentiles, ousted from the universities and the civil service, excluded from the film, entertainment, and newspaper industries. Black Americans were subjected to precisely the same civic disabilities under the judicial regime of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upholding the

removal of the constitutional protections of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments. Moreover, Du Bois added with no anticipation of the Kristallnacht savagery to come, the orderly Nuremburg laws were much preferable to the lynch law of the American south. Deborah Lipstadt, an authority on the American press and the Nazi persecution of the Jews, has established that until Kristallnacht, "and even to a small degree thereafter," most of the press "continued to be optimistic regarding Nazism's treatment of the Jews."

The blanket apparatus of state surveillance, the nonstop engine of hypnotic propaganda, the satanic charisma of the Leader were explanations for the political docility of the German people. But Du Bois also believed that the fundamental reason for the broad and genuine popularity of the government was, as international correspondent William Shirer conceded, that National Socialism appeared to be a stupendous success: "By the autumn of 1936 the problem of unemployment had largely been licked." If he resisted praising Hitler, in contrast to Britain's Lloyd George after a recent audience with the Fuhrer, Du Bois was not entirely immune. He understood how Hitler's credentials for the job of chancellor had appealed to the German majority—all that was needed was a plausible philosophy, and propaganda." As for that plausible philosophy—fascism—Du Bois expressed both indulgence and disgust. He abominated its anti-Semitism and deplored its reactionary attitude toward women. Its scurrilous propaganda and purging of the universities offended the core beliefs of his life. Still and yet, with capitalism on life support and millions unemployed in the democracies as a result of the Great Depression, he found National Socialism to be neither "wholly illogical" nor hypocritical, but to be a still "growing and developing body of thought" in which he divined an "extraordinary straddle" between capitalism and communism. Du Bois wagered an armchair theorist's prediction that Germany was destined to become "a second Russia, and National Socialism will lose all excuse for being"

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Implicit in the celebrity or influence accorded people of color was the requirement of a reciprocated gratitude that validated the mythic reality of America as a land of color-blind opportunity. Although Du Bois had been equated with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in historian Henry Steele Commager's 1948 list, "Men Who Make Up Our Minds," three years later, his reputation would lie in ruins and his freedom to work and walk among his compatriots would hang in the balance of Cold War justice. Du Bois would be but one victim among the many accused, censured, and convicted, yet the humiliation to be visited upon him, as with his friend Paul Robeson, was meant as an express warning to his people and their leaders—a message that their long struggle for equality must continue to exemplify commendable patience, conventional patriotism, and immunity to radical economic ideas.

In 1958, the Supreme Court, in a five-to-four decision, finally handed down an opinion consonant with the First Amendment, and Du Bois's suspended passport was restored. He and his second wife, Shirley Graham, sailed away to red-carpet receptions in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China. He appeared on BBC television, gave several lectures, then flew to Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic. On Monday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1958, in this very hall, a special occasion unfolded in the former Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin to the strains of Bach. Herr Professor Dr. Heinz Mohrmann, dean of the faculty of Humboldt University of Berlin, in recognition of his progressive ideals and outstanding scholarship, bestowed upon the grand old scholar the Doktor des Wirtschaftswissenschaften ehrenhalber---the honorary degree of Doctor of Economics, the degree Du Bois had "coveted...sixty-five years before." Du Bois spoke in English accompanied by a translator. "Unfortunately, I have forgotten my German from those days," he said in a firm voice, "but the

beautiful memories are still present.” His address covered much of his life from the hills of Western Massachusetts to the decolonization of Africa, for which he rightly took some credit as the doyen of the Pan African Movement.

With communism consigned to history’s curiosity shop of failed religions, some of Du Bois’s pronouncements may ring so oddly as to cause doubt as to his standing as one of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century’s intellectual heavyweights. What has befallen the African continent would dismay Du Bois, although it would probably not permanently disillusion him. It may be argued that it is by far the significance of Du Bois’ life of scholarship, protest, and propaganda rather than the solutions he proposed, that are instructive. Indeed, Du Bois offers us the best appreciation of his own significance in his second and final autobiography, *A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*.

Had it not been for the race problem early thrust upon me and enveloping me [he writes], I should have probably been an unquestioning worshipper at the shrine of the established social order into which I was born. But just that part of this order which seemed to most of my fellows nearest perfection seemed to me most inequitable and wrong, and starting from that critique, I gradually, as the years went by, found other things to question in my environment.”

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois must have gazed with profound approval on Marx’s apothegm carved on these walls many years after his Berlin student days: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

THANK YOU.