

W.E.B. DU BOIS AND THE WOUNDED WORLD: SEEKING MEANING IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS

by Jennifer D. Keene

In his unpublished and published writings, W.E.B. Du Bois struggled for fifteen years with multiple interpretations of the First World War's significance for African-Americans. Du Bois argued that the war was a futile exercise brought on by capitalist imperialists, but then glorified the military accomplishments of black soldiers and the chance African-American soldiers had to experience the joys of being treated as equals by the French. The urgency he felt to present his version of the history of the First World War reflected his belief that unstable race relations would likely mean another war in the near future. The possibility of a Pan-African community emerging from the war fascinated Du Bois, and he hoped the war would provide a way for the black world to reunite and become a political force. Du Bois also wanted the white world to take note of the central role Africa and black soldiers played in the war. Du Bois, however, gradually became disillusioned with the notion that war could serve as a vehicle for positive social change as he realized that postwar economic problems had intensified racial hatred throughout the world. He also doubted the ability of World War I to serve as "the war to end all wars" until the problem of racial prejudice was solved. In the end, Du Bois rejected war as a way to advance the economic or political interests of the black world.

For over fifteen years after World War I, W.E.B. Du Bois collected material, wrote grant proposals, and drafted chapters for a work titled "The Wounded World." Du Bois never published this meditation on the meaning of the war for the black man, but this little-known manuscript deserves attention.¹ Historians evaluating the reaction of Du Bois to World War I have emphasized the controversies surrounding his decision to support the war in 1917 when he urged African-Americans to "close ranks" with white Americans, his near acceptance of a position in the Military Intelligence Branch, and his disillusioned postwar appeal for returning black soldiers to join the fight against racism at home.² Scholars subsequently have used the documents Du Bois collected to detail the African-American war experience, but no one has examined and evaluated Du Bois's own use of this material.³

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Du Bois's contemporaries also expressed little interest in his ongoing efforts to analyze and draw lessons from the war experience. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (which funded Du Bois's research trip to France in 1919), philanthropic agencies, and publishers consistently dismissed his project as insignificant.⁴ Concern with the world war "is about as dead as the League of Nations," wrote an editor from the Associated Publishers in 1924, and since "the Negroes themselves have lost interest in their own record during that upheaval" it was doubtful the book would be a commercial success.⁵ At one point in the early 1920s, Du Bois concocted a plan to present the work to the public as a pageant and to the intellectual community as a multi-volume work. Du Bois went so far as to contact Colonel Otis Duncan, commander of the 8th Illinois Infantry, a black National Guard unit, to ask if his regiment would be interested in taking part in the great battle scenes, augmented with "masses of little dolls," who would perform after a lecturer had used maps, drawings, and tables to explain the scope of black participation in the war.⁶ In presenting the book as a scholarly contribution, Du Bois faced concerns from officials of various foundations over the manuscript's length, the topic's popularity, and the controversial questions he intended to raise. Though he made numerous fellowship applications, Du Bois only received one small grant of \$600 in the interwar period.⁷

For Du Bois, the world war offered lessons about the state of race relations in the world, and insights into the particular problems faced by Black America. Du Bois's private and public, published and unpublished writings offer a complex interpretation of the war's meaning to African-Americans. Disproving charges of inferior leadership skills and cowardly battlefield conduct took up many pages in "The Wounded World." Du Bois, however, also placed the African-American experience in a larger world context. In his writings Du Bois reflected on the various identities African-Americans developed during the war in different cultural settings: a colored man in a white man's army, a human being welcomed with grace by French families, a black man who felt a spiritual and ancestral kinship to the Africans serving in France, and a soldier who embraced the ultimate test of manhood on the battlefield.

Du Bois believed that the war illustrated the striking connection between the unsatisfactory marginal position that African-Americans occupied at home and the world problem of colonialism.⁸ He saw nothing to contradict his earlier conclusion that the problem of the twentieth century was the color line.⁹ Yet the possibility of a new, independent black nation emerging in Central Africa and black men worldwide uniting behind the common cause of Pan-Africanism caused Du Bois to imagine some good emerging from the war.¹⁰ A black nation no longer seemed impossible, Du Bois argued,

since in four short years the world had witnessed Russia dethroning the Tsar, England accepting female suffrage, and Germany adopting parliamentary government.¹¹ The Paris Peace Conference soon dashed these hopes by turning former German colonies over to European supervision with no room for Du Bois's plan to "inaugurate on the Dark Continent a last great crusade for humanity."¹² This failure left Du Bois pessimistic about the chances for a lasting peace. Some of the urgency he felt to present his version of the history of the First World War reflected his belief that unstable race relations would likely mean another war in the near future.

Four themes dominated Du Bois's writing on the First World War. First, Africa played a central role in the war. The war began in Africa, the continent provided the Allies with the critical manpower they needed to win, and the war's promise to extend democracy failed most dramatically in Africa. Second, the race prejudice that permeated the postwar world jeopardized world peace. Third, racial prejudice prevented African-Americans from using honorable military service to strike down Jim Crow laws in their own country. The war, however, did give African-Americans faith that an egalitarian, democratic society could exist. This hope came from their experiences in France, and Du Bois championed France as the progressive model that other Western societies must emulate. Fourth, the war demonstrated what members of the "Black World" had in common.¹³ It gave Pan-Africanism legitimacy as a political and ideological movement to solve the problems of black people.¹⁴ Through the Pan-African movement, Du Bois hoped to create an opportunity for black people to negotiate, debate, and direct their own future.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AFRICA

"In a very real sense Africa is a prime cause of this terrible overturning of civilization which we have lived to see; and these words seek to show how in the Dark Continent are hidden the roots, not simply of war to-day but of the menace of wars to-morrow," Du Bois wrote in his 1915 essay, "The African Roots of the War."¹⁵ During and after the war Du Bois challenged the prevailing views of why the war had occurred. Why did each nation believe that its very survival was at stake? Du Bois found no satisfying answers to this question in the death of the little-admired Archduke Franz Ferdinand, France's desire to recapture Alsace-Lorraine, balance of power issues in Europe, or the German violation of Belgium's neutrality.¹⁶

According to Du Bois, the race among European powers to acquire colonies in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century caused the war. Nationalistic impulses and racial prejudices drove Britain, France, Germany, Belgium,

Italy, and Portugal to exploit the riches of the African continent. It was an illusion, Du Bois maintained, to believe that the autocratic and democratic nations differed in their reasons for colonizing "the darker nations." The industrial revolution created an exploited working class within each Western European nation, which increasingly demanded its share of the pie. When Germany entered the competition for colonies, Du Bois noted, "England and France crouched watchfully over their bones, growling and wary, but gnawing industriously, while the blood of the dark world whetted their greedy appetites."¹⁷ If the promise of increased national wealth did not woo workers to the imperialistic cause, then the threat of exporting jobs overseas quieted any sense of outrage the abused workers of one continent might feel over exploiting the race of another. Even democratic nations, therefore, shared a fundamental characteristic with authoritarian regimes: a union of capital and labor that energetically supported the extension of the white man's rule over Africa.

RACIAL PREJUDICE

With this conclusion in mind, "I appealed to the last meeting of peace societies in St. Louis, saying: 'Should you not discuss racial prejudice as a prime cause of the war?'"¹⁸ Du Bois could not get the gathering to consider this question in 1915, so he raised it himself in drafts and notes for "The Wounded World" and in *Darkwater*, his 1919 meditation on the state of race relations in the world. How could racial prejudice explain the war? First, it helped answer the question of who caused the war. The real culprits, he maintained, were "all those modern civilized citizens who submitted voluntarily to the Dominant Wills of those who ruled the leading lands" and supported their nations' colonial wars of conquest.¹⁹ Working men could not see through the Western propaganda that claimed black men only existed to serve as "beasts of burden for white folk."²⁰ The ruling powers' fostering of racial prejudice among the working class explained why violent racial rioting took place within the United States during the war, despite continuous labor shortages and high wages for all. After rejecting black workers from their unions, white workers attacked them for working as scabs. African-American workers, Du Bois noted bitterly, had committed a horrendous crime in American society. They were, he wrote, "guilty of being black."²¹

Racial prejudice also explained why the model democratic nation in the world, the United States, was powerless to prevent the war. "America, the land of democracy, here came forward with increased frequency as a supporter of the doctrine that democracy belonged to the white race alone," thus giving Europeans a clear conscience as they simultaneously fostered democracy and

imperialism in their own countries.²² Finally, racial prejudice helped Du Bois understand why the warring nations fought so bitterly on the battlefield. “Europe today is fighting to settle the question of leadership in the world of subject and ‘inferior’ peoples. The preeminence of England and France as colonists is being challenged by Teutonic Europe. They are fighting for a ‘place in the sun’ which means they are fighting for the right to rule and exploit colored folk,” Du Bois noted during his fact-finding mission to France.²³

The Allies won the war, but until the world solved the problem of racial prejudice Du Bois had little hope for lasting world peace. The United States was less than credible in championing the principle of “consent of the governed” when it disenfranchised millions of American blacks, Du Bois wrote to President Woodrow Wilson.²⁴ Early in the war Du Bois predicted the next war would not be between whites over their desire to control the riches of Africa and Asia, it would be between the races. “These nations and races, composing as they do a vast majority of humanity, are going to endure this treatment just as long as they must and not a moment longer. Then they are going to fight and the War of the Color Line will outdo in savage inhumanity any war this world has ever seen. For colored folk have much to remember and they will not forget,” he wrote.²⁵ In the twenties and thirties he saw little reason to amend this prediction. Du Bois’s grant proposals for “The Wounded World” consistently claimed that the war had intensified racial prejudice and made the prospects of racial and economic equality—the only possible way peace could last—more remote.²⁶ One of the few hopes Du Bois expressed in 1919 rested with the League of Nations providing “relief from the spectre of the Great War of Races” by letting “black and white and yellow sit and speak and act” in one world body.²⁷

AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND THE BLACK WORLD

What responsibility did African-Americans bear for this state of world affairs? How could they in good conscience participate in the war, knowing what was truly at stake and knowing that the United States had little moral authority to correct European assumptions about Africa? In the postwar years Du Bois took pains to defend himself from charges he had acted irresponsibly when he urged African-Americans to “close ranks” with whites once the United States entered the war in 1917. In his first drafts of “The Wounded World,” Du Bois clearly intended to present a historical interpretation of the war that justified his wartime stand. By the thirties, however, he displayed increasing bitterness and disillusionment. In his later private correspondence Du Bois admitted he had been swept off his feet by “the great call to duty” during

the war, and was "ashamed of my own lack of foresight."²⁸ Eventually Du Bois signaled his intention to re-work the manuscript to convey the folly of depending on war to solve racial problems. Du Bois's writings on the First World War, therefore, reveal his own somewhat self-serving struggles to find some transcending meaning in the war experience for African-Americans and his eventual rejection of war as a way to advance the economic or political interests of the black world.

Du Bois presented a strong case for supporting the war in the manuscript. "The thinking Negro group would have preferred to make this war an opportunity for bargaining between the colored and white races and to have said to the Allies frankly: 'We think as between you and Imperial German aggression the balance of right is distinctly on your side but nevertheless we want from you certain clear guarantees and promises as to your treatment of the darker races in the future,'" Du Bois wrote.²⁹ Yet, Du Bois accurately acknowledged, African-Americans did not have the power to bargain. Instead they risked setting back the fight against racial prejudice in their own country even further if they chose not to fight. Du Bois consistently maintained that the inclusion of African-Americans in the draft represented an important recognition of their status as citizens.³⁰ At a time when other rights of citizenship such as voting, due process, and free speech went unacknowledged, African-Americans needed to make the most of this recognition by white America. Du Bois could with some justification point to the progress in civil rights made after black men fought in the Civil War. Du Bois believed the NAACP victory in establishing a black officers training camp promised to be an important step in breaking down stereotypes about the capacity of black men to lead. And, as this report that Du Bois received from a YMCA secretary illustrated so vividly, Du Bois hoped the war would call attention to the disastrous effects of the southern caste system that left black men impoverished and illiterate. The African-American men coming into the training camps, the Y secretary told Du Bois, "thought the enemy to be fought was just a few mile beyond Atlanta, and that a battle was imminent at almost any hour. They mistook the blasting of rock for the roar of enemy cannon. Some had never heard of Germany or Serbia or France or the Kaiser or Europe or New York. They had just known for a few weeks that a great war was raging, and had not the slightest idea what it was all about."³¹

Unfortunately, none of the changes Du Bois hoped for came to pass. Rather than ushering in an era of improved race relations and expanded opportunities for social and economic advancement, the war made an already deteriorating racial situation worse. The army organized only two black combat divisions. The 93rd Division fought well under French command, but

the 92nd Division compiled a dismal combat record as poor training, constant efforts to discredit and remove black officers, and general demoralization took their toll on the division. The vast majority of African-American soldiers, over 80 percent, worked as non-combatant laborers who unloaded cargo, repaired roads, and built cemeteries. Rather than returning home with enough medals on their chests to spur America to reward their loyalty and heroism with full recognition of their civil rights, African-American soldiers came home to charges they made poor officers, were only interested in pursuing French women, and served best as stevedores. These men found themselves distrusted by both northern and southern white communities. During the war hundreds of thousands of blacks migrated north in search of higher factory wages and freedom from the oppressive southern racial environment. Black veterans formed the last leg of this migratory wave just as wartime prosperity evaporated and a paralyzing wave of strikes began. When African-American strikebreakers willingly crossed the picket lines of white-only unions, racial tensions escalated to dangerously violent levels in many cities. Returning to their southern communities did not ensure tranquility for black soldiers either. There, whites worried that after their exposure to a liberal racial environment in France and training in the use of firearms black veterans were returning as revolutionaries intent on overthrowing the Jim Crow system. Together these fears and strains sparked at least thirty race riots in 1919 and a depressing increase in lynching. Of the seventy-seven black citizens killed by mobs in 1919, ten were former soldiers.

Despite this bleak situation, Du Bois had not given up hope that some positive good might still come from the war for African-Americans. Black people had every right to demand changes in America and the world, Du Bois argued, since “the black soldier saved civilization in 1914–1918.”³² African soldiers from France’s colonies fought decisively from the First Battle of the Marne to the Armistice, while the African-Americans working as stevedores made it possible for America’s economic might to win the war for the Allies. Du Bois focused especially on the ignored achievements of African-American combatants, noting the special burden they placed on themselves to win a victory for their race in the final moments of the war. It was, he wrote,

one of those terrible moral questions which war brings to the front. The negotiations for the armistice were already under way. . . . It is a grave question then as to whether there was any necessity of sending these Negro troops to death in the morning of the 10th but it was done and done under singularly tragic circumstances.

If the troops had been white they might have gone forward slowly and listlessly, knowing that the end of the war was near, but these black troops of the 92nd Division were on their metal. They had had a shameful deal handed them in the case of the 368th. They were determined that no human sacrifice would keep them from proving their stubborn determination in this case. . . . and so with this last great gasp of black blood the fighting ended.³³

Men of color, in Du Bois's eyes, played a central role from the beginning to the end of the war. Whatever failures tarnished their war record Du Bois blamed completely on racism. Hundreds of pages in "The Wounded World" detail the obstacles racial prejudice placed in the path of African-American soldiers trying to demonstrate intelligence and military aptitude. Prejudiced American white officers may have caused black men to falter on the battlefield, but the one American black division under French command had performed splendidly. Du Bois intended to use their experiences to restore the image of the black soldier as a heroic and valiant warrior in "The Wounded World."

Throughout the manuscript Du Bois focused on black soldiers as representatives of the race who bore the responsibility of performing admirably and valiantly to further the cause of civil rights at home. In the process, however, Du Bois ignored those essential human qualities—fear, ego, luck, illusion—which are part of all soldiers' war experiences. In the end Du Bois never successfully captured the humanness of the men whose humanity he championed. White America demonized and belittled the wartime performance of black soldiers, and Du Bois responded by deifying them. His portrait of their war experiences is consequently unsatisfying because he never freed himself from the constraints of contemporary political debates, which forced him to portray these soldiers as symbols, rather than individuals. In many respects, Du Bois set the tone for how historians have continued to approach African-Americans' participation in the war. The same need to match past racist accusations of cowardliness with heroic tales of glory and achievement drives the narratives of the few contemporary works devoted to black soldiers' wartime experiences. Classic works on the First World War detail the detachment, alienation, and disillusionment of soldiers along the Western Front. These are, however, always accounts of white soldiers, never black ones.³⁴ That the political imperatives informing this history have changed so little in eighty years adds credibility to Du Bois's increasing pessimism over the future of race relations in America.

Spending time in France was the only positive experience black soldiers recalled to Du Bois. There, black soldiers could eat where they wanted and socialize with whom they liked, and the French welcomed them in the front lines. Du Bois experienced this welcome firsthand when he journeyed to France in 1919 and recalled with delight dinners where he could “laugh and joke and think as friends” with “no elegant and elaborate condescension of —‘We once had a colored servant’—‘My father was an Abolitionist’—‘I’ve always been interested in your people’.” It was, he noted, “simply human decency and I had to be thankful for it because I am an American Negro, and white America, with saving exceptions, is cruel to everything that has black blood.”³⁵ Du Bois was soon championing France as the true model democracy in the world.

But were contradictions creeping into Du Bois’s evaluation of the war? In weighing the larger causes and outcomes of the war, Du Bois condemned France as heartily as Britain and Germany for her overseas exploits in Africa and chastised the French working class for placing its own material gain above concern for the exploitation of the black world. In the chapters devoted to the African-American experience in France, however, Du Bois now extolled these same French workers and peasants for their willingness to embrace African-Americans as social equals. Besides the welcome that African-Americans received in French homes and businesses, Du Bois highlighted the glory the French bestowed on their West African soldiers. Du Bois included one striking example in his chapter on the armistice. On a train to Paris, a black lieutenant overheard a group of white American and French officers talking. “The French officers stated that they had nothing but the highest of praise for their black soldiers, the Senegalese, and that they loved them for the work that they had done at Verdun. . . .” African-American soldiers were a bunch of cowards, an American officer from Virginia countered, “everyone of them would rape a white woman if he was not held down by the whites.” In his concluding remarks, the white American officer claimed “that one of the first things that he wanted to do upon his return to the States was to join a lynching bee, and said to the Frenchmen, that he would ‘send them a piece of a nigger ear as a souvenir’.”³⁶

From stories like these, it was not hard to see why Du Bois praised France so profusely in the pages of *The Crisis*, the newspaper he edited for the NAACP. Besides honoring her black troops, France also granted full citizenship rights to a segment of its black colonial population who had recently sent its first black representative to the House of Deputies. The willingness of French officials to allow Du Bois and Blaise Diagne, the Senegalese deputy, to organize a Pan-African Conference in Paris after the war further enhanced

Du Bois's esteem for the French, a view that he disseminated in *The Crisis*. African-American soldiers should not second-guess their decision to fight on the side of the Allies, even if their tangible gains in the United States were few, Du Bois told his readers. "Given the chance again, they would again do their duty—for have they not seen and known France," he exclaimed.³⁷ To maintain this relationship, Du Bois urged African-Americans to speak French and to travel abroad to spread the truth about American racial prejudice.³⁸ In the late 1920s Du Bois tried to organize a tour of France and North Africa for a few hundred African-Americans, to demonstrate their growing economic clout and remind his countrymen that France welcomed African-American visitors with safe and agreeable accommodations.³⁹

In seeing France as a country without racial prejudice, Du Bois was voicing a conventional postwar conclusion embraced by white and black Americans. The contrast between a racist America and an enlightened France became the organizing principle for a myriad of African-American soldier memoirs as well as the popular book-length histories by Emmett J. Scott and Charles Williams.⁴⁰ A host of recent studies by French historians have called into question the existence of a "color-blind" France by focusing on the troubled experiences of colonial troops and laborers, but American historians have remained steadfast in insisting that the war revealed the workings of an egalitarian France and a racist America.⁴¹ Differences indeed existed in how the two countries treated African-Americans, but Du Bois was incorrect to claim that France was free of racial prejudice.⁴² Instead, the French had a range of stereotypes to select from when coming into contact with African-Americans. These stereotypes included their own propaganda images of the West African soldier as savage, child-like, and loyal; warnings from white Americans of African-Americans' criminal tendencies; the American view that France was a society without racial prejudice; and both generous and ungenerous French notions of how America's wealth and power would affect France. Ironically, the American army actually helped strengthen the identification of its black soldiers with the American ideal of wealth and vigor by rigorously policing black troops. American army officials intended to teach the French that black troops had criminal tendencies, but instead they prevented the French from assimilating African-Americans into the image of the African savage or child and the image of the undisciplined, egotistic, uncouth white American soldier that developed during the war. The over-reaction by American military police to any infraction committed by African-American soldiers helped open the door to amicable relations between French civilians and a group of soldiers who did not get drunk, paid their bills promptly, and were polite and friendly. This paradoxical turn of events helped pave the way

for extraordinary wartime events, such as when one village mayor wrote to American military authorities requesting that they “take back these soldiers and send us some real Americans, black Americans,” after a group of rowdy white Americans disrupted the town.⁴³

Du Bois used more than African-Americans’ positive overseas experiences to demonstrate France’s “color-blindness.” Her willingness to let West African colonial subjects fight on the front lines also impressed Du Bois. The steady stream of patriotic pronouncements from black deputies representing France’s African and Caribbean colonies in the French National Assembly and his own political agenda gave Du Bois little reason to question why these colonial subjects should want to fight for France.⁴⁴ Instead Du Bois sought to identify African-Americans with the image of the valiant black soldier who fought for a society that knew no racial prejudice.

In his chapters on West African soldiers, Du Bois relied heavily on the memoirs of Alphonse Séché, a French officer who commanded these troops during the war. Without comment, Du Bois incorporated Séché’s stories of West African soldiers’ stoicism when wounded, their devotion to their officers, the sense of camaraderie whites and blacks discovered on the battlefield, West Africans’ tenacity in battle, and their correct demeanor in French villages. In his memoir, Séché raised and then dismissed the question of how a recently conquered people could be willing within a matter of years to fight and die for France.⁴⁵ Du Bois enthusiastically accepted Séché’s conclusion that “there was no mistake about the enthusiasm for the French cause, and this could only have been created by years of sympathetic French rule in West Africa. . . .”⁴⁶ The notes and anecdotes that a research assistant took for Du Bois from Séché, however, revealed a highly selective reading of Séché’s book. Large sections of Séché’s work described African soldiers as big children who would kill their own mothers if ordered to do so by a white. Séché praised a French hospital director for curing wounded West African soldiers who “expect to be treated like Europeans; they look at other blacks with pity, if not mistrust; they let their hair grow long, make a part on the side, and refuse to eat native cuisine. . . . If one does not give them satisfaction, they do not hesitate to threaten to appeal to higher authorities. A sergeant went as far as to get the address of M. Poincaré [the president of the republic] with the goal of writing him!”⁴⁷ After these “intoxicated” troops spent some time in an all–West African hospital in Menton, Séché noted approvingly, the “cure of re-senegalization” helped them quickly recover their native habits and attitudes. If he had been looking, Du Bois could have easily gathered enough evidence from this memoir to shatter his claim that the French harbored no racial prejudice.

Du Bois, however, did express private doubts about whether France would eventually educate and grant suffrage to the vast majority of her African subjects and continue to welcome black Americans. He did not base these reservations on questions concerning the sincerity of French democratic ideals or a more profound reading of Séché's book. Instead, after the Pan-African Conference in 1919, Du Bois wrote a cautionary confidential memo to other organizers. Though France practiced racial equality more completely than any other modern nation and treated "civilized blacks like civilized men," Du Bois wrote, she was still part of the white world and would come under pressure from the United States and England to align her racial policies with theirs.⁴⁸ Du Bois attributed France's hesitation to grant political power to African natives to this insistence from the Anglophone white world. In 1932, Du Bois noted dismally, France had made little progress in extending education and political rights to other than the few who made up "the black aristocracy," and "Americans are able to dictate to Frenchmen in all lines of life and while they have not succeeded in closing entirely hotels and restaurants to Negroes, they have made it much more difficult."⁴⁹

Du Bois intended his book, "The Wounded World," to serve in part as a call for the white working class to realize that their true interests lay in supporting rather than exploiting their black brethren. "All this disintegrated and inchoate black world is seeking," he wrote, "is spiritual unity and at the same time looking for help, not only within its own bosom but also in the souls of those European and American disinherited laboring classes whose problem is at the bottom one with theirs."⁵⁰ By 1932 Du Bois had lost hope that African-American soldiers' wartime welcome by the French people was such an awakening. "It seems to me that the French with all of their theoretical socialism . . . do not envisage the great mass of the people as the people. France still identifies itself with an efficient middle-class of wealthy or well-to-do folk who are ruling the French empire for their own economic interests . . .," he told the editor of *Je Suis Partout*.⁵¹ The fact that France continued to lead the world in matters of racial equality now said less about the greatness of France to Du Bois and more about the "extraordinary spiritual poverty of the rest of the civilized world."

One last possibility remained, however, that might have made the war worth fighting for African-Americans. Service in France provided African-Americans with more than a chance to meet white men as equals; it gave members of the black world a place to meet, a purpose to share, and an opportunity to shape a political agenda for the future. "Is there a black world—a conscious social organism, aware of itself and its parts?" Du Bois asked in "The Wounded World."⁵² The war had erased any doubts for Du

Bois. "Yes," he replied, "There is today a Black world. It did not exist as a world ten years ago, although it was a world and a mighty one 25 centuries ago." Soon this hope evaporated as well. Subsequent Pan-African conferences met throughout the twenties, but differences between the leaders of various black communities in the world dominated these exchanges. In the first meetings, Du Bois heartily agreed with the testimonials given to France by men of color holding seats in the National Assembly.⁵³ After twelve years, however, Du Bois began to suspect that "in black France . . . the dark masses have no leaders. Their logical leaders like Diagne, Candace and others are more French than the French, and feel, quite naturally much nearer the French people than to black Africa or brown Martinique."⁵⁴

Like many of the World War I generation, Du Bois found it difficult to accept such a cataclysmic event without searching within it for some ultimate purpose besides the continuation of the status quo. Having supported the war so publicly, Du Bois also had a personal stake in looking hard for some evidence of progress in race relations. His disillusion with the failure of American blacks to secure immediate gains at home gave way to the fleeting hope that the world's working men and women could overcome the color line to unite behind their common economic interests. The idea that France might serve as a model interracial democracy and the dream that the Pan-African movement might improve the international status of the black race also captivated Du Bois.⁵⁵ One by one he abandoned these illusions and recognized the war for what it was: a meaningless conflict that consumed millions of lives and hardened ethnic and racial hatreds throughout the world.

Du Bois, however, never fully confronted the ever-existent contradictions in his analysis of the war. He eventually argued the war was a futile exercise brought on by capitalistic imperialists, noting in his 1936 proposals for the manuscript "the utter failure of war as a solution of a major social problem or any other problem."⁵⁶ Yet he continuously felt the burden of demonstrating that black soldiers had fought well, believed in the cause, and were patriotic. African-American soldiers could be disillusioned by racism, but could not reject the value of war itself without their much-maligned manhood coming once again into question. When Du Bois added a more pessimistic note to his planned manuscript, it was an abstract, general conclusion he wished to draw. He did not suggest that the poorly trained black soldiers of the 92nd Division who ran away from the guns were right to refuse to sacrifice their lives for a pointless cause. The flaws in his evaluation, however, are ultimately as important as the broad, international perspective Du Bois offers on the war. It reminds us that the complete story of black soldiers' disillusionment has yet to be told.

NOTES

1. "The Black Man and the Wounded World" draft manuscript and supporting materials are part of the W.E.B. Du Bois manuscripts held by Fisk University, Tennessee. Research for this article was aided by a Beveridge Grant from the American Historical Association and a Faculty Research Grant from the University of Redlands.

2. "Close Ranks," *The Crisis* 16 (July 1918): 111. For defenses of "Close Ranks" during the war, see "A Philosophy in Time of War," *The Crisis* 16 (August 1918): 164–65, and "Our Special Grievances," *The Crisis* 16 (September 1918): 216–17. For a recent controversy over Du Bois's motivation for writing this editorial, see Mark Ellis, "'Closing Ranks' and 'Seeking Honors': W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 96–124; William Jordan, "'The Damnable Dilemma': African-American Accommodation and Protest during World War I," *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1562–83; Mark Ellis, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Formation of Black Opinion in World War I: A Commentary on 'The Damnable Dilemma,'" *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1584–90.

3. See especially Arthur Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), which relied heavily on Du Bois's manuscript and is the most widely cited source on African American soldiers' experience.

4. Mary W. Ovington to Du Bois, February 11, 1919, reel 7, frame 1181, Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts–Amherst (hereafter, Du Bois Papers, UM-A).

5. Associated Publishers, Inc. to Du Bois, April 28, 1924, reel 13, frame 287; Du Bois to Robert Littell, The MacMillan Company, September 10, 1925, and reply, reel 15, frame 1044–45; Du Bois to R. R. Taylor, March 14, 1927, reel 23, frame 263. All in Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

6. Du Bois to Colonel Otis Duncan, 8th Illinois Infantry, June 19, 1923, and Memorandum on a Proposed Pageant and History titled "The Black Man and the Wounded World," reel 11, frames 1103 and 1107, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

7. Exchange of correspondence between Du Bois and J. H. Dillard, Charlottesville, Virginia, June–September, 1927, reel 21, frames 1320, 1322, 1327, 1328; Du Bois to Raymond Fosdick, November 16, 1927, reel 22, frame 1324; Memorandum to the Imperialism Committee of the American Fund for Public Service, March 27, 1929, and reply, May 2, 1929, reel 27, frame 1155; Social Science Research Council to Du Bois, March 20, 1935, reel 44, 1057; Du Bois to James T. Shotwell, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 16 and February 26, 1936, reel 45, frame 471/ 473; Du Bois to Sage Foundation, March 16, 1936, reel 45, frame 622, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

8. See letter to Editor of the *New York Age*, 1919, reel 7, frame 1161, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

9. Outline of speech before the Pan-African Congress, 1919, reel 8, frame 67–68, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

10. Du Bois to French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, January 4, 1918, reel 6, frame 402; Du Bois to George Foster Peabody, August 28, 1918, reel 6, frame 1096; Memorandum on the Future of Africa, November 27, 1918, to Robert Lansing, Secretary of State, reel 6, frame 1122–23. All in Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

11. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, in *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 517.

12. Memorandum on the Future of Africa, p. 4.

13. These Pan-African sentiments and his placement of Africa at the center of the world conflict built on the Afrocentric historical view that Du Bois had been developing since publishing *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 and attending the Pan-African Conference of 1900. Richard Cullen Rath, “Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois,” *Journal of American History* 84 (September 1997): 461–95; David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (New York: Henry Holt Co., 1993).

14. During this period Du Bois’s definition of racial identity placed less emphasis on shared blood and biological capacities and more emphasis on shared histories, interests, ancestry, and experiences. *Darkwater*, 532.

15. W.E.B. Du Bois, “The African Roots of the War,” *Atlantic Monthly* 115 (May 1915): 707.

16. *Darkwater*, 503, 506.

17. *Darkwater*, 506.

18. “The African Roots of the War,” 712.

19. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Chapter 1: Interpretations: The Black Man and the Wounded World,” *The Crisis* 27 (January 1924): 110–14.

20. *Darkwater*, 503.

21. *Darkwater*, 526–35.

22. Du Bois, “The Black Man and the Wounded World, Chapter Seven: Black America,” p. 5, box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.

23. Du Bois, “War and Color,” Bulletin #3, box 58, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.

24. Du Bois to President Woodrow Wilson, November 27, 1918, reel 7, frame 112–15, Du Bois Papers, UM-A. For questions about America as the moral arbitrator of peace see *Darkwater*, 500, 508.

25. “The African Roots of the War,” 714; *Darkwater*, 507.

26. Wounded World grant proposals, box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.

27. “The League of Nations,” *The Crisis* 18 (May 1919): 10–11.

28. Du Bois to Kirby Page, *The World Tomorrow*, June 24, 1930, reel 32, frame 796, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

29. Du Bois, "Black Man and the Wounded World—Chapter 8, The Challenge," box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.

30. Draft of speech, April 1918, reel 7, frame 104, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

31. Du Bois, "Black Man and the Wounded World—Chapter 9, The Draft," p. 7, box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.

32. Du Bois, "The Black Man in the Revolution of 1914–1918," *The Crisis* 17 (March 1919): 218–23.

33. Du Bois, "The Black Man and the Wounded World—Chapter 14—The 92nd Division," pp. 136, 144, box 57, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University. The 368th was a poorly trained black regiment sent into battle during the Meuse-Argonne campaign whose disorientation many white American officers cited as proof that African-Americans fought poorly.

34. These classic works include Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare: The Live and Let Live System* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980).

35. *Darkwater*, 604.

36. Du Bois, "The Black Man and the Wounded World—Chapter 17, The Armistice," p. 11, box 56, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.

37. Du Bois, "An Essay toward a History of the Black Man in the Great War," *The Crisis* 19 (June 1919): 63.

38. Du Bois, "French and Spanish," *The Crisis* 17 (April 1919): 269–70.

39. J. Perret, Director, French Tourist Information Office to Du Bois, September 23, 1927, reel 22, frame 140; Du Bois to French Tourist Information Office, November 6, 1927, reel 22, frame 142; Du Bois to M. Gratién Candace, Député de la Guadeloupe, Chamber of Deputies, October 24, 1928, reel 25, frame 13. All in Du Bois Papers, UM-A. *Darkwater*, 598–99.

40. Emmett J. Scott, *The American Negro in the World War* (Chicago: Homewood, 1919); Charles H. Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers* (Boston: Brimmer, 1923). For a list of personal narratives see Barbeau and Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 254–56.

41. The classic works on African-American soldiers' experiences are Barbeau and Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers*, and Bernard Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986). The conclusion that French color-blindness alone explains African-American soldiers' positive experiences in France is also maintained in the standard American and French works on America's wartime experience, including David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and*

American Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), and André Kaspi, *Le Temps des Américains: Le concours américain à la France en 1917–1918* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976). The standard works focusing exclusively on West African soldiers' experiences are Charles John Balesi, *From Adversaries to Comrades in Arms: West Africans and the French Military, 1885–1918* (Waltham, MA: Crossroads, 1979), Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F., 1914–1919* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982), and Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1992). For recent work questioning the color-blind image of France, see Joe Lunn, "Les races guerrières": Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34 (Oct. 1999): 517–36, and Tyler Stovall, "The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War," *American Historical Review* 103 (June 1998): 737–69.

42. See Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, The Great War, and the Re-making of America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming), chapter 4.

43. Quoted in Michel Fabre, *La Rive Noire* (Paris: Lieu Commun, 1985), 49.

44. For examples of these speeches, see debates over 1915 law recognizing originaire rights as French citizens in Affaires Politique, carton 533; and reports from Blaise Diagne's 1918 troop recruiting mission in West Africa in Affaires Politique, carton 3036, dossier 11. Both in the Archives d'Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

45. Alphonse Séché, *Les Noirs, d'après des documents officiels* (Paris: Payot, 1919), 26–35.

46. Du Bois, "Notes for Wounded World," chapter 4, box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University. Séché, *Les Noirs*, 47–48.

47. Séché, *Les Noirs*, 246–47.

48. Memorandum Confidential pour MM. Diagne et Candace et leurs amis au sujet du prochain Congrès Pan-Africain, 1919, reel 8, frames 114–16, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

49. Du Bois to J. G. Fleury, editor of *Je Suis Partout*, November 26, 1932, reel 37, frame 21, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

50. Du Bois, "The Black Man and the Wounded World, Chapter 3—The World of Black Folk," box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University. Memorandum Confidential pour MM. Diagne et Candace et leurs amis au sujet du prochain Congrès Pan-Africain, 1919.

51. Du Bois to J. G. Fleury, editor of *Je Suis Partout*, November 26, 1932.

52. Du Bois, "The Black Man and the Wounded World, Chapter 3—The World of Black Folk," box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.

53. Discours inaugural de M. Diagne au Congrès pan-africain des 19–20–21 février 1919, reel 8, frame 47; Minutes of Pan-African meeting, 1919, reel 8, frames 100–06; A. P. Miller, Secretary, “The Pan-African Congress,” in *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines’ Friend*, 1921, p. 104, reel 10, frame 98. All in Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

54. Du Bois to J. G. Fleury, editor of *Je Suis Partout*, November 26, 1932.

55. For possible improvement in African-Americans’ economic position, see *Darkwater*, 531, 574.

56. Du Bois, “Manuscript entitled: The Black Man and the Wounded World,” February 22, 1936, box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University.