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Term Paper

In *The World and Africa*, W.E.B. Du Bois disputes the US and European version of history that portrays blacks as weak and unintelligent. He demonstrates how the US and Europe have twisted the history of Africa to fit their ideas of Africans being unintelligent and uncivilized. Du Bois shows that through the process of increasing prosperity as a result of industrialization, US and Europe have completely exploited and destroyed other nations. He also goes on to illustrate how fear about the spread of communism and issues of race relations have led the Western world to completely oppress many African nations and that this should not be allowed to continue. He proves his point very well throughout the book, however I do not think this book made much of an impact on people's views at the time. Although the book did not have great significance at the time it was published, Du Bois is still a significant Cold War figure because he stands for everything the Cold War is not. He takes a stance for African rights and wants to stop the exploitation of developing nations by Imperial powers.

This book fits into the framework of the Cold War because it illustrates how imperial nations, such as the US and Europe, were so focused on their own gain and prosperity that it caused them to completely ignore the human rights violations they were committing. These nations were so focused on getting ahead of other nations both economically and strategically that they exploited others to do so. It also demonstrates the irony of the Cold War because the US and Europe were claiming to fight for equality and democracy and yet even at the beginning of the Cold War, these policies were not applied in their own nations. This essay will first provide background on W.E.B. DuBois. It will

focus on his life and his beliefs in order to better understand his purpose for writing *The World and Africa*. Then it will talk about what *The World and Africa* focuses on and what it tries to accomplish. After, I will go on to illustrate what outside forces Du Bois was combating and the state of the world at the time. Finally, I will demonstrate how Du Bois's beliefs fit into the Cold War structure.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was an American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, Pan-Africanist, author and editor.¹ He was born in a tolerant community in Massachusetts in 1868 where he experienced little racism. He then went on to complete his undergraduate education at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. It was here that he first learned about the Jim Crow laws and began analyzing the deep troubles of American racism.² He graduated from Harvard in 1895, as the first African American to earn a doctorate. He then went on to become a professor of history, sociology, and economics at Atlanta University in 1897.

While working at Atlanta University, he published *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899, this was a detailed sociological study of the African-American people of Philadelphia based on the fieldwork he completed in 1896-1897.³ This work was a breakthrough in scholarship, because it was the first scientific sociological study in the US, and the first scientific study of African Americans.⁴ Du Bois's theme throughout this study was that the elite of a nation, black and white, was the critical portion of a society that was responsible for culture and progress. He believed that blacks as well as whites

¹ Gerald Horne, W.E.B. Du Bois, (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Biographies, 2010), 7.

² Ibid, 7.

³ Ibid, 26.

⁴ Ibid, 26.

had a significant role in society and should be treated as equals. This belief caused him to disagree with Booker T. Washington's Atlantic Compromise, which stated that Southern blacks would submit to discrimination, segregation, lack of voting rights, and non-unionized employment if they could receive a basic education, some economic opportunities and legal justice.⁵ By Du Bois going against Washington's idea, it demonstrates how he was already focused on the issue of equal rights and prohibiting the exploitation of Africans, which would turn out to be a major theme of *The World and Africa*.

Du Bois wrote and published many books and essays that focused on the importance of the black race. These works also led him to get involved in both the national and international community where he began to participate in more committees and organizations. In May 1909, DuBois attended the National Negro Conference in New York.⁶ This meeting led to the creation of the National Negro Committee dedicated to campaigning for civil rights, equal voting rights, and equal educational opportunities. It also led to the eventual creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).⁷ This involvement demonstrates his deep participation and concern for the rights of blacks and wanting to help create equal rights for all.

After WWII, Du Bois began to focus on writing *The World and Africa*.⁸ During this time he was actively involved in the Pan- African movement. In 1919 he traveled to

⁵ David Lewis, *A Biography 1868- 1963 W.E.B Du Bois*, (New York, New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 180-181.

⁶ Ibid, 256-257.

⁷ Ibid, 263.

⁸ Ibid, 263.

Europe i to attend the first Pan-African Congress. The Pan-African Congress was a series of seven meetings that were to address the issues facing Africa as a result of European colonization. Its focus was on ending colonial rule and racial discrimination. This goal was carried out in every aspect of Du Bois life. Throughout his life he focused on fighting for equality for blacks all over the world and finding an end to their exploitation. This a theme that he reiterated throughout *The World and Africa*.

Du Bois published *The World and Africa* in 1946. He wrote it in an effort to illustrate to the white world that African people are advanced and civilized and should be treated as equals to whites. The book attempts to show a different history of Africa than the one that Europeans and Americans tell. A history where the African people were advanced and intelligent but were ravaged by war and eventual exploitation. Du Bois is very detailed throughout the book and takes the reader through the development of key countries in Africa such as the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. He also goes through and describes how Africa has been continuously exploited through the slave trade due to the U.S. and Europe's focus on prosperity. And how through this focus on prosperity, the US and Europe have also manipulated their beliefs about science and history to try a come up with a theory of exploitation.

Although he did many things throughout his lifetime this book began with his role in the Pan-African movement and how the movement was trying to achieve rights for the countries of Africa so that these nations are able to define their own fate. The Pan African congress called upon the Allied and Associated Powers to draw up an international code of law for the protection of the countries of Africa and to create a permanent bureau and

to insure observance of such laws and thus further the racial, political and economic interests of the natives.⁹ This ideal is a central concept that the book is centered around. He attempts to show how Africa should not be exploited by other nations and should be able to grow and prosper like any other area.

However, his task of getting people to pay attention to Africa was very difficult to achieve given the state of the world at the time. Wartime crisis had obliged the British, French, and Belgians to exploit the resources of empire as never before.¹⁰ The pressure to do so continued after 1945 because of economic need and the shortage of hard currency for foreign trade.¹¹ This need caused the European empires to shift their focus to colonial development and bring Africa into the framework of international capitalism. However these empires could not predict what this would mean for the African colonies in the future. This sparked a desire for independence from colonial rule and led to many uprisings and crises throughout Africa in the 1950s and the 1960s, such as the uprising in Algeria in 1954.

Also at this time ideologies of race were circulating throughout Europe and the US such as the Superior race theory that Du Bois mentions in *The World and Africa*. This is an aspect that Du Bois spends a great deal of time disputing in this book. The theory is that a minority of the people of Europe are by birth and natural gift the rulers of mankind; rulers of their own suppressed labor classes and heaven-sent rulers of yellow, brown and

⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa*, (New York, New York: International Publishers, 1946), 12.

¹⁰ Ibid, 89.

¹¹ Ibid, 89.

black people.¹² Du Bois goes on to trash this idea and describe how it ruins civilization. He even goes as far as to compare the entire Christian civilization of Europe to the Nazi's. He states, "there was no Nazi atrocity-which the Christian civilization of Europe had not been practicing against colored folk... in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race".¹³ He is attempting to get a rise out of his audience in these initial chapters through his intense language.

He is primarily targeting upper class whites, the people that believe in these theories and who are responsible for the exploitation of Africa. He is attempting to show these people how backwards this logic is and how there needs to be an end to it. He is sticking up for the developing nations that have been completely exploited throughout history. It is clear to the reader that his audience is upper class whites through his intense use of language and persuasion. He is not attempting to just inform people on the history of Africa, rather he wants to spur people to stop exploiting the region. In order to get this accomplished he has to focus on people that can change the situation and at the time these people were upper class whites. Through the Pan African Congress and through his many books, including *The World and Africa*, Du Bois is making an unmistakable call for drastic social change and an end to European exploitation in Africa

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¹² Ibid, 17.

¹³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁴ Walter Rucker, "A Negro within A Nation' : W.E.B Du Bois and the Creation of a Revolutionary Pan Africanist Tradition, 1903-1947," Black Scholar, 32, no :40, <http://web.ebscohost.com/oca.ucsc.edu/ehost/detail?vid=4&hid=9&sid=0985bc78-28c2-43d1-8f72>

This book was published in the early period of the Cold War when the US was trying to figure out how to handle relations with the Soviet Union, who previously an ally. The U.S. was turning towards taking a strong stance on communism and against the Soviet Union. This began by the U.S. helping rebuild and stimulate the West European economy. The US did this because it wanted to have a strong ally that would also be against communism. Communism was beginning to become a feared concept throughout the Western world. All of this focus on rebuilding the economy and these initially fears of communism caused western nations to focus on their own needs rather than those people they were exploiting. Du Bois and his writings represent a stark contrast to this mentality because he focuses on issues of equality and human rights rather than big politics power play.

Although Du Bois is an influential figure and his works have gained a lot of attention, *The World and Africa* is a forgotten book. Since this work was written at a time where the Cold War was heating up, it does not seem to gain as much significance as his other works that possess a similar theme such as *The Souls of Black Folk*. This is because at this time communism was becoming the focus of society, while the human rights movement would not gain immense popularity until at least a decade later. It seems that the impact and influence that *The World and Africa* diminished due to this focus on communism and the build up of Western Europe.

Du Bois was also accused of being a communist, which could have had an effect on the influence of his writings during this time. During the 1950's the U.S. government's anti-communist McCarthyism campaign targeted Du Bois because of his

socialist leanings.¹⁵ These attacks grew when Du Bois passed an appeal through the Peace Information Center (PIC) asking governments around the world to ban all nuclear weapons.¹⁶ The government twisted this and claimed that the PIC was acting as an agent of a foreign state, and required them to register with the government. They refused and a trial ensued and although Du Bois was not convicted the government confiscated his passport and held it for 8 years.¹⁷ The accusation of Du Bois being a communist could be another reason why *The World and Africa* was not as popular as many of his other works.

Eric Porter examines the possible reasons why *The World and Africa* does not have as much popularity today as many of Du Bois other works. He describes how scholars often give limited attention to or dismiss Du Bois' post -1940 work because of assumptions about the effect of age on his intellectual powers, the ways political alienation affected his judgment, or the extent to which dogma compromised his radicalism.¹⁸ He has also been criticized for his reliance on secondary sources and the creative license he permitted himself when deploying evidence.¹⁹ These are all possible reasons why *The World and Africa* seems to be a forgotten book among Du Bois other works.

¹⁵ Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois : A Black Radical Democrat*, (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), xx.

¹⁶ David Lewis, *A Biography 1868- 1963 W.E.B Du Bois*, (New York, New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 689.

¹⁷ Ibid, 689.

¹⁸ Eric Porter, "Imaging Africa, remaking the world: W.E.B. Du Bois' history for the future," *Rethinking History* , 13, no. 4 (2009):480, <http://humweb.ucsc.edu/americanstudies/faculty/porter/imagining.pdf> (accessed December 5, 2012).

¹⁹ Ibid

After Du Bois regained his passport, he moved to Ghana in 1961 to work on the creation of a new encyclopedia about Africa. In early 1963, he made the symbolic gesture of becoming a citizen of Ghana.²⁰ He died later that year in Ghana on August 27, 1963 at the age of 95. It is symbolic that he died in Africa, in a place and among people that he has fought for through out his life.

His belief in Africa and equality for Africans that he exhibits throughout his life and in *The World and Africa* demonstrate why Du Bois is a significant Cold War figure. He is significant because he supports Africa and other developing nations that have been exploited by Imperial nations. He takes two ideological stances against his circumstances- resistance to white supremacy at home and resistance to European imperialism abroad.²¹ These two stances are vastly different from the views of other Cold War figures. Although other black intellectuals took on the same stance later, such as Fanon, Du Bois was the first to challenge these ideas. He represents a fresh perspective on the Cold War by not fitting into the typical Cold War ideological framework. He fought for equality for blacks, rather than focusing on huge political displays of power surrounding the issue of communism.

DuBois is a crucial Cold War figure because he stands for everything that the Cold War is not. He stands for African rights and calls for an end of the exploitation smaller nations for Imperial gain. He outlines this all in his book *The World and Africa*. The book takes the reader through African history in an attempt to show how the US and Europe have twisted history to fit their needs. He believes the US and Europe portray

²⁰ Ibid, 712.

²¹ Ibid, 712.

Africans as less than whites so that they can continue this exploitation for their own gain.

Du Bois takes a stance against these norms making him a significant Cold War figure.

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