

FROM  
AN ABC OF COLOR  
BY W.E.B. DUBOIS

Selections  
chosen by the author  
from  
over a half century  
of his writings

With an Introduction by  
John Oliver Killens

\* PAN-AFRICA (1919)

\* OF GIVING WORK (1920)



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PAN-AFRICA

Europe had begun to look with covetous eyes toward Africa as early as 1415 when the Portuguese at the Battle of Ceuta gained a foothold in Morocco. Thereafter Prince Henry of Portugal instituted the series of explorations which resulted not only in the discovery of Cape Verde, the Guinea Coast and the Cape of Good Hope, but by 1487 gave to Portugal the possession of a very fair slice of the African East Coast. This was the beginning of the Portuguese Colonies of Guinea, Angola and East Africa. Other European nations, France, Holland, Spain, England and Denmark, followed and set up trading stations along the African coast whose chief reason for existence was the fostering of the slave trade.

But the partition of Africa as we know it is much more recent and begins with the founding in 1884 of the Congo Free State whose inception was so zealously fostered by Leopold of Belgium and which in 1908 was annexed to Belgium. The "scramble" for African colonies was on and within a quarter of a century Africa was virtually in the hands of Europe.

In this division the British Empire gained a network of possessions extending from the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan down to South Africa with valuable holdings on the East Coast and in Somaliland. France came next with an equally larger area, but with a smaller population. Her possessions reached from Morocco and Algeria, including the Algerian Sahara, to the French Congo, and on the Eastern Coast comprised Madagascar and French Somaliland. Germany, who was late in entering the game of colonization, contrived none the less to become mistress of four very valuable colonies, Togoland, Kamerun, South-West Africa and East Africa. Italy's and Spain's possessions were relatively unimportant, embracing for the former,

Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, and for the latter Rio de Oro and the Muni River settlements.

This was the state of affairs when the war broke out in 1914. In Africa the only independent states were the Republic of Liberia, and the kingdom of Abyssinia which, according to history, has been independent since the days of Menelek, the reputed son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The number of souls thus under the rule of aliens, in the case of England, France, Germany and Belgium, amounted to more than 110,000,000. During the course of the war Germany lost all four of her African colonies with a population estimated at 13,420,000. It is the question of the reapportionment of this vast number of human beings which has started the Pan-African movement. Colored America is indeed involved.

*If we do not feel the chain  
When it works another's pain,  
Are we not base slaves indeed  
Slaves unworthy to be freed?*

*Colonial Imperialism in Africa*

The suggestion was made that these colonies which Germany lost should not be handed over to any other nation of Europe but should, under the guidance of *organized civilization*, be brought to a point of development which shall finally result in autonomous states. This plan met with criticism and ridicule. Let the natives develop along their own lines and they will "go back," has been the cry. Back to what, in Heaven's name?

Is a civilization naturally backward because it is different? Outside of cannibalism, which can be matched in this country, at least, by lynching, there is no vice and no degradation in native African customs which can begin to touch the horrors thrust upon them by white masters. Drunkenness, terrible diseases, immorality, all these things have been the gifts of European civilization. There is no need to dwell on German and Belgian atrocities, the world knows them too well. Nor have France and England been blameless. But even supposing that these masters had been models of kindness and rectitude, who shall say that any civilization is in itself so superior that it must be superimposed upon another nation without the expressed and intelligent consent of the people most concerned. The culture indigenous to a country, its folk-customs, its art, all this must have free scope or there is no such thing as freedom for the world.

The truth is, white men are merely juggling with words — or worse — when they declare that the withdrawal of Europeans from Africa would plunge that continent into chaos.

What Europe, and indeed only a small group in Europe, wants in Africa is not a field for the spread of European civilization, but a field for exploitation. They covet the raw materials — ivory, diamonds, copper and rubber in which the land abounds, and even more do they covet cheap native labor to mine and produce these things. Greed, naked, pitiless lust for wealth and power, lie back of all of Europe's interest in Africa and the white world knows it and is not ashamed.

Any readjustment of Africa is not fair and cannot be lasting which does not consider the interests of native Africans and peoples of African descent. Prejudice, in European colonies in Africa, against the ambitious Negro is greater than in America, and that is saying much.

But with the establishment of a form of government which shall be based on the concept that Africa is for Africans, there would be a chance for the colored American to emigrate and to go as a pioneer to a country which must, sentimentally at least, possess for him the same fascination as England does for Indian-born Englishmen.

#### *Not Separatism*

This is not a "separatist" movement. There is no need to think that those who advocate the opening up of Africa for Africans and those of African descent desire to deport colored Americans to a foreign land. Once for all, let us realize that we are Americans, that we were brought here with the earliest settlers, and that the very sort of civilization from which we came made the complete adoption of western modes and customs imperative if we were to survive at all. In brief, there is nothing so indigenous, so completely "made in America" as we. It is as absurd to talk of a return to Africa, merely because that was our home 300 years ago, as it would be to expect the members of the Caucasian race to return to the fastnesses of the Caucasus Mountains from which, it is reputed, they sprang.

But it is true that we as a people are not given to colonization, and that thereby a number of essential occupations and interests have been closed to us which the redemption of Africa would open up. To help bear the burden of Africa does not mean any lessening of effort in our own problem at home. Rather it means increased interest. For any ebullition of action and feeling that results in an amelioration of the lot of Africa tends to ameliorate the condition of colored peoples throughout the world. And no man liveth to himself.

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#### OF GIVING WORK

"We give you people work and if we didn't, how would you live?"

The speaker was a southern white man. He was of the genus called "good." He had come down from the Big House to advise these Negroes, in the forlorn little church which crouched on the creek. He didn't come to learn, but to teach. The result was that he did not learn, and he saw only that blank, impervious gaze which colored people

know how to assume; and that dark wall of absolute silence which they have a habit of putting up instead of applause. He felt awkward, but he repeated what he had said, because he could not think of anything else to say:

"We give you people work, and if we didn't, how would you live?"

And then the old and rather ragged black man arose in the back of the church and came slowly forward and as he came, he said:

"And we gives you homes; and we gives you cotton; and we makes your land worth money; and we waits on you and gets your meals and cleans up your dirt. If we didn't do all those things for you, how would you live?"

The white man choked and got red, but the old black man went on talking:

"And what's more: we gives you a heap more than you gives us and we's getting mighty tired of the bargain —"

"I think we ought to give you fair wages," stammered the white man.

"And that ain't all," continued the old black man, "we ought to have something to say about your wages. Because if what *you* gives us gives *you* a right to say what we ought to get, then what *we* gives you gives *us* a right to say what *you* ought to get; and we're going to take that right *some day*."

The white man blustered:

"That's Bolshevism!" he shouted.

And then church broke up.

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