

Guide to
the Microfilm Edition of the

**FBI File on
W. E. B. Du Bois**

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Introduction

For more than a half-century, W. E. B. Du Bois was the most prominent black intellectual and spokesperson for civil rights in the United States. Born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Du Bois began his activism early, writing for two black newspapers by the time he was fifteen. He attended Fisk University in Nashville on a scholarship and graduated in 1888. He entered Harvard as a junior, where he studied philosophy with William James and George Santayana. In the fall of 1890 he began his graduate work in history at Harvard, receiving a master's degree in 1891. Du Bois continued his studies abroad in 1892 at the University of Berlin, where he completed a thesis on agricultural economics in the American South.

Upon his return to the United States, Du Bois accepted a position teaching class at Wilberforce University in Ohio. In 1895 he became the first black to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard. His doctoral thesis, entitled "The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States," became the first work published in Harvard's Historical Studies series. Du Bois resigned from Wilberforce to take up a one-year appointment at the University of Pennsylvania. There, he conducted an extensive study of the lives of urban blacks, published as *The Philadelphia Negro*. With its emphasis on historical and environmental rather than genetic influences on behavior, his investigation set new standards for the sociological study of blacks.

Du Bois taught at Atlanta University as a professor of economics and history from 1897 to 1910, during which time he produced what remains his best-known work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, a collection of essays depicting the deleterious effects of racism and the spiritual resilience of American blacks. Du Bois's interest in African culture also developed during his years at Atlanta, and his immersion in the segregated culture of the South, the Atlanta Riots of 1906, and his leadership of a barefoot march on Harper's Ferry helped to galvanize his commitment to activism and service. Du Bois's activism differed sharply, however, from that of the other prominent black leader of his day, Booker T. Washington, who emphasized vocational education for blacks and believed that they would only be able to claim and obtain full American citizenship through the gradual acquisition of economic power. Du Bois, on the other hand, pressed for immediate and complete equality for blacks. Both men attempted to reconcile their differences at a conference in 1904, but Du Bois resigned in protest of Washington's control of the convention's governing board. A year later at a meeting held in Fort Erie, Ontario, Du Bois and other black leaders who shared his goal of full political and economic equality for blacks organized the Niagara movement, dedicated

to the elimination of racism and insistent upon the fundamental equality of humankind. Factionalism within this group, coupled with the power of the Tuskegee group led by Washington, ended the Niagara movement within five years.

In 1910, Du Bois, seeing the need to join with liberal whites to fight racial segregation and to improve the lot of blacks generally, became a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He also became its director of publications and research, editing the *Crisis* for almost twenty-five years. The *Crisis* was crucial to the work of the NAACP and was the most important African-American magazine of the time, championing blacks' achievements in literature, science, and the arts, and raging against lynchings and other atrocities. Although its first print run was only 1,000 copies, peak circulation reached more than 100,000. During his years with the NAACP, Du Bois also became involved with the Pan-African movement, whereby he organized a series of conferences in Paris, Lisbon, Brussels, London, and New York. Although his scheme to found an international African-controlled state failed, he continued to emphasize self-government for oppressed black subjects of colonial powers.

After a visit to the Soviet Union in 1926, Du Bois declared himself a Bolshevik. In a reversal of his earlier position, he began arguing for voluntary segregation for blacks. His views, expressed in the *Crisis*, brought him into conflict with NAACP leadership. Finally, in 1934, Du Bois resigned the editorship of the *Crisis* and returned to Atlanta University as chairman of the Department of Sociology. In 1935 he published *Black Reconstruction in America*, a Marxist reevaluation of blacks' role in the Civil War and in the rebuilding of the South. During this time, Du Bois also wrote a weekly column for black newspapers, championing both socialism and Pan-Africanism. These writings, as well as some of those published in the *Crisis*, formed the basis of the FBI file created on Du Bois during the 1940s and 1950s and reproduced here.

Perhaps because of his views, he was retired from his position at Atlanta University in 1944. The NAACP appointed him director of special research. During the four years in which Du Bois held this position, he published a critique of capitalism and colonialism, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (1945) and *The World and Africa* (1947). At the Pan-African Congress in 1945, Du Bois was proclaimed the "father of Pan-Africanism." His socialist leanings, however, led to his dismissal by the NAACP leadership in 1948.

Du Bois's political views became more and more in sympathy with communism and further away from the goals of the American civil rights movement. He took office space with a "subversive" organization, the Council of African Affairs; he addressed a rally in New York

City of the Conference for World Peace; and in 1950 he became chairman of the Peace Information Center, a Communist group that organized protest against nuclear weapons. Throughout the next fifteen years the FBI continued monitoring Du Bois's writings and activities, amassing a file that reflected his support of and participation in Communist organizations, his anti-American statements issued abroad, and the statements that his supporters made to defend him against charges of communism.

In 1951, Du Bois, along with four other members of the Peace Information Center, was tried in a federal court on the charge that he was an unregistered agent of a foreign power. Although he was eventually acquitted, the U.S. State Department revoked his passport and that of his second wife, writer Shirley Graham. After the travel ban was lifted in 1958, Du Bois embarked on a tour of Britain, France, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, the Soviet Union, and China. In Moscow, he received the Lenin Peace Prize on May Day, 1959. In 1960 he traveled to Ghana for the inauguration of President Kwame Nkrumah, who invited him to return permanently to work on the *Encyclopedia Africana*. Before he left the United States, he applied for membership in the Communist Party and was admitted on October 3, 1961. He renounced his American citizenship and became a Ghanaian in 1963. He died in Ghana on August 7, 1963, the eve of the historic civil rights march on Washington.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; certain documents, or portions of documents, have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released, and every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

The file is in approximate chronological order, and the FBI did not index documents. The Roll Notes is not a complete inventory of the file; however, it gives an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.

Roll Notes

FBI File 100-99729

SECTION 1

1942-1951

Roll 1, 0002-0108

Internal Security: Suspected Socialist and Communist

with sympathies toward the Japanese people Excerpts of his writings in *Crisis* magazine and in the NY *Amsterdam Star News* Excerpts from *Dusk of Dawn*, an autobiographical work published in 1940 Financial supporter of the Southern Negro Youth Congress, a Communist front organization Personal background information and surveillance of his Communist activities National Committee to defend Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and Associates Newspaper articles include:

- *The Worker* (Jun. 1945): "Dr. Du Bois Traces Path to Colonial Freedom"
- *New York Times* (date obscured): "DuBois Tells Harlem Only U.S. Wants War"
- "Peace on Trial" pamphlet prepared by the Peace Information Center

SECTION 2

1951-1954

Roll 1, 0109-0231

Internal Security: Communism Activities with Communist front groups Excerpts from *The Daily Worker* and the *National Guardian* Pamphlet: / *Take My Stand for Peace* by W. E. B. Du Bois, published by the National Committee to defend Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and Associates *Romanul American* (Nov. 10, 17, 1951)

Excerpts from speeches given by Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois Pamphlet: *Agents of Peace* by Albert E. Kahn, published by the National Committee to defend Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and Associates Information from the Files of the Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives (1953)

SECTION 3

1954-1958

Roll 1, 0232-0356

Security Matter: Communism

Excerpts from House Committee on Un-American Activities hearings (Jul. 5, 6, 1955)

Full subject report including personal background and affiliation with the Communist movement Activities in San Francisco, 1951, 1953, 1956 Testimony in Smith Act Trials of Trachtenberg and Jackson (Jun. 1956)

SECTION 4

1958-1959

Roll 1, 0357-0467

Security Matter: Communism

Tour of Eastern Europe (Aug. 1958) and and-American comments made in speeches while abroad

Awarded the East German Peace Medal (Nov. 1958) Summary of interview on Radio Moscow (Jan. 1959)

Summary of activities in Communist China (Mar.-Apr. 1959)

Awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union (May 1959)

Articles by Du Bois in *Pravda*, May 1959 (translated from Russian)

Summary of Du Bois statements made while abroad Attending reception held at the Soviet embassy, Washington DC (Sep. 1959)

SECTION 5

1959-1960

Roll 1, 0468-0533

Internal Security: Communism

Chicago Council of American-Soviet Friendship Du Bois and the Lenin Peace Prize

Excerpt from Fulton Lewis radio program (Jun. 1960) citing Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and his

Communist background and sympathies Itinerary on trip to Europe, following visit to Ghana (Jun. 1960)

Excerpt from Radio Moscow re: International Lenin Peace Prize Files of the Passport Office re: W. E. B. Du Bois and wife, Shirley Graham

SECTION 6

1960-1961

Roll 1, 0534-0652

Security Matter: Communism

Itinerary of W. E. B. Du Bois (Canada to Virgin Islands), Feb. 1960

Files of the Passport Office re: Trip to Ghana (Nov. 1959)

Trip to Nigeria (Nov. 1960)

Du Bois's application and acceptance in the Communist Party, United States of America (CP, USA)

SECTION 7

1961-1963

Roll 1, 0653-0759

Security Matter: Communism

Application for membership in the Communist Party, United States of America

The Worker (Nov. 1961), press release announcing "Du Bois Joins the Communist Party"

Full report outlining affiliation with the Communist Party

Excerpts from *The Worker* (Mar. and Apr. 1962) re: health of Du Bois

Proposed *Encyclopedia Africana* to be directed by Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois

Files of the Passport Office, Department of State re: Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois's requested and received Ghanaian citizenship (Feb. 1963)

W. E. B. Du Bois and wife, Shirley Graham, welcome Chairman Mao Tse-tung's statement supporting the struggle of American Negroes (Aug. 1963)

The Worker (Sep. 1, 1963) announces the death of W. E. B. Du Bois

SECTION SUB A

1947-1963

Roll 1, 0760-END

Numerous newspaper articles cover the life and the death of W. E. B. Du Bois