

THE FORETHOUGHT

History is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogenous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now [*Jetztzeit*]. For Robespierre, Roman antiquity was a past charged with the here-and-now. . . . The French revolution thought of itself as a latter day Rome. It cited ancient Rome exactly the way fashion cites a past costume. Fashion has an eye for what is up-to-date, wherever it moves in the jungle [*Dickicht*: maze, thicket] of what was. It is the tiger's leap into that which has gone before. Only it takes place in an arena in which the ruling classes are in control. The same leap into the open sky of history is the dialectical one, as Marx conceptualized the revolution.

—WALTER BENJAMIN, "ON THE CONCEPT OF HISTORY," 1940

Judge Mansart began to learn what most men learn slowly and some never—namely, that when we live through a great series of human events, we do not necessarily see them, even less do we really understand them, nor can we arrange them to fit logically into the world we already know. Perhaps (and this complicates understanding even more) current events clearly show us that our interpretation of the past has been wrong, that only through the present can we see the past. Time, in other words, shifts—future is partly the past and the past is future.

—W.E.B. DU BOIS, *WORLDS OF COLOR*, 1961

The violent conflicts of our age enable our practiced vision to see into the very bones of previous revolutions more easily than before.

—C.L.R. JAMES, PREFACE TO *THE BLACK JACOBINS*, 1938

—an American, a Negro . . .

—W.E.B. DU BOIS, *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*, 1903

When the twenty-six-year-old Tunisian fruit vendor Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi set himself aflame in January 2011 to protest police efforts to confiscate his livelihood, protestors took up the ringing denunciation of French colonial rule by the poet Aboul-Qacem Echebbi a century earlier: "If one day, a / people desire to live, / then fate will answer their call / And their night will then begin to fade, / and their chains break and fall." Weeks later, Egyptian revolutionaries shouting down neoliberal state policies and the high cost of daily goods invoked the nation's deposition of British colonial rule in 1952 and bread riots of 1977 en route to toppling

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the autocrat Hosni Mubarak. In Greece, in the months after Mubarak's fall, workers protesting wage and employment cuts carried out a series of general strikes, reviving a tactic instrumental to the Russian Revolution of 1905, the decolonization of India in 1947, and the *Solidarność* (Solidarity) movement in Poland in the 1980s. By the summer of 2012, some fifty years after launching pickets against the fascist government of Francisco Franco, Spanish mine-workers in the northern village of Ciñera blockaded roads and hurled rocks—slingshot-style—at police dispatched to quell protests against austerity. As the battle waged on the ground, the forty-two-year-old coal miner Miguel Angel Iglesias told the *New York Times*, “I don't preach violence, but I guess it's turning into our version of the intifada. . . . When somebody is determined to take away your job and what has kept families living here for over a century, you fight to the end.”¹

The twenty-first century and its dissidents are haunted by the specter of one of the twentieth century's most ambitious and unrealized projects: world revolution. When on its last day the Nobel Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote the epitaph for a hundred years of nineteenth-century imperial conquest—“The century's sun has set in blooded clouds. / There rising in the carnival of violence / from weapon to weapon, the mad music of death”²—he limned the dawn of a new century marked out by interdependent serial struggles for global emancipation. The first to apprehend this vector in full was Leon Trotsky. In his book *Results and Prospects* (1906), written in the wake of the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, Trotsky argued that the “combined and uneven” development of capitalism across the world could create conditions where a revolution in one “backward” country could help initiate another in a more advanced industrial nation, a process Trotsky called “permanent revolution.”³ Trotsky was not alone in conceiving world-system change as the new century's historic task. In 1900, conveners of the first Pan-African Congress in London, the largest gathering of African diasporic descendants to date, proclaimed, “Let the nations of the World respect the integrity and independence of the first Negro States of Abyssinia, Liberia, Haiti, and the rest, and let the inhabitants of these States, the independent tribes of Africa, the Negroes of the West Indies and America, and the black subjects of all nations take courage, strive ceaselessly, and fight bravely, that they may prove to the world their incontestable right to be counted among the great brotherhood of mankind.”⁴ Five years later, after a Japanese fleet commanded by Admiral Togo Heihachiro destroyed much of the Russian Navy in a territorial war in Manchuria, future revolutionary leaders of the coming century, from Mustafa Kemal (Turkey) to Mohandas Gandhi (India), were positively stricken by the prospects of chain decolonization across the globe.⁵ Japan's victory also helped to inspire China's Republican Revolution of 1911, an event that

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was nearly concurrent with the Mexican Revolution of 1910, which helped draw the African American Lovett Fort-Whiteman first to Mexico and then to Russia, becoming the century's first black Bolshevik.⁶

In 1916, the Polish communist Rosa Luxemburg, repelled by social democrats backing German imperial ambitions in World War I, posited a formal political movement for global emancipation. "The founding of a new workers' international has become a living question of socialism," she wrote, "which would undertake the task of guiding and coordinating revolutionary class struggle against imperialism in all countries."⁷ By October 1917, world revolution had become both iteration of possibility and historical fact. "The fall of Petrograd," Tariq Ali has quipped, "was . . . a universal event."⁸ In the wake of their victory, the Bolsheviks formed the Communist International (Comintern) to build revolutionary communist parties and movements in every country of the world and to link liberation struggles in the global South to proletariats in industrial nations. World revolution became an official Bolshevik program to end Russia's internal civil war through global communist victory and to put into practice what Trotsky had first described and Vladimir Lenin had endorsed as the central objective of the new Third International. Indeed, the year 1919 saw an explosion of global struggle that seemed to bring the world to the brink: a May 4 anti-imperialist movement in China motivated by lost Chinese concessions in the Treaty of Versailles; a new communist movement in Korea; nationwide *hartals*, or labor strikes, in India in response to the Rowlatt Act, events Sumit Sarkar calls "the biggest and most violent anti-British upsurge which India had seen since 1857"—the year of the Sepoy Mutiny.⁹ In Germany and Italy, new communist parties led by Luxemburg and a young Antonio Gramsci were flooded with members, heralding enthusiasm in the Soviet Union that world revolution was a matter of when, not whether. In 1920, the Dutch astronomer and council communist Anton Pannekoek published the essay "World Revolution and Communist Tactics" in *Kommunismus*, the Vienna-based theoretical organ for southeastern Europe.¹⁰ In 1923, the radical poet Herman Gorter published an article in the London journal *Workers' Dreadnought* asking whether England might be the starting point of the world revolution.¹¹ Between 1919 and 1929, workers' uprisings across the United States, Asia, and Europe especially were undertaken in the name of the world revolution, anticipating the massive strike waves after the global crash of 1929.¹² By the mid-1930s, in the midst of world depression and emerging fascism, the Trinidadian expatriate, Bolshevik, and newly won Trotskyist C.L.R. James would both canonize and mourn the prospects for world revolution, assessing the surge and crest of events in the first third of the still new century as *World Revolution 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*.

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These movements and moments constitute a provisional genealogy of the history of world revolution forged from the twentieth-century left's contradictory aspirations, achievements, and failures. Among Marxists, this genealogy was first given flesh most brilliantly by the German communist Walter Benjamin in the essay "On the Concept of History" (1940). Written, like James's *World Revolution*, in the flow tide of ongoing revolutions in Europe and Asia, Stalin's takeover of the Communist International, and the rise of European dictators, the essay seeks to create a mode of historical materialism in which revolution is not incidental but typological. "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'emergency situation' in which we live is the rule," wrote Benjamin. "We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this." In response, Benjamin famously evoked a "messianic" theory of revolution that acknowledged the cyclical imminence of historical eruption. "On the Concept of History" proposed a temporal dialectics in which the present (*Jetztzeit*) inhabits history as the potential to rehabilitate *all revolutions* that had come before but not yet arrived in the here and now. It conceives the historical materialist, in turn, as the caged bird of history necessarily taking a leap of faith toward the "open sky" of revolutions past and present. For Benjamin, she or he is like the "Angel of History" in Paul Klee's famous painting, blown by the storm of past human failures and misery "irresistibly into the future." As Alex Callinicos astutely notes, Benjamin's essay transforms the apocalyptic doubts of revolutionary failures—"midnight in the century"—into a prophetic mode of recovery and restoration.¹³

Benjamin's typological reading of prospects for world revolution with and against the grain of the twentieth century also illuminates the long arc of the political thought and political life of W.E.B. Du Bois. In the summer of 1961, the year he joined the Communist Party of the USA and exiled himself to Ghana, Du Bois wrote a seldom studied essay for *Freedomways* magazine that provided, with abrupt clarity, an inordinately self-reflexive synopsis of what might be called his cumulative historical method, or "concept of history." The essay, titled "Africa and the French Revolution," begins with Du Bois imagining someone (the reader) approaching a senior on an American Ivy League college campus and asking what influence Africa had on the French Revolution. The answer "None" provokes the interlocutor's fantasy of approaching the student's teacher of "historiography," who, Du Bois avers, would give the same answer: "You would be told that between African slavery in America and the greatest revolution of Europe, there was of course some connection, since both took place on the same earth; but nothing causal, nothing of real importance, since Africans have no history."¹⁴ Here, Du Bois conflates and animates the "ancient" problem of Hegel's (and Hume's) imperial erasures of Africa from Western timelines as an ongoing dilemma of writing history,

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as Benjamin has it, in an “arena in which the ruling classes are in control.” The “leap” Du Bois insists on is historical materialism as an antidote to the hegemony of capitalist scripture. Thus, Du Bois proclaims, “It is a perfectly defensible thesis of scientific history that Africans and African slavery in the West Indies were the main causes and influences of the American Revolution and of the French Revolution. And when after long controversy and civil war, Negro slavery and serfdom were not suppressed, the United States turned from democracy to plutocracy and opened the path to colonial imperialism and made wide the way for the final world Revolutions in the 20th century.”¹⁵

Like Benjamin, Du Bois here solves a crisis of *historicism* with the recovery of revolutionary agency. The recurring absence of Africa *from* world history is resolved by making Africans the subject *of* history. Revolution thus becomes the hermeneutic engine of both history writing and history making. The twentieth century’s dream of world revolution discloses itself not just as a latent topic of Du Bois’s nearly one hundred-year life but as a main leitmotif of that life’s self-consciousness. As Benjamin puts it, “The subject of historical cognition is the battling, oppressed class itself.”¹⁶

Fittingly, Du Bois’s resolution of a world revolution typology in “Africa and the French Revolution” retrospectively drew together the totality of his life. Embracing communism and leaving America for Africa, Du Bois in 1961 reconciled a tension endemic to his most famous and oft-repeated archetype of African American experience: double-consciousness. Shopworn assertions about the dilemma of being “an American, a Negro” have typically failed to register the passage as antecedent and seed of Du Bois’s eventual alienation from the U.S. nation-state and what Eric Porter has called Du Bois’s “disidentifactory Americanism.”¹⁷ For example, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois describes the problem of trying to become “both an American and a Negro” as particular to one “who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe.”¹⁸ This qualification offers exile and exilic consciousness as a variant antithesis to what Orlando Patterson calls “natal alienation,” reminding us that *Souls* was written on the heels of Du Bois’s first extended period abroad as a fellow of the John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen in Germany.¹⁹ Describing in the posthumously published *Autobiography* his first journey south to take a teaching position at Fisk University, Du Bois rewrites the primal scene of double-consciousness as a precondition for national disidentification: “So I came to a region where the world was split into white and Black halves, and where the darker half was held back by race prejudice and legal bonds, as well as by deep ignorance and dire poverty. But facing this was not a lost group, but at Fisk, a microcosm of a world and civilization in potentiality. Into this world I leapt with enthusiasm. A new loyalty and allegiance replaced my Americanism: hence-forward I was a Negro.”²⁰

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Du Bois here clearly presents his coming to race-consciousness as a leap outside the *nation* and into what he calls a “world and civilization in potentiality.” He retrospectively applies Cold War terminology (“Americanism”) to describe an oppositional consciousness formed (or forming) some sixty years earlier (the “Un-American”). We can now begin to understand more clearly, more dialectically, the contours of affiliation between Du Bois’s embrace of a typology of world revolution and lifelong traumas of disidentification with the U.S. nation-state. Thus, when he finally assembled his *actual* autobiography in the late 1950s, Du Bois’s reordered the chronology of his development. Part I begins not with his biological birth in the United States but with an account of his travels abroad, starting in 1951 in Europe, including his trips to the Soviet Union and China. This time of exile is antecedent to the “Interlude,” titled “Communism,” where he declares famously and emphatically, “I now state my conclusion frankly and clearly: I believe in communism.”²¹ This a priori section of the book is itself a conglomerate of earlier writings that point to his eventual formal embrace of world revolution politics. *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois* re-presents wholesale passages from Du Bois’s account in *The Crisis* of his inaugural trips to both the Soviet Union and China in 1926 and 1936. The “Communism” declaration also recasts Du Bois’s “Basic American Negro Creed,” first enunciated in a column in *The Crisis* in 1936 and repeated as the closing pages of *Dusk of Dawn* in 1940: “We believe in the ultimate triumph of some form of Socialism the world over; that is, common ownership and control of the means of production and equality of income.”²² Structurally and thematically, then, *Autobiography* symbolically resolves the original sin of natal/national alienation by foregrounding both the totalizing capacity of world revolution Du Bois declares possible and the unitary or merged autobiographical self forged outside the United States as the agent of that historical possibility: “Only through the present can we see the past.”

For Du Bois, then, the capacity to think, live, and write “a world and civilization in potentiality” necessitated a morphological break of time and space. Racial identification with and as the “Negro” is not a static identification with identity but, as Paul Gilroy has argued, a mode of passage into a counterculture of modernity. This is the true meaning of what in 1939 Du Bois called the “race concept.” Yet Gilroy, like much Du Bois scholarship, founders there on Du Bois’s political praxis, denying the obvious trajectory of his thought toward international revolutionary Marxism and mystifying Du Bois’s practice of diaspora as a diffuse engagement with a corpus of *non-Marxist, anti-Marxist, or Pan-African sources*.²³ As should be clear by now, I argue instead that Du Bois’s most useful analogues for thinking his relationship to modernity and its dark shadows were those thinkers like himself (James, Benjamin, Karl Marx, for starters) who were both exiled from its dominant currents and

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wholly committed to tearing down its prevailing apparatus of exploitation, immiseration, racism, and inequality. Put another way, I argue that Du Bois's diasporic identification was a necessary condition for transcending a capitalist hegemony in the United States that sought to incarcerate his mind, if not his body, to hold him captive within discursive limits of the possible, to make him a hostage to a legacy of "ruling class" history to which un-Americanness and exile became both a political necessity and a passport to global solidarity.

It is this aspect of Du Bois's life that I track in this book as the baseline of his political and intellectual development across the twentieth century, the century of world revolution. The central contention of this study is that Du Bois's political and intellectual life lived *outside* the United States and his body of writing in support of world revolution beyond the real and ideological borders of the United States constitute a counter-narrative to what might called the American Du Bois. Put another way, Du Bois's life may best be understood as the evolutionary political embrace of the Un-American years before the political label became the Cold War cloak designating his marginalization and dishonor. Indeed, Du Bois, I argue, came to himself as a committed global revolutionary thinker and typologist of world revolution as a means of shedding the historical excrescence of political failure and reformism within the United States: the structural and political limits of racial uplift theory and Second International reformism; Fabian socialism; cooperative economics; Jim Crow; structural racism and violence; liberalism and reaction; a relentless, elephantine, and repressive state apparatus. In time, Du Bois came to equate the totality of this U.S. history with the American "counterrevolution" read forward and backward in both his brilliant analysis of the Civil War and its aftermath, *Black Reconstruction*, and the "Propaganda of History," his post-script to that book on U.S. historiography. In the end, Du Bois had no choice, as a world revolutionary, but exile from both.

Thus, I argue, Du Bois's most deeply affecting political lessons and analysis of twentieth-century history were drawn primarily—though not exclusively—from sources and events outside the United States. The century of world revolution was lived elsewhere than America; across the course of his long life, Du Bois, to the best of his ability, insisted on living, thinking, and working on that stage of history. But if it was a life increasingly alienated from American soil, American thought, it was not one lived alone. Indeed, Du Bois's first encounter with Marxism "beyond the shores" of the United States as a Slater Fund fellow in Berlin in 1896 was the symbolic entry point into his participation in what in this study I call a diasporic international. This dynamic and fluid constellation may be defined as a cognate group of communist, socialist, anticolonial, and anti-imperial writers and thinkers who both contributed to and participated in many of the century's most important struggles for

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worldwide emancipation. The group itself is made visible and coherent by two characteristics I have already marked as fundamental to Du Bois's evolving political temperament and practice: a dedication to the concept of world revolution as drawn by Pan-African, Pan-Asian, and communist worldwide organizing movements and exilic wanderlust committed to intellectual and political formations beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. These attributes are dialectically linked by affiliation with internationalist organizations and political movements synchronically arranged to encompass the "combined and uneven" development of both capitalism and revolutionary struggle across the globe. Voluntary and involuntary diasporic movement across and between nation-states earmark members of the diasporic international, whose political biographies were necessarily shaped—like Du Bois's—coincident with the prospects for political realignment worldwide.

The members of the diasporic international include a range of Du Bois's friends, collaborators, correspondents, comrades, intimates, and familiars, each of whom acted as confidante, interpreter, or political mentor unto his own grasp of World Revolution theory and practice. Among them are Jawaharlal Nehru, Lajpat Rai, and Mohandas Gandhi from India; the Trinidadian Comintern member and Pan-Africanist George Padmore, perhaps Du Bois's most companionate member of the diasporic international; the aforementioned C.L.R. James and his fellow Trinidadian Claudia Jones, also exiles from the United States in 1953 and 1955, respectively; Agnes Smedley, Esther Cooper Jackson, and Anna Louise Strong, Americans who like Du Bois had committed early support for the Russian Revolution of 1917 and, later, China's 1949 revolution; Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) and Joseph Stalin, leaders of the Russian Revolution of 1917; and Kwame Nkrumah, Du Bois's early mentee and later mentor in Pan-Africanism and Ghanaian decolonization. More directly—or closer, ironically, to home—Shirley Graham Du Bois functioned as Du Bois's navigator and amanuensis through the field of the diasporic international, entering Du Bois's life at a moment of personal consolidation over the meaningful relationship between communism as theory and practice and his own relationship to the non-U.S. world. Indeed, Graham Du Bois was a personal and calendrical tipping point for Du Bois not just in confirming his confidence in Marxism as a method for grasping and changing history, but in companionship that enabled him to resolve the dilemma of becoming (or embracing) Un-Americanness by not going it alone.

The trajectory of this group and its constituted network of relationships encompasses the entire course of Du Bois's life: many (Nehru, Gandhi, Rai, Lenin, Stalin) were born within a few years of him in 1868; others, slightly younger, came to revolutionary commitment through similar passages—World War I, the Russian Revolution, Pan-Africanism—and would include Strong,

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Smedley, Padmore, and James. Still others, including Jones and Graham Du Bois, were turned toward revolutionary politics later by events such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the fight against fascism, and mid-century anticolonial struggles. All, however, were bonded by the series of revolutionary upturns, successes, near-misses, and deferrals that constitute the expansive timeline of world revolution with which I began this study. As I show in chapters to come, they are the archetypal figures of the typology of world revolution with whom Du Bois conjoined, from whom he learned to stay the course and whose solidarity, even when at great distance, kept him moving always in the direction of revolutionary affirmation, even, banally, hope.

At the same time, Du Bois's diasporic international was, like Benjamin's Angel of History, buffeted and impelled by defeat, betrayal, contradiction, misjudgment, and fatal lapse. Its members are the children of both the midnight of Indian decolonization and the "midnight hour" of fascism and revolutions betrayed. Paramount to this bidirection was Stalinism, the twentieth century's dark hijacking by what Isaac Deutscher has called the "mongrel offspring of Marxism and primitive magic."²⁴ This study emphasizes world events between companionate poles of twentieth-century revolutionary foment: the formation of the Communist International in 1919 and of the Pan-African Congress of 1945 in Manchester, England. These events were shaped, and at times directed, by Stalin's tragic influence on the world-revolutionary left. Consequential throughout were the disastrous turns in the Soviet Union toward famine and genocide in the Ukraine; mass starvation from failed collectivization; internal repression of dissidents; alliance with fascism; purges, exile, and murder—events to which members of the diasporic international at times lent tacit support, denial, defense, or, in the best of cases, critical dissent. *Politically* most damaging and significant to the diasporic international's aspiration for world revolution was Stalin's dedication to Socialism in One Country, prioritizing the defense of the Soviet "socialist homeland" over the building of workers' revolutions in industrialized capitalist states and their colonies. While the Soviet abandonment of the Communist International in 1943 signaled the formal demise of Soviet leadership for the world revolution, its protracted dissipation can be traced to the earliest years after 1917. Its tragic traces are thus everywhere to be examined here: in Germany's failed revolution of 1923; Chiang Kai-shek's attack on Shanghai's working class in 1926; the Comintern's redirection of world communist parties away from class struggle; the destruction of Soviet democracy in the U.S.S.R.; lapses and cycles within the Pan-African movement; and tensions between anticolonial nationalism and internationalism within the world-revolutionary left.

Thus, members of the diasporic international elicited contradictory adherence to a Stalinist Soviet Union claiming a mantle of world revolution while

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simultaneously repressing, eroding, and destroying the capacity of workers' states. Indeed, the Soviet revolution, in part because of its isolated singularity, became not just typological but archetypal for the diasporic international, even its distant mistakes and distortions templates for the world revolution conception. Ideologically, comprehension of the world revolution idea after 1917 was also produced through a filter of conflicting events on the ground where members of the diasporic international found themselves: Beijing, Shanghai, Delhi, London, Paris, Manchester, Berlin, New York, Accra. Physical diffusion, differentiated nationalisms, uneven class struggles, inconsistent or truncated understanding of Marxist thought—itsself distended by Stalinist rule—mercurial shifts and starts in political conditions, and political lines: each of these traumas of the revolutionary left tore at and challenged allegiance to Stalinism in practice even as *in name* Stalinism and the Soviet Union remained synonymous with the world revolution concept. For figures such as Strong, Smedley, James, Padmore, and Nehru, for example, this meant often sharp disagreement with specific turns in Stalinist policy—the Popular Front strategy; support, or lack thereof, for African decolonization and the Chinese communist movement; liquidation of the kulaks—mediated by overarching support for the Russian Revolution itself. Thus, what Alan Wald has noted of recent scholarship on members of the African American left is even more strikingly true in assessment of the diasporic international—namely, that “despite its clarifying potential when used in a sophisticated manner to treat an ideology, social system or political organization, ‘Stalinism’ can be an oversimplifying lens through which to evaluate the thinking, personalities and life activities of diverse individuals.” And yet, contradictorily again, even as the prospects for both the Soviet revolution and world revolution had dimmed by World War II, *Stalinism* was burnished as a historical marker of each by the very tragedies it helped to create. As Tariq Ali has noted, Red Army battles with Hitler’s troops at Leningrad and Stalingrad “provided Stalinism with a legitimacy it had hitherto established over the corpses of old Bolsheviks.”²⁵

Nowhere were the contradictions of world revolution in the Stalin era more acute than in the political work and thought of W.E.B. Du Bois. Because he came to full support for the Russian Revolution after Stalin’s ascent to leadership, Du Bois was a particularly vulnerable prisoner of Stalinism’s dark magic. In his unpublished manuscript “Russia and America,” Du Bois acknowledged directly his orientation to a “Stalinist” conception of world revolution from which he, like many of the diasporic international, was unable fully to break. “The World Revolution for which the Communists hoped did not materialize,” he wrote about the 1920s. “Even Lenin had doubted if a single Socialist agricultural state could stand alone in a capitalistic industrial world: and Trotsky had insisted that the Russian Revolution could only succeed if it was

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prelude to a European uprising. Only Stalin, slowly but with ear to ground, came to believe that Russia not only could but must prepare to stand alone in the world as a socialist state.”²⁶ For Du Bois, as for many members of the diasporic international, defense of Socialism in One Country doctrine and the world revolution concept came to be paradoxically synonymous—Du Bois referred to the Soviet revolution as a “part” of the world-revolutionary whole—even while Stalin’s leadership of the former generated massive roadblocks to the latter. This explains Du Bois’s increasingly strident public proclamations for Stalin’s leadership, especially after the successes of Indian and Chinese decolonization, and much of his refusal to recognize the material disasters and persecutions under Stalinism in his written record. At the same time, especially as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 4, Du Bois’s staggered and incomplete understandings of Marxism, his lifelong aversion to political violence, and the congruent pull of competing ideological influence on his thought (from Pan-Africanism and Pan-Asianism to cooperative economics) evince marks of doubt, hesitation, and deviation from Stalin’s Russian program up to the end of his life.

Hence, a judicious accounting of Du Bois’s relationship to Stalin’s influence on the world revolution must take heed of and refine both Robin D. G. Kelley’s assertion that Du Bois, like Paul Robeson and others on the pro-communist left, had “nothing to say” about Stalin’s atrocities, and Eric Porter’s more recent assertion that “we must avoid the problem of making leftist ideas and affinities overly determinative of his thought . . . in either positive or negative ways. Du Bois might have praised Stalin, for example, but he was not a Stalinist in any systematic way.”²⁷ Indeed, to return to an example discussed earlier: Du Bois’s essay “Africa and the French Revolution” of 1961 reconciles what, contemporarily or in hindsight, would seem to be two radically oppositional conceptions of world revolution itself: C.L.R. James’s Trotskyist-influenced conception of black self-activity as part of the worker’s vanguard with the unremitting Communist Party loyalism of Herbert Aptheker. Five years after Du Bois made Aptheker his literary archivist, James had savagely attacked Aptheker’s scholarship on Negro slave revolts.²⁸ He accused Aptheker of producing a “Stalinist” historiography that diminished black self-activity in the creation of the abolitionist movement, thereby replicating white chauvinism as a feature of the Communist Party to which Aptheker belonged. Du Bois, for his part, had viciously attacked Trotsky (though not James) in several places during the 1950s, including in his unpublished manuscript “Russia and America: An Interpretation,” discussed later. But in both the 1950 manuscript and the 1961 essay, Du Bois evinces a desire to preserve and enunciate what I have been calling a typology of revolutionary reading and writing that supersedes political sectarianism and specifically identifiable political traditions.

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The burden of revolutionary aspiration—or, in other words, the Benjaminian impulse to animate the messiah of revolution—eclipses what might be called political “orthodoxy” even in the high moment of Du Bois’s publicly professed Stalinist loyalties. Supporting world revolution in the Stalin era for Du Bois came to mean the intellectual survival of an idea—human self-emancipation—even in the objective face of its own distorted meanings and often depleted prospects. Put another way, world revolution for Du Bois was also a version of Benjamin’s angel: a figure of contradiction constantly chased forward by counterrevolution and defeat—the brooding, ever present shadow of historical and political foreclosure Benjamin called “progress.”

ON REVOLUTION AND REVOLUTIONARY TYPOLOGY: A NOTE ON METHOD

In the same year in which he published “Africa and the French Revolution,” W.E.B. Du Bois published *Worlds of Color*, the last of his Mansart trilogy of novels. The Mansart trilogy, according to Brent Edwards, is Du Bois’s most neglected major work. Yet it is arguably an explanatory key not only to his life’s self-evaluation but also to the historical method he offered readers for explicating that life. The trilogy is a collective autobiography in which Du Bois both represents and is represented by figures across the time and space of twentieth-century history. In his preface to the trilogy, Du Bois explains that fiction serves the purpose of giving history (and fact) a shape and meaning it otherwise cannot achieve. The generic slippage is a clue to an anxiety and assertion about political conclusions and political consequences in a world where epistemic reach exceeds political grasp, where “pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will” are in dialectical interplay, if not at war. Mansart’s internal soliloquy on time is key to this: the refusal of history and lived experience to conform to what we already know necessitates recognition that “our interpretation of the past has been wrong, that only through the present can we see the past. Time, in other words, shifts—future is partly the past and the past is future.” Here Du Bois again challenges “historicist” time, what Benjamin called “Once upon a time,” to comprehend dialectically the dialectics of history. In Benjamin’s words, “The historical materialist cannot do without the concept of a present which is not a transition, in which time originates and has come to a standstill.”²⁹ In 1961, time stood still for Du Bois as epiphany that the making of human struggle, of class struggle, was the only means of making and comprehending human history. The aforementioned moment, cited in an epigraph from *Worlds of Color*, is thus a gloss on Marx’s famous dictum from “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it

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under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”³⁰ For Marx, as for the late Du Bois, accepting the forfeit is the burden of historical struggle and interpretation.

We thus risk comprehending the totality of Du Bois’s concept of history by ignoring the totality of Du Bois’s life, a risk all too often fulfilled by Du Bois scholarship. Too commonly, the “late Du Bois” is configured by scholars as a veering or departure from a life lived in general disciplined dedication to humanist ideals.³¹ At times, this departure is described as a crude embrace of communism or of decrepit alienation from earlier commitments. This mechanical and stagist view of Du Bois carries with it an attempt to rescue Du Bois’s radicalism from serious scrutiny. It shuns and censors that which it implicitly condemns. Against this grain and in the interval, this study reads the self-evident traces and tracks of Du Bois’s commitment to the theory and practice of world revolution to argue for revolutionary typology as the keynote of Du Bois’s political life and political thought. Here, I borrow from the literary scholar Mary Frances Fahey’s interpretation of Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” as a pursuit of the idea that the past “bears with it a secret index through which it is directed towards deliverance.” The task of the historical materialist, writes Fahey, is to discover the “monadological structure within configuration of data and events, in order to liberate the past so that it may be put in service of the future.”³² Indeed, this book argues here and in subsequent chapters that the most productive way to read the life and work of Du Bois is backward: as the retrospective fulfillment of a conception of human history best understood as its capacity for world revolution. I claim, first, that Du Bois’s own retrospective and “revisionist” method, in which iterations of recurring tropes and ideas (the color line, double-consciousness, souls of black folk,) and textual reassemblage (the regeneration and recycling of prior themes, words, and ideas across texts) is the materialization or practice of Du Bois’s late revelation that “future is partly the past and past is future.” Second, I argue that only by seeing his thought and work in this perspective can we grasp the long arc of Du Bois’s highly secularized aspiration for a “messiah” of world revolution and the century that made it so alluring and elusive for him.

As an example of this reading method to come, I return again briefly to “Africa and the French Revolution.” Du Bois’s essay tracks citationally to three prior historical texts and three historical epochs, each of them constitutive of Du Bois’s typology of world revolution. The first is C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins* (1938). The central argument of Du Bois’s essay derives directly from James’s magisterial thesis that the consolidation of black labor in Haiti and the Caribbean constituted at once the world’s first wholesale proletariat and nascent rebellion against proletarian status and that the “colonial question” itself was a singular spur to France’s revolution: “It was not the Mulattoes

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they feared[;] it was the slaves. Slavery corrupted the society of San Domingo and had now corrupted the French bourgeoisie in the first flush and pride of its political inheritance.”³³ This historical causality is, in turn, repeated in the French Revolution’s aftereffects in San Domingo. As James puts it, “What of the slaves? They had heard of the revolution and construed it in their own image.”³⁴ James’s book, composed while reading Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* (1935), inhabits the typology of revolution for Du Bois in two ways: first, as texts that “reorder” ruling class historiographical past and present by placing a history of Caribbean slave rebellions *prior to* the revolution of the French, and second, by adopting Du Bois’s own typological reading of black slaves in *Black Reconstruction* as primary historical agents in the making of revolution. In *Jacobins*, James provides what might be called a “globalized” historiographical complement to Du Bois’s final chapter of *Black Reconstruction*, “The Propaganda of History,” his excoriation of “historicist” U.S. history that eliminates black agency in self-emancipation in the Civil War and Reconstruction. Indeed, speaking about the Haitian Revolution specifically but the arc of world revolution more generally, James averred in 1939: “The only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians.”³⁵ James’s *Black Jacobins*, like Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*, was also written in the self-conscious aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917—the crucial event in their respective “Bolshevization” of history—and within the grain of ongoing anticolonial movements in Pan-Africa and Asia (the former being the special subject of their contemporary political commitments, as I show later). Thus, James’s prefatory comment to the *Black Jacobins*—“The violent conflicts of our age enable our practiced vision to see into the very bones of previous revolutions more easily than before”—was a double-voiced, or dialectical, iteration of a typological historiographical method he and Du Bois were collaboratively developing in the mid-1930s—not so coincidentally, the age of Benjamin. The years 1935–1940, then, were something like the “midnight hour” of their own advance in world-revolutionary theory.³⁶

The second text to which Du Bois’s 1961 essay tracks is Herbert Aptheker’s *American Negro Slave Revolts*, first published in 1943. The book derives from Aptheker’s doctoral dissertation, written at Columbia University, and like *Black Jacobins* it is a companion and intertext to Du Bois’s own typological method. Like *Black Reconstruction*, which it cites, *American Negro Slave Revolts* assaults consensus school scholarship on the history of slavery, particularly the work of Ulrich B. Phillips, which, Aptheker notes, held that “slave revolts and plots very seldom occurred in the United States.”³⁷ Laying the groove of his own dissident historiographical method, Aptheker cites C.L.R. James’s then obscure (to American readers) book *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938), published in London the same year as *Black Jacobins*. Aptheker’s own

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typology of slave rebellions, beginning with a panic in Virginia in 1673 about possible uprisings between slaves and indentured servants and ending with Civil War–era insurrections, was an affirmation and defense of James’s (and Du Bois’s) earlier revisionist historiography. Like James, Aptheker argued for the symbiotic influence of rebellion in San Domingo on African American slavery and on prior slave rebellions in the United States. Significantly, like Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction, American Negro Slave Revolts* expanded its analysis of black self-emancipation to demonstrate its relationship to wider working-class struggle: “The anti-slavery struggle broadened into a battle for the security of the democratic rights of the white people.”³⁸ This reference is not just to the support from white workers in the United States for the abolitionist movement but also to what Aptheker knew to be the support cast by the International Workingmen’s Association in London, headed by Karl Marx. That support elicited letters on behalf of the association from Marx to President Abraham Lincoln urging him to end slavery and became the kernel of Marx’s most famous dictum on both race and the Civil War: “Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin wherein the black it is branded.”³⁹ It was those letters from Marx that became an important source of Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*.

The third, and culminating, source of the 1961 essay is Du Bois’s oft-neglected *Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (1939), a text that, I argue, stands as the crossroads in Du Bois’s historiographical typology of world revolution. The book began in conception as a sequel to Du Bois’s *The Negro* (1915), a study of African history. It ended as a synthesis of Du Bois’s mobile and frantic self-education in shifting scholarship on Africa (the work of Melville Herskovitz, for example, which induced last-minute revisions) and his decade-long investment in the study of Marxism precipitated most significantly by his visit to the Soviet Union in 1926. This dual orientation is registered in the structure of the book: the first six chapters are ethnographic descriptions of African history, geography, demographics, and culture; the nine later chapters interpret modern world history as the interdependence of capitalist development and the slave trade. Of all of his books, *Black Folk Then and Now* is most emblematic of Du Bois’s efforts to negotiate the midnight hour of midcentury, or what the text deems “fascist capitalism.”⁴⁰ The term signals Du Bois’s evolving grasp of Marxist theory, as well as his attempts to verify a method that can legitimate what he calls “the magnificent and apostolic fervor of Karl Marx and the communists.”⁴¹ Du Bois’s sketch of capitalism’s rise, for example, attributes Marx’s description of the emergence of wage labor to the institution of slavery. Marx argued in addition that the exploitation of Africa produced “primitive accumulation” (what Du Bois calls “primary accumulation”) that generated wealth necessary

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to capitalist development as a system. Du Bois also interprets colonialism and imperialism as intended to “keep the majority of people in slavish subjection to the white race”—the kernel of his conception of “fascist capitalism,” an argument Marx never made.⁴²

At the same time, Du Bois’s interpretations were consistent with the endeavor of *Black Folk Then and Now* to consummate the *intention* of Marxist historiography—from the *Manifesto* of 1848 through the Russian Revolution of 1917—to foment world revolution. The “typology” and resolution for this was set clearly in the book’s final chapter, “The Future of World Democracy.” Producing a progressive timeline of Africa’s own twentieth-century workers’ rebellions—in the Belgian Congo in 1904, the railway workers’ strikes in Sierra Leone in 1919, the anti-imperialist dockworkers’ strikes in Dahomey in 1923, in South Africa again and again—Du Bois concludes the book with these words: “The proletariat of the world consists not simply of white European and American workers but overwhelmingly of the dark workers of Asia, Africa, the islands of the Seas and South and Central America. These are the ones who are supporting a superstructure of wealth, luxury, and extravagance. It is the rise of these people that is the rise of the world. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.”⁴³

Several aspects of Du Bois’s revolutionary typology are at work in this paragraph. First is its analysis of capitalism’s “combined and uneven” development and proletarian global formation, a perspective owing to both the Communist Third International’s support for colonial self-determination, as we shall see, and Du Bois’s long-standing Pan-Africanist emphasis on the consequences of imperialism. Second is the embrace of a presentist (in the Benjaminian sense) temporality averring that the current moment of history can redeem failed revolutions past: “It is the rise of these people that is the rise of the world.” Third is the “tiger’s leap” into reassessment of Du Bois’s own personal and textual history of thinking about the predicament of history and writing about it. “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” is a recasting of that sentence’s inaugural iteration—not, most famously, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, but as the concluding sentence of the “To the Nations of the World,” the statement collectively constructed by participants in the Pan-African Congress of 1900.⁴⁴ Indeed, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” was a sentence fluid and repetitive—typological even—in space and time for Du Bois. He also invoked it in the essays “The Color Line Belts the World” (1906) and “The World Problem of the Color Line” (1914), among other usages.⁴⁵ Du Bois’s self-citation is thus itself part of a dialectical typology in which “objective conditions” of historical change can be measured through a mode of historical and textual repetition. In *Black Folk Then and Now*, Du Bois’s dramatic “color line” finale stands in, objectively and

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subjectively, for the closing lines of the *Communist Manifesto*: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite!”⁶ In sympathetic answer to C.L.R. James’s lament that black workers are rebelling everywhere but in the pages of capitalist history, Du Bois rewrites both Marx and himself as a leap of faith into the “open sky” of revolution both in the world and in the book.

Chapter 1 of this study, “From Comintern to the ‘Colonial International’: Making the Diasporic International, Making World Revolution,” provides a historical framework for the people and events that the rise of the diasporic international and world revolution comprised. It bookends the formation of the Communist International in 1919 and the Manchester Pan-African Congress of 1945 as emblematic of two dominant currents in the world revolution conception: proletarian internationalism and national self-determination struggle. These currents organized the political aspirations of the diasporic international and drew them into oscillating relationship, especially to the Russian Revolution after 1917. By the end of World War I, Stalin’s Socialism in One Country policy had tipped the balance of world revolution forces in the direction of anticolonial struggle and reshaped revolutionary communism to suit national liberation struggles during the Cold War and Bandung era during which decolonizing Asian and African countries allied themselves in common struggle, highlighted by their conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955.

Chapter 2, “‘Experiments of Marxism’: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Specter of 1917,” offers a close reading of Du Bois’s engagement with the Russian Revolution and especially Leninist conceptions of self-determination. It argues that the major works of Du Bois’s life written after his 1926 visit to the Soviet Union and deep study in Marxist thought oriented every phase of his political development thereafter. The chapter pays special attention to *Black Reconstruction* (1935) and Du Bois’s unpublished “Russia and America: An Interpretation,” arguing for it as a key text in his continually self-revised typological conception of world revolution and the place of African Americans within it.

Chapter 3, “India, the ‘Indian Ideology,’ and the World Revolution,” examines Du Bois’s relationship to the place of India in both his own conception of world revolution and the contradictory ideological lineaments cast out by India’s decolonization. Here, Du Bois’s emotional and intellectual affiliations with the Indian anticolonial leaders Lajpat Rai, Mohandas Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru are used as a template for measuring the tensions between nationalism and proletarian internationalism embedded in India’s freedom struggle. The chapter also explores affinities between Du Bois’s view of India

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and that of Agnes Smedley, with whom he shared important intellectual and political influences.

Chapter 4, “World Revolution at the Crossroads: Japan, China, and the Long Shadow of Stalinism,” argues that Japanese imperialism and China’s gradual emergence as a Stalinized communist state was a pivot in Du Bois’s thinking about the world revolution concept. Both events reflected the influence of the Soviet Union’s increasingly Stalinized and bureaucrat conception of Socialism in One Country, which significantly damaged the chances for China’s first revolution of the 1920s and later imprinted Mao’s replication of features of Soviet Stalinism. The chapter constellates Smedley, Anna Louise Strong, and Du Bois as similarly influenced by these developments into hard advocates for Asian liberation struggles, especially during the Cold War era.

Chapter 5, “Making Peace: Gendering the World Revolution/Reckoning the Third World,” describes Du Bois’s concomitant turn to international peace activism and his negotiation of Cold War currents as final stages in his revised typology of world revolution. Pushed by his new life partner, Shirley Graham Du Bois, toward peace politics and membership in the Communist Party, Du Bois embedded himself in a network of black female radical activists who were simultaneously reassessing their own place in the world revolution. Stalin’s death in 1953 and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 elicited a final stage of Du Boisian reflection, “revolutionary nostalgia,” evident in late stagings of his thought. Legacies of the diasporic international are also the subject of Chapter 5.

Finally, “The Afterthought” considers the legacy of the diasporic international and world revolution for scholars seeking to de-Stalinize and decolonize their work and its relationship to social and political struggle in our time.