

# **Afrocentricity and the Black Intellectual Tradition and Education: Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and E. Franklin Frazier**

by

**Greg Wiggan, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor of Urban Education; Adjunct Assistant Professor of Sociology  
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

[Acknowledgement: the author wishes to thank Dr. Asa Hilliard for ancestral guidance]

Key Words: Afrocentricity, Black intellectuals, Black education, Urban Education, Pan-Africanism, Race relations, Sociology, Urban sociology, Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois, E. Franklin Frazier.

## **Abstract**

African Americans' struggles for education in the United States have been immense and the scholarship on their achievements has been growing. This article examines the lives of Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier, and their relationships and contributions to the development of Afrocentricity. The discussion highlights the work of these three intellectual giants, and how they helped to advance research on Africa and the experiences of people of African descent. It explores Woodson and Du Bois respectively as Fathers of Black History and Militant Journalism, and Frazier as the Son of the Crisis. The findings elucidate the complexities and struggles surrounding these scholars' worldviews, and ensuing antagonisms arising from their institutional training and the resulting social dynamics of racism and color prejudice in the United States and around the globe. Responding to social, political and institutional racism, Woodson and Du Bois emphasized the centrality of Africa and African liberation in their work. However, Frazier appeared to remain in an intellectual crisis because his emerging perspectives on Africa and people of African descent was budding in the context of black pathology theorizing. Nevertheless, the paper argues that collectively the lives of these three scholars illustrate Afrocentricity and the black intellectual tradition.

The contributions of African American scholars have been remarkable, but often invisible. Although limited, the discourse on these thinkers have been dominated by names like W. E. B. Du Bois, first black recipient of a doctorate degree from Harvard University, and Charles Spurgeon Johnson, distinguished sociologist and first black president of Fisk University.<sup>1</sup> However, there are a host of less recognized scholars who were just as excellent in their contributions. For example, in 1849 Charles Lewis Reason became the first black faculty member on a white college campus in America. He was a professor of mathematics at New York Central College in McGrawville, New York.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the distinguished scholar Martin Henry Freeman graduated from Middlebury College in 1849 and he remained in Vermont and later became a professor at Avery College (formerly Allegheny Institute). Among other black professors were William G. Allen and George B. Vashon who both served at Avery College in the 1860s.<sup>3</sup> In 1870, Richard Theodore Greener, an educator and lawyer, became Du Bois' precursor, being the first black person to graduate from Harvard University. And in 1876, Edward Alexander Bouchet graduated from Yale University as the first African American to receive a doctorate from an American university.<sup>4</sup>

While the list of black intellectuals may be extensive, many of these scholars remain in obscurity because they have not been given sufficient attention. No one can do them justice in a single piece of work. Therefore, the research and writing on these individuals must be ongoing. It was the recognition regarding the lack of black representation in achievement and history that led people like Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and in some respect E. Franklin Frazier, to their lifelong interests in the experiences and contributions of people of African descent. Although Frazier was controversial in the black community, he is recognized as a prolific author and an authority on issues pertaining to black families.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the lives and contributions of Woodson, Du Bois, and Frazier. Few works have investigated these three scholars collectively and comparatively, and in the context of Afrocentricity. As mentioned, Du Bois is one of the most celebrated black intellectuals and while there have been volumes written on him, because his life and work are so comprehensive, one cannot help but bring him into the discussion. Using both primary and secondary data sources, the paper begins by discussing Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois and then E. Franklin Frazier. Due to the magnitude and excellence of these three scholars' works, I do not intend for this to be a comprehensive treatment, but a meaningful discussion on Afrocentricity in the lives of these intellectuals.

## Father of Black History

Few biographies of early black intellectuals have been written partly because of the suppression of information on these scholars' work, and sometimes the lack of primary source materials that are available. The difficulty in locating original documents is evidenced by Jacqueline Goggin's, the chief biographer on Carter G. Woodson, own admission about the paucity of information that was available on Woodson's parents and his youth. Nevertheless, she has written a concise, but superb account on Woodson's life. Born in New Canton, Virginia in 1875, Carter Godwin Woodson was the first and only black American of slave parentage to earn a doctorate in history. Through his many hours of work, he has impacted countless lives and established himself as the Father of Black History. As a young man, Woodson worked on the family farm and after he left home he did odd jobs like driving garbage trucks and working in coalmines to support himself. The young Woodson was an avid reader; he read speeches, lectures, and essays dealing with civil service reform, black history, and current events from just about any newspaper he could get his hands on.<sup>5</sup> After graduating from Frederick Douglass High School in West Virginia, he enrolled in Berea College in Kentucky in the fall of 1897. When Woodson completed Berea, he seized the opportunity to travel to the Philippines after the country was brought under American jurisdiction at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. American teachers were being recruited to teach in the Philippines, and Woodson was among those African Americans who accepted the offer. His decision to go to the Philippines was clearly influenced by his belief in the idea of social progress through education.

After returning home, Woodson embarked on a six-month world tour visiting Africa, Asia and Europe.<sup>6</sup> His travels apparently gave him an international perspective on the exclusion of people of African descent and their contributions throughout the world. His decision to become a historian was formalized in 1907 when he chose to pursue studies in history at the University of Chicago. In 1908, while Woodson was studying at Chicago he wrote Du Bois at Atlanta University requesting statistics on black churches and the training of black ministers for research he was doing on the topic. Du Bois, who was already being recognized as one of the leading black intellectuals, responded and forwarded Woodson the materials he requested.

After completing his training in Chicago, Woodson was encouraged to apply to Harvard University. While at Harvard, he recalled that some of his professors scoffed at the notion that people of African descent played a vital role in world history and American history.<sup>7</sup> Due to his experiences with racism and the anti-black climate at Harvard, Woodson almost abandoned his plan to complete his Ph.D. However, despite these obstacles on the way to receiving his doctorate, in 1912 he completed his degree in History. Later, Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to promote black history. The first meeting was held on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1915, and eventually the organization sponsored the first Negro History Week, which in 1926 evolved into Black History Month.<sup>8</sup> Woodson edited the *Journal of Negro History* from 1916 to 1950 as well as the *Journal* and *The Negro History Bulletin*.

He was totally devoted to the cause of promoting black history. However, for many of his research endeavors he was forced to solicit the support of white philanthropic foundations. When Woodson was rejected funding by the Rockefeller Foundation for his research, an emerging black scholar name E. Franklin Frazier made his objection known to the foundation, asserting that Woodson was the most competent person; therefore, he should receive funding.<sup>9</sup> Frazier, the emerging scholar, would later be recognized as one of the most prominent black sociologist ever.

Despite some financial hardships, Woodson never lost sight of his goals. He was professor at Howard University in Washington D.C. and he was active in organizations like the National Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Friends of Negro Freedom, and he supported Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, as well as the National Negro Congress. In 1926, the NAACP presented Woodson with the highest honor, the prestigious Spingarn Medal, in recognition of his achievements. For all of these accomplishments, Woodson has been given the title "father of Negro history." While racism and cultural hegemony continue to prevail in the academy, the relevance of Woodson's work remains evident.<sup>10</sup> However, even with Woodson's great successes, historians, both black and white, often overlook his work in relation to other scholars.

Clearly, Woodson's work is one of the most important in the emergence of Afrocentricity as an intellectual and life framework. Molefi Asante describes Afrocentricity as the indispensable perspective on the centrality of Africa and black studies.<sup>11</sup> According to Asante, Afrocentricity means to "literally, placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior."<sup>12</sup> Obenga explains that, "Afrocentricity is not merely an intellectual work of negation [against western thought], but, as is always the case with every critical endeavor that cares to be firm or constructive, it is a principle that rests on the human capability of self-understanding."<sup>13</sup> In this context, Afrocentricity offers a social, economic and political framework that positions Africa and African Diasporic issues at the core of its vision and work, and it seeks to reclaim and uncover the suppressed contributions of African people, while working for the continued improvement of Africa, the world, and people of African descent and the broader human population/family.

Although Asante has written probably the most definitive piece on Afrocentricity, the Afrocentric emphasis on black studies reaches back much earlier to Woodson's classic piece, the *Mis-Education of the Negro*.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, in a lesser known work, *The African Background Outlined or Handbook for the Study of the Negro*, Woodson (1936) masterfully lays out the social context of pre-colonial Africa, its contributions and major civilizations, and its connection to the black American experience.<sup>15</sup> Regarding Africa and people of African descent, Woodson states:

Scholars have for centuries differed as to the composition of the mixed breed stock constituting the Mediterranean race and especially about that in Egypt and the Barbary States. In that part of the dark continent many inhabitants have certain characteristics which are more Caucasian than negroid and have achieved more than investigators have been willing to consider the civilization of the Negro. It is clear, however, that although the people of northern Africa cannot be classed as Negroes, being bounded on the south by the masses of African blacks, they have so generally mixed their blood with that of the blacks that in many parts they are no nearer to any white stock than the Negroes of the United States.<sup>16</sup>

On early African migratory patterns, Woodson explains:

Traces of Negro blood have been found in Malay States, India and Polynesia. In the Arabian Peninsula it has been so extensive as to constitute a large group there called the Arabised Negroes. But most significant of all has been the invasion of Europe by persons of African blood. Professor Sergi leads one to conclude that the ancient Pelasgii were of African origin or probably the descendants of the race which settled northern Africa and southern Europe, and are therefore due credit for the achievements of the early Greek and Italian civilizations.<sup>17</sup>

At a time when academic racism and the dehumanization of African culture and people were the standard for anything concerning Africa, Woodson painstakingly provided evidence in a general outline of history that placed Africa at the center of the human experience.<sup>18</sup> This work provided a background and delineation of African culture and Africans' survival in America, as well as their influences in education, literature, arts and economics. Similarly, Du Bois in his classic works *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The World and Africa*, with striking sophistication in his scholarship, demonstrated an African perspective on people of African descent.<sup>19</sup> It is remarkable how much Woodson and Du Bois were able to accomplish, especially Woodson, given the few resources he had. After Woodson's death in 1950, Goggin cites Du Bois as stating, "There will be a vast respect and thankfulness for the life of this man [Woodson]," for "under the harshest conditions of environment," Woodson "kept to one great goal, worked at it stubbornly and with unwavering application and died knowing that he accomplished much if not all that he planned."<sup>20</sup> After his death, Du Bois and other scholars recognized Woodson as the Father of Black History.

### **Father of Militant Journalism**

Born in Massachusetts in 1868, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois lived to the age of 95. Although he was born before Woodson, Du Bois lived long enough to see the Father of Black History being laid to rest. During his lifetime, Du Bois wrote sixteen pioneering or provocative books on sociology, history, politics, and race relations. He was a Lenin Peace Prize laureate and his birthday was once a national holiday in China.

While he was in his eighties, he completed a second autobiography and produced several historical novels.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned, Du Bois is the first African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard University. His dissertation on the *Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States 1638-1870* was published by Harvard (1896), one of the few works by a student to be published by the University. In this work, he argued:

The slave-trade was the very life of the colonies had, by 1700, become an almost unquestioned axiom in British practical economics. The colonists themselves declared slaves “the strength and sinews of this western world,” and the lack of them “the grand obstruction” here, as the settlements “cannot subsist without supplies of them.”<sup>22</sup>

In his dissertation, Du Bois documented the rise and suppression of slavery in the United States, a work of elegance that has endured more than a century and still stands tall as a classic and a must read for any serious scholar.

Du Bois contends that the Harvard doctorate was awarded as consolation after he was near the completion of his Ph.D. in economic from the University of Berlin. However, he was denied a third renewal of the Slater Fund he needed to do an additional semester to simply defend his thesis that was already accepted to earn a doctorate in economics from Berlin, which was the most coveted degree at the time.<sup>23</sup> It appeared that producing an African American Ph.D. from Germany was not a priority for the Slater Fund or the Booker T. Washington type Americans.<sup>24</sup> While at Berlin, Du Bois might have met the renowned sociologist Max Weber who had received a temporary lectureship before leaving for a sociology professorship at Freiburg.<sup>25</sup> According to Gordon Marshall, later Weber became an admirer of Du Bois.<sup>26</sup>

During his lifetime, Du Bois co-founded the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was editor of the *Crisis*, from which volumes of writings were published that helped to chart a path of social justice for African Americans. As editor of the NAACP’s *Crisis* from 1910 to 1934, Du Bois is called the Father of Militant Journalism.<sup>27</sup> By Militant Journalism, I mean journalistic writing aimed at social, economic and political transformation, and is characterized by scholarship that questions and challenges oppressive institutions; and while providing a voice for the oppressed, it also presents direction and acts as a blueprint for the progress of the masses. In essence, this type of journalism helps to shape and change public opinion by appealing to the conscience of a nation to address systematic injustices and group domination. While the journalism of William Monroe Trotter, T. Thomas Fortune, and Ida B. Wells were uniquely important and brilliant, all of whom Du Bois respected and worked with, the writings of the latter would emerge with the most eloquent and scathing critique of the American racialized social system. Elliott M. Rudwick argued that during Du Bois’ editorship of the *Crisis*, “he was the most prominent leader of the Negro protest for civil liberties.”<sup>28</sup> Rudwick cites an unpublished school thesis by Dewey R. Jones, where the author refers to Du Bois as being militant in his journalism.<sup>29</sup>

Due to the critical conditions of African Americans and the severe treatment that they endured, which included lynching, public beatings, Jim Crow, segregation, mass-unemployment, and lack of basic human rights, among other things; Du Bois was compelled to write in a critical, commanding and yet elegant tone. As a journalist and scholar, Du Bois argued that all forms of scholarship should be used for social justice work, and to improve the plight of people of African descent.

While Du Bois was editor of the *Crisis*, he had a profound impact on both blacks and whites. His tenure with the *Crisis*, particularly between 1910 and 1919, also corresponded with the height of his influence on America and race relations.<sup>30</sup> During this time, Du Bois' name served as a household conversation piece. In his intellectually vibrant, slashing editorials against American racial prejudice and discrimination, he forced the nation to reckon with its past and present crusade against people of African descent. He made it his duty to comment on all injustices as he wrote monthly about the race problem in the U.S. and around the world. Du Bois called on readers to resist segregation, while encouraging African Americans to be enterprising artisans and professionals.<sup>31</sup> He was professor, editor, propagandist, one time candidate for the U.S. Senate, and a civil rights icon. Du Bois was an African American scholar in a time when African Americans were not supposed to be scholars.<sup>32</sup> He was an intellectual and activist, and in part a sociologist receiving everything but official recognition. His work, though largely ignored by modern sociologists, was a precursor of many of the classic themes in early American sociology.<sup>33</sup>

Du Bois contributed to the *American Journal of Sociology*, chaired the Department of Social Studies at Atlanta University, and in 1899 in *The Philadelphia Negro*, he published the first systematic sociological study of African American communities, the pioneering work in urban sociology. In the fall of 1896, shortly after receiving his doctorate from Harvard, he accepted a job at the University of Pennsylvania as an assistant instructor in sociology. However, even with his Harvard Ph.D. he was not protected from racism in the academy. At Pennsylvania, Du Bois had no real academic standing, no official ranking, no office, and very little contact with students and faculty.<sup>34</sup> Later, he would relocate to the South and begin pioneering work on the black experience at Atlanta University.

In one of his seminal works, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903),<sup>35</sup> Du Bois elegantly discusses the veil that separates African Americans and whites, and the “two-ness” or double consciousness that most blacks face in the U.S. as they are constantly forced to see themselves through the eyes of the other (whites) and are compelled to measure themselves against that other. Du Bois argued that this “two-ness” creates a great level of stress and discomfort in the lives of African Americans, because the racialized perceptions of the other remain a permanent feature in their psychology. Seemingly, Du Bois being a northern light ‘complexed’ intellect, appeared to have his own color presuppositions, much of this is evident when he got into a heated debate and struggle for power with the Black Nationalist leader Marcus Garvey.<sup>36</sup>

Carter G. Woodson was a supporter of Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Du Bois' NAACP. Garvey, a Jamaican of African descent, was leader of the UNIA, an organization that had millions of members across the globe and a large readership through its newspaper, the *Negro World*. Garvey saw himself as the black people's president, both in Africa and in the Diaspora. He was critical of Du Bois and the NAACP, which was being run by whites and northern black elites.

Du Bois, who was more the intellectual, struggled with Garvey, the international iconic great grassroots organizer, over power and influence on the black world. While the NAACP had a growing membership, Garvey had an enormous amount of support around the globe. At first, Du Bois belittled Garvey's Pan-Africanism as he saw it as being more emotional and ideological than having real substance. Du Bois had his own vision for Africa through his Pan-African Congress.<sup>37</sup> In fact, although Garvey was the most popular black leader, Du Bois never invited him to the Second Pan-African Congress, referring to Garvey's movement as "dangerous" and "impracticable." While Du Bois was critical of Booker T. Washington (another black leader whose leadership was being supported financially and politically by white philanthropy) for being too much of a white accommodationist and for being silent on issues of lynching and racial equality, he was one of Garvey's biggest critics, charging that Garvey was too radical and unreasonable.<sup>38</sup> When Garvey, who had also been criticizing Du Bois for his elitism, defended his organization and his pro-African mission, Du Bois called him a "little, fat, black man; ugly, but with intelligent eyes and a big head."<sup>39</sup> Garvey hurled back, calling Du Bois a mulatto and pointed to the way the lighter skinned caste attempted to gain acceptance from whites by protesting against darker members of the race. Both leaders denied that they had any color prejudice, but one cannot help but notice that the lower class and darker, less educated blacks gravitated toward Garvey's movement, while whites, educated blacks and lighter 'complexed' blacks toward Du Bois's movement.

Notwithstanding, throughout his life, Du Bois was a noted contributor to The American Negro Academy, which was one of the first national black intellectual societies. He was also one of the principal organizers of the Niagara Movement, which was developed to confront the accommodationist policies of Booker T. Washington, and he encouraged African Americans to press for civil rights.<sup>40</sup> His countless essays and reviews, not only in the *Crisis*, but also in other academic journals and popular magazines and newspapers, are impressive in their scope and elegance, and for this Du Bois is called the Father of Militant Journalism.<sup>41</sup> He contended without shame that whatever art he had for writing was used always for advancing and gaining the rights of black folks to love and enjoy life.<sup>42</sup> After Du Bois was branded a communist by the U.S. government and after being interrogated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, per an invitation in 1961 from Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah, who was in some respects influenced by Du Bois, but more greatly influenced by Marcus Garvey, Du Bois' rival; he headed to West Africa where he lived the last years of his life. Du Bois argued that "one of the curious results of current fear and hysteria is the breaking of ties between Africa and American Negroes."<sup>43</sup>



As Du Bois evolved in his thinking, it became even clearer to him that American blacks needed to reconnect with Africa and the struggle for independence on the continent. He wrote:

Pan-Africanism as a living movement, a tangible accomplishment, is a little and negligible thing. But there are twenty-three millions of Negroes in British West Africa, eighteen millions in French Africa, eleven millions and more in the United States; between eight and nine millions each in the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Africa; and a dozen other lands in Africa and America have groups ranging from two to five millions. This hundred and fifty millions of people are gaining slowly an intelligent thoughtful leadership.<sup>44</sup>

Du Bois saw a growing Pan-African movement, which he cherished and encouraged. Concerning Africa's contribution to the development of global capitalism, Du Bois wrote:

For the last century, Europe's interest in Africa has been the conversion of the heathen, the annexation of colonies and investment for profit in African labor and raw materials. Once, investment in Africa involved the slave trade and the transport of Negro labor to America. American Negro slavery, through the crops it raised, the commerce it gave rise to, the cities it built and the inventions it inspired, helped bring the Industrial Revolution. With the new industrial era began the decline of the slave trade and slavery and the utilization of African labor in Africa to develop African resources. Thus the search of finance capitalism for new fields of exploitation introduced a new set of problems into the relations of Africa and the white world.<sup>45</sup>

After relocating to West Africa, while in Ghana, Du Bois began working on the *Encyclopedia Africana*, a comprehensive piece on Africa and the African Diaspora. At 93 years old, he was unable to complete the *Encyclopedia Africana*. However, the project was finished posthumously by Henry Louis Gates and Anthony Appiah. In August of 1963, the announcement of Du Bois' death in the U.S. came the same day that protesters were gathered together based on the charge of Asa Philip Randolph, the grandfather of the Civil Rights Movement, to March On Washington.<sup>46</sup> According to David Levering Lewis, chief biographer on Du Bois, it appeared that Du Bois had timed his death for the maximum symbolic effect on civil rights advocates.<sup>47</sup> While attending the "March on Washington," activists who learned of Du Bois' death were saddened but inspired by the life of a man who devoted all of his talents for the cause for which they were gathered together.

## **Son of the Crisis**

One person who was influenced somewhat by both Woodson and Du Bois was the late Edward Franklin Frazier, who was a professor of sociology at Howard University. During his lifetime, he published 108 articles, numerous pamphlets, and chapters in the works of other scholars.

His unique teaching abilities granted him recognition from Baltimore public schools, visiting professorships at New York University and University of California. He lectured at John Hopkins University, Universities of London, Edinburgh, and Liverpool and during his time he was one of the few Americans to deliver the Sir James Frazer Lecture in Anthropology.<sup>48</sup> All of these accomplishments came from a man born in Baltimore in 1894, around the same time Du Bois was working on his dissertation at Harvard, and who was the grandson of former slaves.<sup>49</sup> From his humble working-class background, against all odds, Frazier became a leading academic. He received training at Howard, and his doctorate in sociology in 1931 from the University of Chicago. The Chicago School of Sociology focused on urban social processes and social pathological studies at the neighborhood level. At Chicago, Frazier would have studied with leading social thinker Robert Park, who was instrumental in developing Chicago School urban sociological studies, which were less sympathetic about black people than that put forth in Du Bois' *Philadelphia Negro* (1899), the work that pioneered urban sociology. It is important to note that Park was a friend of Booker T. Washington and he served as his secretary before becoming a sociologist.<sup>50</sup> Frazier was most influenced by the Chicago school tradition of sociology of that time, which focused on urban pathologies and deficits researchers believed to be inherent in black communities and in the culture of poor blacks, all of which became themes in Frazier's work.<sup>51</sup> In 1934, 14 years after Woodson completed his professorship at Howard, Frazier returned to his alma mater to head the department of sociology.

Frazier conducted research projects in Brazil, Denmark, Haiti, Israel, the Caribbean, and Africa. He taught at Morehouse College and was Director of the Atlanta School of Social Work, where he continued the pioneering work of Du Bois. In addition, he taught at Fisk University, Du Bois' alma mater, and he was professor and head of the department of sociology.<sup>52</sup> In 1948, he was named the first black president of the American Sociological Association. Throughout his life, Frazier was known to be a nonconformist. He argued against American racial injustice, false ideals of the black middle-class, and the failure of African Americans to "compete" with white Americans.

Frazier was critical of the black community, and in 1957, after publishing a controversial piece of work called *Black Bourgeoisie*, in which he characterized the black middle-class as having a love-hate relationship with whites and as alienating and exploiting the masses of black people as ruthlessly as white Americans, he received sharp criticisms from his community.<sup>53</sup> Although he critiqued the black middle-class, he contended that he wrote most truthfully about the topic because he himself was a black bourgeois.<sup>54</sup> Due to his scrutiny of the "black bourgeoisie" and the black family structure, unlike Woodson and Du Bois, Frazier has often been reduced to being polemical to black progress. In his work on Brazil's African descent families in Bahia, he acknowledged the Bantu Candomblé culture and spirituality as being distinctly of West Africa origins. However, one cannot help but see Frazier's lack of understanding and disregard for the African cultural retentions in Brazil's African descent population. For Frazier, Candomblé is simply "a religious cult, which embodies a fusion of African practices and Catholicism."<sup>55</sup> He states,

Whatever has been preserved of African culture in the Candomblé has become a part of the folklore of the people and, so far as family relationships are concerned, there are no rigid, consistent patterns of behavior that can be traced to African culture. As Brazil becomes urbanized and industrialized and the mobility of the folk increases, the blacks will continue to merge with the general population.<sup>56</sup>

Frazier failed to comprehend the cultural continuity of Africans in the Diaspora or Africa's contributions to world civilization.<sup>57</sup> He further argues:

There can be no question concerning the existence of cities in Africa before the coming of the European. But we are not interested in the role of these cities in nation building. Although some of the African cities played some role in the slave trade, they finally succumbed to the devastation of Africa, both demographic and social, resulting from the slave trade. We are interested in the role of the new cities of Africa—the cities which are the product of the impact of industrialization... The preindustrial African city was a market place and the seat of feudal power, and often the center of a religious cult.<sup>58</sup>

Here again, Frazier underestimates and perhaps belittles African culture and spirituality. He may not have known that African spirituality, particularly the worship of Isis [Aset], Osiris [Asaru] and Horus [Heru], one of the oldest trinities in the world, which provided the pretext and basis for western theology.<sup>59</sup> Although Frazier may never be totally vindicated from his indifference to Africa or to African culture, and for his controversial arguments about the black middle-class, his eminence as a sociologist should not be underestimated.

Clearly, the Afrocentric emphasis on Africa and black studies were central to both Woodson's and Du Bois' work.<sup>60</sup> In *The African Background Outlined or Handbook for the Study of the Negro*, Woodson provided a historical analysis of Africa and its contributions. In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, he articulated the effects of not having, as well as the need for an Afrocentric education. In like manner, Du Bois in his *Souls of Black Folk* and *The World and Africa* evidenced the Afrocentric tradition.<sup>61</sup> In the *Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois discussed the social and cultural conscience of black people living in America, and in his book, *The World and Africa*, he highlights the central role that Africa has played in civilization and in the growth of modern capitalism.<sup>62</sup> Du Bois explains:

The primary reality of imperialism in Africa today is economic. Since 1884 there has been invested in that continent a sum larger than the total gold reserve of the British Empire and France in 1939. Due to this investment there were exported annually from Africa, just before the present war, seven hundred million dollars' worth of products. And this valuation of African exports is abnormally low, since in a market controlled by the manufacturers the labor cost is depressed so as to yield high profit; the potential value of African raw materials runs into the billions.

These, then, are the two facts to keep in mind in our discussion of the future of Africa – that in the nineteenth century the African trade in men changed to a trade in raw materials; and that thenceforth the political domination which insured monopoly of raw materials to the various contending empires was predicated on the exploitation of African labor inside the continent. The integration of Africa into the world economic organization since the Industrial Revolution has been of far greater significance than social scientists like to admit.<sup>63</sup>

In Du Bois' seminal work, *The World and Africa*, he illustrates how the domination of Europe over the world and particularly in Africa, has undermined the well-being of nations. Furthermore, after experiencing a growing level of resentment towards the U. S., while increasingly embracing the idea of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois moved to Ghana where he later died. While Woodson and Du Bois embraced the Afrocentric tradition, Arthur Davis, a former Professor at Howard University, quotes Frazier as stating, "I have no illusion about myself as an Africanist."<sup>64</sup> Frazier vehemently rejected the suggestion that African Americans had a genuine culture from which Africa was the source.<sup>65</sup> The controversy surrounding Frazier may have resulted from his failure to embrace a unified African perspective and from his allegiance to the Chicago School of Sociology work on the black community.

Unlike his two forefathers, Frazier appeared to remain in an intellectual crisis because his emerging perspective on Africa and people of African descent was budding in the predominance of his black pathological and social deficit theorizing. His arguments about middle-class blacks and the black family structure reflects some of the dominant ideology and sociological thinking of the past and present, and for this members of the dominant group co-opted Frazier's arguments and partnered with him in the subordination of the race.<sup>66</sup> Frazier's lack of an African perspective sometimes gives readers a kind of cultural ambiguity when reading his work. However, towards the end of his life after witnessing Du Bois leave the U.S. for Ghana, perhaps Frazier began to realize that Africa was not only for people who were born on the continent, but it was for all people of African descent. Although he was never fully anointed by Du Bois, Du Bois was a mentor and supporter of Frazier. After Frazier's death in 1962, his wife Marie Frazier presented his library to the University of Ghana.<sup>67</sup> The fact that Frazier's library was sent to Ghana might suggest that his interest in Africa grew over his lifespan, and perhaps through the mentoring he received from his elder, W. E. B. Du Bois. In return, Du Bois, who was living in Ghana, sent a message to commemorate Frazier's gift to the University of Ghana. Anthony Platt quotes Du Bois' epitaph on Frazier as stating:

In the best sense of the words, E. Franklin Frazier was more fundamentally American than most Americans. He believed the ideals of democracy were genuine and that men equally sharing responsibility could and would improve themselves. He pursued Truth and revealed the reason for society's confusions and fears.<sup>68</sup>

Du Bois' epitaph clearly reflects Frazier's life and commitment to American democracy.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, from the lives of Woodson, Du Bois and Frazier, one can certainly see evidences of Afrocentricity in the black intellectual tradition. Although, Woodson's early education was limited due to his commitment to supporting his family in the West Virginia coalfields, he completed high school and later earned a Ph.D. from Harvard. However, he argued that it took him almost twenty years to undo the mis-education and psychological and emotional trauma he endured at Harvard. He was founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and the *Journal of Negro History*, and without doubt, he is the most important contributor to black history. Therefore, he rightly received the title of Father of Black History.

Similarly, Du Bois with relentless zeal throughout his life, exposed racism and the oppression that was being experienced by people of African descent. He wrote eloquently as he confronted a nation trying to protect its conscience and international self-image, while at the same time assaulting black people in America. While the U.S. government rightfully chastised Germany for its atrocities against the Jews during WWII, it had recently completed 400 years of enslavement of people of African descent, masterminded a Holocaust of Native Americans, genocide against Africans and African Americans, and maintained a system of lynching and Jim Crow against its black population. Likewise, Great Britain acted justly in moving to end the oppression of the Jews in Germany. However, it had recently decimated the majority of the black population during its reign in Australia, and killed of the entire indigenous population on the island of Tasmania (see David Davies' *The Last of the Tasmanians*). The U.S. and Great Britain were both unapologetic about their actions and the devastation they brought to both groups of black people. Through his journalism, Du Bois would take the U.S. and other world governments to task on their dehumanizing treatment of blacks and other oppressed groups. For his sharp and elegant scholarship and journalism, Du Bois adorns the title as Father of Militant Journalism. Following the road already trodden by Woodson and Du Bois, Frazier came to Atlanta where he was a professor at Morehouse College and he continued the legacy of Du Bois in the Atlanta School of Social Work. Later, he went to Howard University where Woodson was a former professor, and he did sociological work regarding African American families. However, unlike his forefathers, Frazier appeared not to have celebrated the Afrocentric idea. Later toward the end of his life, Frazier seemed to have gained a better appreciation for the Afrocentric perspective. Although he has been given some resuscitation, Frazier's legacy has not lived as well or as long as his forefathers, partly because early on he abhorred the centrality of having an Afrocentric perspective on the life and culture of people of African descent, and he embraced black pathological models espoused through the early University of Chicago style urban sociology. Nevertheless, in the lives of these three intellectuals, junior and senior scholars alike can find a degree of comfort knowing that the forefathers cherished the Afrocentric tradition, and that it is worthy of all their labor and commitment.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>Jessie Carney Smith, *Black Firsts: 2,000 Years of Extraordinary Achievement* (Washington D.C.: Visible Ink, 1994), 272; Ronald E. Mickens, *Edward Bouchet: The First African-American Doctorate* (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2002), vii.

<sup>2</sup>Ivan E. Taylor, "Negro Teachers in White Colleges," *School and Society* 65, no. 1691 (1947): 370-372.

<sup>3</sup>Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (Washington D.C.: Associated Publisher Inc., 1968), 271; Ivan E. Taylor, "Negro Teachers in White Colleges," *School and Society* 65, 1691 (1947): 370-372.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Smith, 89; *Ibid.*, Mickens, vii.

<sup>5</sup>Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 7-14.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, Smith, 272.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, Goggin, 132.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, Goggin, 43-125; Maulana Karenga, *Introduction To Black Studies* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1993), 34.

<sup>11</sup>Molefi Asante, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Buffalo: Amulefi Publishing Co., 1980), 66.

<sup>12</sup>Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 2-4; Asa G. Hilliard, *SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind* (Gainesville: Makare Publishing Co., 1998), 2-18.

<sup>13</sup>Theophile Obenga, *A Lost Tradition: African Philosophy in World History* (Philadelphia: Temple University 1995), 10.

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<sup>14</sup>Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Trenton, NJ: Associated Publishers 1933), p. 2; Regina A. Bernard-Carreño, “The Critical Pedagogy of Black Studies,” *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2, no. 10 (2009): 13-15.

<sup>15</sup>Karanja Keita Carroll, “Africana Studies and Research Methodology: Revisiting the Centrality of the Afrikan Worldview,” *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2, no. 2 (2008): 4-16.

<sup>16</sup>Carter G. Woodson, “The Beginnings of the Miscegenation of the Whites and Blacks,” *Journal of Negro History* 3, no. 4 (1918), 335.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>18</sup>Carter G. Woodson, *The African Background Outlined or Handbook for the Study of the Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of African American Life and History, 1936), 3-52; 179-256.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, Karenga, 282; Richard Cullen Rath, “Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W. E. B. Du Bois,” *The Journal of American History*, 84, no. 2 (1997): 461-495.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, Goggin, 209.

<sup>21</sup>David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 3.

<sup>22</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (Corner House Publisher: Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1970/originally published in 1896), 4.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, Lewis, 3-4, 144-145.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1960), 26.

<sup>26</sup>Gordon Marshall, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 173.

<sup>27</sup>Elliott M. Rudwick, “W.E.B. Du Bois in the Role of Crisis Editor,” *Journal of Negro History* 43, no. 3 (1958): 214 .

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<sup>28</sup>Elliot M. Rudwick, "Dub Bois's Last Year as Crisis Editor," *Journal of Negro History* 43, no. 3 (1958): 526.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>David Howard-Pitney, "The Enduring Black Jeremiad: The American Jeremiad and Black Protest Rhetoric, from Frederick Douglass to W. E. B. Du Bois, 1841-1919," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986): 481-492.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., Elliott M. Rudwick, "W.E.B. Du Bois in the Role of Crisis Editor," 214-240.

<sup>32</sup>John Henrik Clarke. 1995. *W.E.B. Du Bois- A Biography in four Voices* (Clarke's interview in the documentary). San Francisco, Calif.: California Newsreel. Video.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, Marshall, 173; Dick Russell, *Black Genius and the American Experience* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1980), 85.

<sup>34</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 194-198.

<sup>35</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903), 9-24.

<sup>36</sup>Elliott M. Rudwick, "DuBois versus Garvey: Race Propagandists at War," *The Journal of Negro Education*, 28, no. 4 (1959), 421-429.

<sup>37</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Crisis* XVII (1918-1919), 118-124.

<sup>38</sup>Ben F. Rogers, "William E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Pan-Africa," *The Journal of Negro History* 28 no. 4 (1959): 421-429.

<sup>39</sup>*Negro World*, February 10, 1923.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., Smith, 290.

<sup>41</sup>William E. Cain, "W.E.B. Du Bois's Autobiography and the Politics of Literature," *Black American Literature Forum* 24, no. 2 (1990): 299-313.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 300.



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<sup>43</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: an Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1946), 265.

<sup>44</sup>W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Touchstone, 1925), 411.

<sup>45</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, "Black Africa Tomorrow," *Foreign Affairs*, 17 no. 1 (1938): 100.

<sup>46</sup>V.P. Franklin and Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Biography, Race Vindication, and African-American Intellectuals: Introductory Essay," *Journal of Negro History* 81, no. ¼ (1996): 1-16.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, David Levering Lewis. *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: H. Holt, 2000), 41-53.

<sup>48</sup>Arthur P. Davis, "E. Franklin Frazier (1894-1962): A Profile\*," *The Journal of Negro Education* 31 no. 4 (1962): 429-435.

<sup>49</sup>Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 12-13.

<sup>50</sup>George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory* (New York:McGraw-Hill, 2008), 198-199.

<sup>51</sup>Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity, and the rise of Sociological Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 32-48.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, Davis, 432.

<sup>53</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1957), 236.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, Davis, 435.

<sup>55</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, "The Negro Family in Bahia, Brazil," *American Sociological Review*, 7 no. 4 (1942): 466.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, Frazier, 478.

<sup>57</sup>Cheikah Anta Diop, *The Cultural unity of Black Africa* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1978), 15-28; Yosef ben Jochannan, *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1988), 46-63.

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<sup>58</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, "Urbanization and its Effects upon the Task of Nation-Building in Africa South of the Sahara," *Journal of Negro Education*, 30, no. 3 (1961): 214.

<sup>59</sup>Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *Osiris: The Egyptian Religion of Resurrection* (New York: University Books, 1961/originally published in 1911), 11-43; John G. Jackson, *Christianity before Christ* (Austin, Texas: American Atheists Press, 1985), 8-38.

<sup>60</sup>Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Trenton, NJ: Associated Publishers, 1933), 2.

<sup>61</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: an Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1946), 16-53.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, Karenga, 282; Richard Cullen Rath, "Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W. E. B. Du Bois," *The Journal of American History*, 84, no. 2 (1997): 461-495.

<sup>63</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Realities in Africa: European Profit or Negro Development,?" *Foreign Affairs*, 21, no. 4 (1943): 721.

<sup>64</sup>Davis, 433.

<sup>65</sup>Garvey F. Lundy, "The Myths of Oppositional Culture," *Journal of Black Studies*, 33 no. 4 (2003): 450-467.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, Platt, 1; Daniel Moynihan, *The Negro family: The case for national action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965); Clovis E. Semmes, "The Sociological Tradition of E. Franklin Frazier: Implications for Black Studies," *Journal of Negro Education* 55 no. 4 (1986): 484-494.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, Platt, 220.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.* 221.

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Carter G. Woodson. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Jump to navigation Jump to search. African-American historian, writer, and journalist. Carter G. Woodson. Born. Carter Godwin Woodson. Woodson believed that education and increasing social and professional contacts among blacks and whites could reduce racism and he promoted the organized study of African-American history partly for that purpose. Woodson's political activism placed him at the center of a circle of many black intellectuals and activists from the 1920s to the 1940s. He corresponded with W. E. B. Du Bois, John E. Bruce, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, Hubert H. Harrison, and T. Thomas Fortune, among others. Du Bois wrote that his proposed Encyclopedia Africana would be "unashamedly Afro-centric" in focus. Asante resurrected the term in his 1980 work, Afrocentricity, injecting new energy into an old approach to the study of Africans and their descendants. Black Nationalism, Afrocentrism, and the Academy. A crucial prerequisite to an Afrocentric perspective is the recognition of Africa as a common "homeland" to all peoples of African descent. "Afrocentricity is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person." "the afrocentric idea in education." journal of negro education (spring 1991). Increasingly, Du Bois's emphasis was on the place of 'continental and diasporic Africans' in history and 'the harsh realities of that history that demand a different program and require Africana education to "start from a different point" '. In many ways, his was a 'proto-Afrocentric pedagogy' that employed African cultures and history and African thought and value systems to 'interpret and understand all history' (Rabaka, 2003, pp. 404-405). ... This article brings two black intellectual traditions to bear on the question of charter schools: black Marxism and black nationalism. The authors examine the theoretical and rhetorical devices used to talk about charter schools by focusing on how notions of "black liberation" are deployed by the charter movement, and to what end.