FROM THE ARCHIVES

Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore and W.E.B. Du Bois

Kwadwo Afari-Gyan

Abstract

From 1945 Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) developed close relations first with George Padmore (1902-1959), a Trinidadian, and then with Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois (1868- 1963), an African-American who became a Ghanaian citizen soon before he died. As men of thought and action, they exerted great influence on the affairs of their day; and, through their writings, they continue to exert considerable influence on contemporary thinking in the black world. They all lie buried in Ghana. This essay seeks to explore the basis of their relationship.

Résumé

À partir de 1945, Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) développa des relations étroites, d'abord avec George Padmore (1902-1959), un trinidadien, puis avec le Dr. W.E.B Du Bois (1868-1963), un afro-américain qui devint citoyen ghanéen peu avant sa mort. Comme des hommes de pensée et d'action, ils exercèrent une grande influence sur les affaires de leur époque; et, par leurs écrits, ils continuent d'exercer une influence considérable sur la pensée contemporaine dans le monde noir. Ils sont tous enterrés au Ghana. Cet article cherche à explorer la base de leur relation

Keywords: Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, W. E. B. DuBois, Pan-Africanism

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KWAME NKRUMAH, GEORGE PADMORE AND W.E.B. DU BOIS

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From 1945 Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) developed close relations first with George Padmore (1902-1959), a Trinidadian, and then with Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), an African-American who became a Ghanaian citizen soon before he died. As Men of thought and action, they exerted great influence on the affairs of their day; and, through their writings, they continue to exert considerable influence on contemporary thinking in the black world. They all lie buried in Ghana. This essay seeks to explore the basis of their relationship.

Kwame Nkrumah spent ten years in America (1935-1945) furthering his education. During the period he developed a pan-Africanist orientation. In this he was perhaps most deeply inspired by the pan-Africanist ideas of Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican who had gone to America in 1916 and had subsequently founded and led the largest black movement of his time. Interestingly, Garvey's ideas and modus operandi were highly objectionable to both Padmore and Du Bois.²

In 1943 Nkrumah became friends with C.L.R. James, a West Indian. James had gone to America in 1938 from London, where he had worked closely with Padmore, a long time spokesman for the rights of colonial peoples, who had settled in London since 1935 and had declared himself to be neutral in nothing affecting African people. Nkrumah had been highly impressed by Padmore's writings on the colonial situation, but he did not know him in person. So, before leaving America for Britain in 1945, he got James to write to Padmore imploring him to meet Nkrumah on his arrival in London because he knew nobody there and had nowhere to lodge. In the letter, James told Padmore that Nkrumah was determined to throw the Europeans out of Africa³ Padmore met him and took him to lodge at the hostel of the West African Students' Union. According to James, for over two years Nkrumah worked and lived in the very closest association with Padmore⁴ In fact, from that meeting in London began a long and intimate friendship between the two men, which grew stronger with the passage of time and was ended only by Padmore's death.

Nkrumah's original intention in going to Britain was to study law or continue work toward a doctorate degree in philosophy. But neither was to be. He got so involved in the activities of workers and students from the colonies that he hardly had time for much else. Along with Padmore, he also associated closely with intellectuals of socialist and anti-colonial orientation in and around London.

Nkrumah viewed these activities as part of a general search for solutions to Africa's problems. And it was in pursuit of the same aim that he got actively involved in the Pan-African Conference held in Manchester in 1945, a meeting which would finally consolidate the pan-African idea for him. The conference was considered to be the continuation of a series which had become closely associated with the name and activities of Du Bois. As far back as 1897, Du Bois had written that Should the Negro become a factor in world history, this will be through a Pan-Negro movement. S And since 1919 he had been the driving force

behind the pan-African congresses antecedent to the Manchester meeting. Thus, in acknowledgement of his enormous contributions to the pan-African cause, Du Bois, then aged seventy-seven, was invited to preside over the Manchester meeting. And Nkrumah says that although he had known Du Bois in America and even spoken on the same platform with him, it was, however, at the conference in Manchester that I was drawn closely to him.⁶ James saw the coming together of the three men at the conference as an auspicious event in pan-Africanism. According to him, The merging of the two currents represented by Padmore and Du Bois and the entry of Nkrumah signalled the ending of one period and the beginning of another.⁷

The merger was truly significant; for even though they had been pursuing similar causes, Padmore and Du Bois did not see eye to eye for a long time. The reason for this would seem to be ideological. After joining the Communist Party of the US in 1927, Padmore would reprove Du Bois as a 'petty bourgeois Negro intellectual' for his reflexive anti-communism.* In fact, while Du Bois would not become a communist for a long time, from 1929 - when Padmore took part in the congress of the League Against Imperialism held in Frankfurt - to 1934 he was perhaps the most important black man in official communist circles. For most of that period he served as the representative of the black world on the Communist Trade Union International (Pronfintern), and in that capacity he lived and worked in the Soviet Union and Europe.

Padmore broke with the communists after 1934. He had come increasingly to feel that the communists were not really interested in the problems of black people. And the crunch came when the Soviet Union joined the Western European-dominated League of Nations in 1934. The League's collective security doctrine implied that thenceforth the Soviet Union would collaborate closely with Western Europe to the detriment of the anti-colonial struggle. For Padmore this was demonstrated the following year when the Soviet Union proved unwilling to assist Ethiopia when she was invaded by Italy. Padmore was formally expelled from the Communist Party, ironically accused of petty bourgeois nationalist deviation and an incorrect understanding of the colonial problem.⁹

It was after his disaffection with the communist that Padmore began to seek collaboration with Du Bois on the problems of black people. In 1934 he wrote to Du Bois, probably for the first time, asking: Will you help us in trying to create a basis for unity among Negroes of Africa, America, the West Indies, and other lands? We think it can be done if men like you were to lend a helping hand. From that time on, Padmore would inform Du Bois about important events concerning black people in Africa and Europe. And whatever he may have thought of Du Bois previously, it now became increasingly evident that he held him in the greatest esteem. On Du Bois' eightieth birthday, Padmore sent him a letter in which he spoke of his sincerity and tenacity of purpose, and described him as a fighter for freedom and democratic justice, who had earned a place in the hearts of black people the world over. 11

After the break with the communists, Padmore's outlook on the colonial problem changed. Before 1934 he had worked with dedication in communist circles because he believed that capitalism in metropolis and colony alike would be liquidated through the solidarity and collaboration of the world's working classes. But gradually, as a result of his experiences, he came to the conclusion that colonial problems could be settled only by colonial peoples. ¹² Consequently, he was now looking for ways to centralize the activities of the various organizations of whatever description dealing with Africans and peoples of African descent as a means of promoting greater awareness and co-operative action. He also now believed that colonial intellectuals had a crucial role to play in giving leadership to the

decolonization effort. In view of what James had said about Nkrumah in his letter introducing him to Padmore, one can understand the *instant* attraction between the two men upon their meeting in London. Nkrumah later wrote, perhaps not without a tinge of exaggeration:

When I first met George Padmore in London ... we both realized from the very beginning that we thought along the same lines and talked the same language. There existed between us that rare affinity for which one searches for so long but seldom finds in another human being. We became friends at the moment of our meeting and our friendship developed into that indescribable relationship that exists between two brothers 13

After the Second World War, Padmore became more and more concerned with West African Affairs ... to the exclusion of an active interest in events transpiring elsewhere on the continent. ¹⁴ This was because events were picking up so fast in West Africa as to make him believe that the right conditions were being created for a successful anti-colonial revolution, particularly in Ghana. By 1954, based on events in Ghana, Padmore would write optimistically to Du Bois: Believe me, dear Doctor, no force on earth can now hold back the forward march of Africa. ¹⁵

Padmore's changed outlook on the colonial problem forms an important backdrop to the proceedings of the Manchester conference. As joint-secretaries, Padmore and Nkrumah devoted much time and energy to organizing the conference. With Du Bois they also played a significant role in the writing of the declarations of the conference. Padmore now saw pan-Africanism as an ideology in its own right, neither communist nor capitalist; an ideology which would enable Africa to steer clear of any entanglements in the cold war then fast shaping up. From the Manchester conference on, Nkrumah too came to see pan-Africanism as a political force which had the potential of uniting Africa against colonialism and imperialism.

After a detailed examination of the colonial situation, the following major conclusions emerged from the deliberations of the conference:

- colonial governments should be replaced with institutions responsive to the needs and aspirations of the colonized peoples;
- 2. racial discrimination in all its forms should be abolished;
- 3. the principle of self-determination should be applied to all peoples without exception;
- in the struggle for independence, unless prevailing circumstances made violence the only viable option, Positive Action (defined as the constitutional application of strikes, boycotts and non-cooperation based on the principle of absolute nonviolence) should be used; 16
- finally, the only way to defeat colonialism was for the participants to return to their respective countries and organize the masses of people in support of the struggle for independence.

The positions adopted by the conference and the association Nkrumah had formed with Padmore and Du Bois were to have considerable influence on his subsequent political career:

(1) In line with the recommendation of the conference, and with Padmore's active prodding, Nkrumah returned to Ghana in December 1947 to become the Secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), a political movement formed earlier that year in the quest for self-rule. But by the middle of 1949 Nkrumah had parted ways with the movement. Ideological and organizational differences mainly accounted for the breach. On

the one hand was Nkrumah, the avowed socialist and grassroots organizer (trade unions, youth movements, women's organisations, etc.) given to confrontational agitation. On the other hand were the majority of the UGCC leadership, who preferred a more conservative, constitutional form of political agitation and collaboration with the chiefs to mass political organization. The breach might have served to draw Nkrumah even more closely to Padmore.

- (2) Having broken with the UGCC, Nkrumah formed his own political party, the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), in 1949 to mobilize the broad masses of people in the struggle for independence.
- (3) In 1950 Nkrumah used Positive Action against the colonial government when he felt that it was dragging its feet on the issue of self-government.
- (4) Just as Padmore had repudiated both communism and capitalism, for some time Nkrumah entertained the idea of a socialism peculiarly suited to Africa and formulated the idea of philosophical consciencism as its basis.¹⁷
- (5) Beginning from their London days, Padmore became a close adviser to Nkrumah, and from December 1957 till his death served as his Special Adviser on African Affairs.

As Special Adviser Padmore's role was described by A.L. Adu, then Permanent Secretary in Ghana's Foreign Affairs Ministry, as to carry through (Nkrumah's) policy for the emancipation of those parts of Africa still under foreign rule and therefore to work with nationalist movements and political parties, an area of activity which it would be inappropriate for civil servants to engage in at the time. 18 Be that as it may, another reason for setting up the new office was Nkrumah's dissatisfaction with the general performance of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, He felt that the Ministry did not have an adequate sense of urgency; that it could not anticipate events. 19 And, according to Dei-Anang, a top civil servant at the time, Nkrumah was worried in particular about the Ministry's capacity to interpret his African policies with his own vigour and vision.20 There can be little doubt, too, that both Nkrumah and Padmore saw the new office as at least a partial fulfilment of a desire expressed at the Manchester conference to have a central place to keep in touch with the whole of the African world and know what is going on. 21 But, of course, the Special Adviser's work would entail much more than keeping track of happenings in Africa: it would seek to change and direct affairs in accordance with Nkrumah's vision of pan-Africanism.

Padmore came to the office with very impressive credentials indeed. His commitment to African emancipation was unquestionable. He had a firm theoretical understanding of the working of colonialism. He was widely known and respected by African nationalists. He had practical experience of organizing groups (students, workers, etc.) for anti-colonial causes. He had had long contact with Africa's liberation movements. And he was a trusted brother who had run errands for Nkrumah since the early 1950s.

While Nkrumah naturally saw Padmore as the logical choice for the new office, there was considerable opposition to his presence. Some people objected on the ground that there were already several West Indians in senior positions in the administration and the judiciary. Others erroneously thought that he was still a communist. Some top civil servants, especially in the Foreign Ministry, resented the fact that Padmore's office was a parallel organization in the country's foreign service, mostly insulated from control by the Ministry. Finally, some members of the CPP resented his role in the National Association of Socialist Students Organization (NASSO), where, in weekly discussion sessions, sometimes attended by Nkrumah, he tried to instil proper socialist ideals and attitudes as opposed to what he considered to be phoney socialism of some of the CPP members. 22.

As joint architect and the implementer of Nkrumah's pan-Africanist vision, Padmore organized conferences, accompanied the Prime Minister on visits to African countries, and ran errands for him. Unfortunately, he was not long in the office; he died in London in August 1959. As could be expected, Nkrumah was highly distressed at Padmore's death. In a fitting tribute, Nkrumah called him a personal friend whose loss was irreplaceable. He said he had worked with him for nearly fifteen years toward the independence and unity of Africa, and had all along been impressed by his indomitable spirit and his profound dislike for colonialism and every kind of oppression and subjugation. On another occasion Nkrumah said: One day the whole of Africa will surely be free and united, and when the final tale is told the significance of Padmore's work will be revealed. On 10th October, 1959 Padmore's ashes were brought down from London and buried at the Castle, amid protests by the parliamentary opposition. After Padmore's death the special adviser's office was converted into the Bureau of African Affairs to carry on similar work.

It is most doubtful if any man of his day knew more about Africa than George Padmore. So it was most fitting that in 1961 Nkrumah established a library in Accra devoted to research on Africa and named it after him. But in the general panic to undo practically everything that had any connection with Nkrumah after his overthrow, his opponents, in an act tantamount to collective amnesia, renamed the Padmore Library the Research Library on African Affairs.

Until Padmore's death, it was hardly possible to speak about Nkrumah's relationship with Du Bois without talking about the intermediation of Padmore. As the official representative of Nkrumah's party in London till he took office in Accra, Padmore was always abreast with major happenings and sometimes sought his advice, which he then passed on to Nkrumah.

On March 1, 1954 Nkrumah made an important economic policy statement in an address to the Legislative Assembly ²⁵ He said that, with the exception of public utilities, Ghana would welcome foreign capital and participation in all her industries. He added that he did not envisage any restrictions on the free transfer of profits, and promised a tax holiday and import duty relief. Nkrumah expressed similar sentiments at a press conference on June 17, 1954 when he said that his government would be socialist in the British sense and stated categorically that there would be no nationalization of industry. ²⁶ In reaction to this development, Du Bois told Padmore that Nkrumah's economic policy was a source of great concern to him, because he did not seem sufficiently to appreciate the power and danger of Western capital. Padmore replied that Ghana had opted for a policy of neutrality and would take a middle road by adopting the good features of both capitalism and communism. Du Bois countered by saying that it was dangerous for Ghana to think that she could develop through reformed capitalism. He advised Nkrumah instead to seek aid from the socialist countries to build a viable public sector of the economy. ²⁷

On the eve of Ghana's independence in 1957, Du Bois sent a message to Nkrumah in which he offered a few words of advice for the future of Ghana and Africa. First, he told him to initiate a new series of pan-African congresses. This conformed with Nkrumah's own position that only united African action could eventually defeat imperialism. Thus in April 1958, barely a year after gaining independence, he called the first Conference of Independent African States. He followed this up in December with the All-African Peoples' Conference, which brought together for the first time anti-colonial forces and freedom fighters from various parts of the continent. It is not surprising that Du Bois was the only person from outside the continent invited to address the meeting. He could not do so in person because of ill-health, but his address was read on his behalf by his wife. Ouite apart from

these conferences, one of the most outstanding features of Nkrumah's political career was what Marais has described as his intense drive towards African unity. 30 In 1956, a year before Ghana's independence, he declared that: We have a duty not only to the people of this country, but to the peoples everywhere in Africa who are striving towards independence. 31 On the eve of Ghana's independence he made the famous statement that: Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent. 32 And Nkrumah's efforts towards the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) are too well known to require recounting.

Secondly, Du Bois asked Nkrumah to work hard to achieve peace on the continent and in the world as a whole. This advice also conformed with Nkrumah's belief that the new nations of Africa could achieve development only in an atmosphere of general peace. At the conference of independent African states, he said one of their major tasks was to examine the problem which dominates the world today, namely, the problem of how to secure peace. ³³ On a visit to America in 1958 he expressed his profound concern about the peace situation in the Middle East to President Eisenhauer. Nkrumah's concern for peace led him to stand firmly against African countries joining military alliances, and against siting military bases and testing nuclear weapons on African soil. His prescription of a policy of non-alignment and positive neutrality must also be seen in the context of his general concern for peace. He believed that by not taking a predetermined stand on the East-West conflict, the non-aligned nations would constitute a force with the potential to hold the balance between the super powers in favour of peace. During his visit to America in 1958 he declared that the major task facing the non-aligned nations in the United Nations was to use our strength wisely and objectively on the side of peace.³⁴

Finally, Du Bois advised Nkrumah to build socialism as the only way to beat back the forces of neocolonialism. He believed that capitalism, white or black, could never bring about true development in Africa. In fact, by the end of 1959 Du Bois would come to the firm conviction that communism offered the only prospect for mankind to realize itself.

This conviction was borne of long study and experience. It is somewhat ironical that about the time Padmore parted ways with communism and began to collaborate with Du Bois, the latter was about to embark on a rather long journey to formal acceptance of that ideology. Du Bois did not fall for communism on his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1926. About that visit he later wrote: I did not believe that the communism of the Russians was the program for America. But on subsequent visits, beginning from 1936, he began to change his view. He says that whereas affluence and stark poverty existed side by side in the West, he noticed, particularly in the Soviet Union, such systematic and economic progress as threatened to abolish poverty altogether.

In addition to his observations about the general progress of mankind in the communist world, certain specific incidents helped push Du Bois toward communism. He says that while no American university, excepting the black institutions, ever recognized his claim to scholarship, he received honours from several Eastern European universities and institutions. 36. He was particularly impressed by an honorary degree from Charles University in Prague, Czechoslovakia, a University which he says was founded 100 years before Columbus discovered America. He later wrote that: This gesture of a communist nation doubtless prejudiced me in favour of socialism. But I do not think it alone was decisive. In 1959 he was highly impressed with, and most grateful for, medical care he received when he fell ill on a visit to the Soviet Union. In the same year he writes that while he was on an extended visit to China, beyond his expectation, his birthday was given national notice ... and celebrated as never before. 38

Against the foregoing background, toward the end of 1959 Du Bois had come to the end of the road. He wrote:

I have studied socialism and communism long and carefully in lands where they are practised and in conversation with their adherents, and with wide reading. I now state my conclusion frankly and clearly: I believe in communism.³⁹

He added that he once believed that capitalism could attain the same ends as socialism, namely, the welfare and happiness of mankind. But that: After earnest observation I now believe that private ownership of capital and free enterprise are leading the world to disaster. 40

In the light of the foregoing, one could understand Du Bois' insistence that Nkrumah should build socialism. But on this Nkrumah wavered. He began to move more to the left in economic matters after Padmore's death, which might suggest that Padmore influenced his mixed economy approach in the early period of independence. It would be true to say that Padmore eventually envisaged a socialist Ghana, but he was prepared to welcome foreign capital for some time. In any case, while at the ideological level Nkrumah always saw himself as a socialist, at the level of practice he began to show signs of some movement toward socialism only after 1960, in the form of a rapid expansion of the state sector of the economy at the expense of the private sector, as had been suggested earlier on by Du Bois. And having entertained the idea of a socialism specifically suited to Africa's conditions, it was not until after his overthrow that he finally came fully to embrace scientific socialism as the only valid solution to Africa's problems.

Upon Nkrumah's invitation, Du Bois came to Ghana in October 1961, after having formally joined the Communist Party of the United States in that year. He took Ghanaian citizenship on February 17, 1963.

One thing which attracted Du Bois to come and live in Ghana was the Encyclopaedia Africana project. Conceived as a twenty-volume inter-African project, the Encyclopaedia would offer Africa the opportunity to reveal the genius of her people, their history, culture and institutions; their achievements as well as shortcomings. A According to Nkrumah, I asked Dr. Du Bois to come to Ghana to pass the evening of his life with us and also to spend his remaining years in compiling an Encyclopaedia Africana, a project which is part of his whole intellectual life. Du Bois had conceived the idea of such an encyclopaedia as far back as 1909, but he had to drop it for lack of financial support. He revived the idea in 1934 with assistance from Phelps Stokes, but dropped it ten years later, again for financial reasons. So the encyclopaedia was indeed a project Du Bois had wanted to undertake all his life, and this explains why he accepted the job of directing it at the ripe age of ninety-three. He knew too well that at that age he could not devote as much energy to the project as he would have wished; nonetheless, he felt happy that he was doing what he could toward bringing it to fruition.

In addition to the attraction the encyclopaedia held for Du Bois, there appears to have been another, if sentimental, reason for his coming to live in Ghana. On the occasion of his becoming a Ghanaian citizen, he said:

My great grandfather was carried away from the Gulf of Guinea. I have returned that my dust shall mingle with dust of my forefathers. There is not much time left for me. But now my life will flow on in the vigorous young stream of Ghanaian life, which lifts the African personality to its proper place among men. And I shall not have lived in vain. 43

When Du Bois came to Ghana the Government gave him a house. In presenting the house to him Nkrumah said: I want my father to have easy, comfortable and beautiful

days. 44 The Du Bois' were given two cars, and the household help consisted of a steward, cook, driver, and night watchman. Nkrumah used to visit often, sometimes with his wife and children.

Du Bois died at his home in the night of Tuesday, August 27, 1963. Two days later his coffin, dressed in the Ghanaian Flag, was carried along a three-mile route to the burial place at Osu, the seat of Government, where the remains of Padmore already lay. In the evening of that day, Nkrumah paid glowing tribute to his *real friend and father* in a broadcast to the nation. After recounting Du Bois' role in the pan-African movement, Nkrumah called him a great son of Africa, who in addition to achieving great distinction as a poet, historian and sociologist, stood steadfastly against all forms of racial inequality, discrimination and injustice; and fought undauntedly for the emancipation of colonial and oppressed peoples. He spoke of his profound and searching scholarship, brilliant literary talent, and deep and penetrating mind. He saw the essential quality of Du Bois' life and achievement to consist in his *intellectual honesty and integrity*. He concluded by calling upon Ghanaians to let Du Bois continue to live in their memory as a phenomenon, a distinguished scholar and a great African patriot.⁴⁵

Nkrumah's call has not gone unheeded. On June 22, 1985 Flt.-Lt. J.J. Rawlings, Ghana's Head of State, officially dedicated the house in which Du Bois had lived his last years as the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Centre For Pan-African Culture. Later in the same year (November 2), the Government declared the house a National Monument. Then on August 27, 1986 the remains of Du Bois and the ashes of his wife were enshrined in a memorial tomb at the Centre. The Centre was charged with establishing a special research library, a display gallery for manuscripts and other Du Bois memorabilia, as well as facilities for lectures, film and video shows, and other educational and cultural programmes. It is envisaged that the Centre will eventually develop into a place where scholars and practitioners of African culture would meet, share their experiences and exchange ideas to the general enrichment of pan-African thought and culture.

In this essay I have tried to show that Nkrumah's relations with Padmore and Du Bois were based on a high degree of ideological affinity and mutual respect. Of course, the three men did not always speak quite the same language; but they were nonetheless solidly united in their singular dedication to African unity and the emancipation of black people in the diaspora.

Nkrumah's relations with Padmore and Du Bois proved to be salutary to all. Nkrumah learned much from their wide store of theoretical and practical knowledge; and, in view of their immense popularity and prestige, the association no doubt added to his international prestige and acceptability. As a matter of fact, some of Padmore's writings placed the burden of Ghana's revolution toward independence squarely on the shoulders of Nkrumah, thus contributing to his international visibility and stature as a revolutionary. 46 But, on the other side of the coin, it must have been most gratifying for Padmore and Du Bois to witness in the activities of Nkrumah's Ghana, as the first independent black African country, the flowering of their common dream and vision of black emancipation.

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