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Du Bois, Dark Princess, and the Afro-Asian International

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At last India is rising again to that great and fateful moral leadership of the world which she exhibited so often in the past in the lives of Buddha, Mohammed and Jesus Christ, and now again in the life of Gandhi... This mighty experiment, together with the effort of Russia to organize work and distribute income according to some rule of reason, are the great events of the modern world. The black folk of America should look upon the present birth-pains of the Indian nation with reverence, hope and applause.
—W. E. B. Du Bois, Crisis, 1930

Hail, dark brethren of mine,
Hail and farewell! I die,
As you are born again, bursting with new life.
W. E. B. Du Bois’s lifelong advocacy for the liberation and independence of Asian countries is both the least appreciated aspect of his political career and the one perhaps most central to its leftist trajectory. Between his support for Japan in its 1904 war with Russia and his second and final trip to Maoist China in 1959, Asia was for Du Bois a literal and figurative site of his intellectual evolution from “fabian socialist” (Adolph Reed) to revolutionary Marxist.1 Asia was the twin pole of Du Bois’s black intellectual world: after 1900, he imagined the U.S. “color line” as the “world color line,” extending into China, Japan, and India, and he considered Pan-Africanism and Pan-Asianism as mutually constituting global struggles. Du Bois’s attention to and support for radical Indian political movements near the turn of the century was likewise his first serious intellectual identification with Marxian politics. Thus it is not surprising that during and after World War I, Du Bois found himself in the midst of a national, and international, debate over the relationship of Asia and Asian national movements to the West, including Africa. Indeed by 1921 Du Bois had become the target of and impetus for arguments within the United States over two vitally linked discourses enveloping this debate: orientalism and Eurocentric race theory on one hand, and bolsheism and anticommunism on the other.

This essay will explore Du Bois’s writings during this period as a means of measuring his role in and contribution to these debates. In particular, it will examine Du Bois’s 1928 novel *Dark Princess* as a symbolic configuration of Du Bois’s political engagement with three central movements and events of the interwar era: the Indian home rule and national movements, the emergence of black radicalism in the United States, and the role of black and Asian radicals in revising Soviet policy on both “Negro” and Asian liberation during the formation of the third International after 1919 and the crucial 1922 and 1928 Cominterns in Moscow. *Dark Princess*, I will argue, is Du Bois’s attempt to synthesize these events as they unfolded in Moscow, Berlin, China, India, and the United States, the sites most prominent on *Dark Princess*’s geopolitical map. In addition, the novel demonstrates Du Bois transforming his famous metaphor of “double consciousness” into a trope for the most hotly debated political questions of his time for radicals: proletarian internationalism and the role and function of the nation. Finally, it reveals how Du Bois’s conception of orientalism was wedded to a patriarchal or
paternal ideology inflected by contemporary debates about female subalterns in the United States and India in particular, and by Du Bois’s own romantic conceptions of the Asiatic.

The significance of Du Bois’s political project in *Dark Princess* is thus several-fold. First, it marks a continuation and departure in the history of African American intellectual engagement with the discourse of orientalism, an engagement crucial for later generations of African American radicals and intellectuals. Second, it demonstrates the scope and depth of African American participation in internationalist political debates during and after World War I, a history recently beginning to be re-revealed. Third, it predicts a series of political decisions and maneuvers by black and Asian radicals away from the trajectory of an “American century” toward a deliberately miscegenated internationalist politics that anticipated, among other things, the shape of anticolonial movements of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Fourth, it centralizes the place of Marxism and Marxian views on internationalism for African Americans before the cataclysm of the depression, and thus foreshadows the wholesale turn by dozens of black intellectuals—Du Bois among them—toward a Marxism that would become by the end of World War II decidedly internationalist. *Dark Princess* thus stands as a central text in African American discursive engagement with the American, Asian, and international left in this century, and it constitutes a key text for understanding how resistance, particularly to Eurocentric discourses of race, led to the radical recasting of Afro-Asian relationships as central to twentieth-century world revolutionary struggle.

*Dark Princess* culminated nearly thirty years of Du Bois’s active intellectual sympathy for the contemporary rise of Pan-African and Pan-Asian politics. Both earned his serious attention after the 1885 partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference and the formation of the Indian National Congress the same year. It was specifically the first Pan-African Congress in London in 1900, which Du Bois attended as secretary, that turned his attention to linkages between African and Asian liberation movements. Du Bois’s speech “To the Nations of the World” announced his famous color line thesis by reference to “the question as to how far differences of race . . . are going to
be made, hereafter, the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilisation.”  

Four years later, after Japan’s 1904 victory over Russia, Du Bois concluded that “The Russo-Japanese war has marked an epoch. . . . The awakening of the yellow races is certain. That the awakening of the brown and black races will follow in time, no unprejudiced student of history can doubt.” In 1907, in a column for *Horizon*, Du Bois cited a militant speech at the Indian National Congress as marking Asian uprising as a model for Pan-African and other colored rebellions: “The dark world awakens to life and articulate speech. Courage, Comrades!” Prior to World War I, Du Bois viewed the congress as India’s (and one of the “colored” world’s) best opportunities for nonviolent overthrow of colonialism; the social democrat in him also admired its attempts at parliamentary inclusiveness—in 1937 he would cite it as a possible model for the National Negro Congress formed two years earlier. The Indian National Congress may also have inspired Du Bois to help organize the 1911 Universal Races Congress in London, attended by representatives of both Pan-Asia and Pan-Africa. There, Du Bois presented “The Negro Race in the United States of America,” a statistical survey of Black living conditions in the United States linked to those of the “darker races” around the world.

The Universal Races conference likewise deepened Du Bois’s interest in and support for Indian swaraj, or home rule, a movement whose features also influenced the plot of *Dark Princess*. This interest grew with the formation of the Gadar (Arabic for “revolution” or “mutiny”) Party in San Francisco in 1913. Gadar was created by nationalist Indian émigrés to the United States. In 1913 it formed the newspaper *Gadar*, with Har Dayal serving as editor. The Gadar Movement, as it came to be known, attempted to coordinate efforts with Indian nationals in Berlin to use German support to send arms and ammunition to assist independence struggles at home. The events resulted in the “Indo-German Conspiracy Trial” in San Francisco from November 1917 to April 1918. In 1915, Lala Lajpat Rai, a founder of the Hindu reformist movement, Arya Samaj, began a five-year exile in the United States. Rai became Du Bois’s fast friend and mentor on Indian politics. In 1917, Rai helped to found the Indian Home Rule League of the United States and formed the journal *Young India*. In 1921, Du Bois reported positively on the
national convention of the Friends of Freedom for India in New York City. In 1922, Du Bois wrote his longest statement in support of swaraj in an article for the *Crisis* titled “Gandhi and India.” The article reported favorably on Gandhi’s 1920 motion to the Indian National Congress (carried by majority), calling for refusal of all British titles and offices; a boycott of British functions; the establishment of Indian national schools; the boycott of British courts and English-made goods. Du Bois cited Gandhi’s program of nonviolence as an “outstanding factor” in his proposal: “It kills without striking its adversary,” he wrote. Gandhi is “a man who professes to love his enemies and who refuses to take advantage of or embarrass government in a crisis!” Finally, in the same year as Du Bois’s article, the Soviet Comintern hosted numerous Indian nationals, among them the Bengali Brahman M. N. Roy at the Congress of the Peoples of the East at Baku, and held vigorous debate on the “Eastern” question at the Comintern. Roy had been active between 1914 and 1916 with the Indian Revolutionary Committee in Berlin linked to Gadar, and he had lived briefly on the campus of Stanford University before fleeing to Mexico after the outbreak of World War I. Roy would pose a serious challenge to Lenin’s thesis on nationalism at the 1922 Comintern, an event which, I will show, would eventually become part of the allegory of *Dark Princess*.

More immediately, this sequence of events, in combination with the outbreak of World War I, helped to ignite a fervor of orientalist discourse within the United States, with which Du Bois also became immediately engaged. In fact, he was in part responsible for its emergence. In 1922, three years after the end of World War I and five years after the Bolshevik Revolution, the American historian Lothrop Stoddard published *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy*. Stoddard’s book openly owed two debts: the first was to Count Arthur de Gobineau, the nineteenth-century eugenics theorist cited by Edward Said as a pioneer of European orientalism. De Gobineau’s 1853 *Essai sur l’inegalité des races humaines* [Essay on the inequality of the human races] described a stark racial hierarchy of Aryan supremacy and Asian and Negro inferiority. In *Rising Tide*, Stoddard evoked Gobineau in order to interpret the decimation of Western Europe in World War I as a tragic white holocaust. Ideologically, Stoddard’s book was a sequel to fellow Gobineau disciple Madison Grant’s 1916 eugenistic tome *The Passing of the Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History*. Stoddard’s book
primarily deviated from Grant by fixing its scientific racism hypothesis to events of 1917. In his introduction to *Rising Tide*, Stoddard linked the end of the war and the Bolshevik Revolution: “Now that Asia,” he wrote, “in the guise of Bolshevism with Semitic leadership and Chinese executioners, is organizing an assault upon western Europe, the new states—Slavic Alpine, with little Nordic blood—may prove to be not frontier guards of western Europe but vanguards of Asia in central Europe.” “Bolshevism is the renegade,” he wrote, “the traitor within the gates, who would betray the citadel, degrade the very fibre of our being, and ultimately hurl a rebarbarized, racially impoverished world into the most debased and hopeless of mongrelizations.”

Stoddard’s second debt was in complement to the first, and of even more direct significance to this essay: *Rising Tide* included an attack on Du Bois’s 1915 *Atlantic Monthly* essay “The African Roots of the War,” which had appeared one year earlier, in revised form, as “The Hands of Ethiopia” in *Darkwater*. “The African Roots of War” revised Du Bois’s 1903 color line thesis, viewing the war as an exaggeration of the divide between white Western Europe and the colored world. European countries’ support of colonialism drew Du Bois’s condemnation and a call for “the trained man of darker blood” to organize against Europe. The revised essay also invoked biblical and nineteenth-century images of Ethiopia, with “hands of helplessness for an agonized God!” (74). The resurrection of Africa was symbolized by the ascent to the throne of Queen Nefertiti, who “redeemed the world and her people” (74). In “The Damnation of Women,” published for the first time in *Darkwater* in 1919, Du Bois returned to the image of defiant black womanhood in antiquity: “The primal black All-Mother of men down through the ghostly throng of mighty womanhood, who walked in the mysterious dawn of Asia and Africa” (165). The all-black Mother is the progenitor of dark and dusky heroines of history—Cleopatra, Candace, Sojourner Truth. Du Bois names this figure as “Isis . . . the titular goddess,” whose spell still pervades the land of Africa. Du Bois’s final formulation is a global family tree descending from a primal moment of Afro-Asian commingling: “The father and his worship is Asia; Europe is the precocious, forward-striving child; but the land of the mother is and was Africa” (166).
As Alys Weinbaum has perceptively argued, the “primal All-Black Mother” image in *Darkwater* bespoke Du Bois’s efforts to critique both orientalist eugenics theory and the specific U.S. cultural practice of denigrating or excluding black women from its “national genealogy.” Dark Princess would later signal these twin goals by ascribing images of black maternity to both the biological mother of protagonist Matthew Towns as well as the Princess Kautilya. Du Bois’s efforts to revalue and reevaluate Afro-Asian maternity also reflected his critical engagement with orientalist representations of India in books like Katherine Mayo’s 1916 *Mother India*. Mayo, a liberal American feminist, offered a statistical indictment of reproductive risks, child-bride customs, and paternalism in Indian society, patently essentialist and colonialist in her refusal to account for imperialism’s role in India’s social development. Both Du Bois and Lajpat Rai responded separately and angrily to the book in their 1920s writings. At the same time, Du Bois’s romantic and biological essentializing of African and Asian maternity in *Darkwater* reflected his own vulnerability to a tradition of what might be called Afro-orientalism. It invoked what Wilson Moses calls Du Bois’s “unilinear conception of progress” drawn from popular nineteenth-century Afrocentric notions that “the great civilizations of the past were Hamitic and therefore creations of the black Afro-Asiatic race.” With the notable exception of Anna Julia Cooper, this tradition generally depended on an exotic essentializing of Afro-Asian vitality, usually associated with the feminine, and an uncritical glorification of black antiquity. Variations on this theme may be found in the work of nineteenth-century writers like Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummell, as well as in the writings of Du Bois’s contemporary Marcus Garvey. Also mediating Du Bois’s tendency to romanticize African and Asian antiquity was the ever-competing influence of historical materialism and socialist ideology. As he would later write in *The World and Africa* on the same topic, “Africa saw the stars of god; Asia saw the soul of man; Europe saw and sees only man’s body, which it feeds and polishes until it is fat, gross, and cruel.” Indeed, it was in *The World and Africa* that Du Bois, more committed to an anticolonialism rooted in historical materialist analysis, attempted to overcome and rebalance his own orientalist tendency to diminish Africa’s potential as her partner in world liberation: “Despite the crude and cruel motives behind her shame and exposure, her
degradation and enchaining,” he wrote there, “the fire and freedom of black
Africa, with the uncurbed might of her consort Asia, are indispensable to the
fertilizing of the universal soil of mankind, which Europe would nor could
give this aching earth” (260).

Interestingly, the supercharged rhetoric of public response to Darkwater
discloses each of these aspects of Du Bois’s developing ideas on Asia and
Africa: in addition to Stoddard’s phlegmatic reaction to the book, the Times
Literary Supplement of London said Darkwater revealed “the dark depths of
a passionate and fanatical mind.” The Paris edition of the New York Herald
devoted an editorial to the book titled “Black Bolshevism.” In Darkwater, the
paper wrote, Du Bois is “intoxicated” by colonial self-determination, which
“partakes of frenzy” and “represents the spread of the Bolshevist madness.”
In fact, in real political terms, Du Bois’s writings in Darkwater were by far
his most militant to date. The just-concluded world war, he wrote in “The
Souls of White Folk,”

was primarily the jealous and avaricious struggle for the largest share in
exploiting darker races. As such it is and must be but the prelude to the
armed and indignant protest of these despised and raped peoples. Today
Japan is hammering on the door of justice, China is raising her half-
manacled hands to knock next, India is waiting for the freedom to knock,
Egypt is suddenly muttering, the Negroes of South and West Africa, of
the West Indies, and of the United States are just awakening to their
shameful slavery.

Typical of his color line formulations of this period, Du Bois perceived
Asia as the probable forerunner to African and black U.S. liberation. Yet
Darkwater also featured a new characterization of black U.S. life, which
became gradually more central to Du Bois’s long-term assessment of hemi-
spheric struggle. In the essay “Of Work and Wealth,” Du Bois described the
ongoing black migration to the North and the horrific events of racist attacks
in 1917 and 1919 as “the old world horror come to life again: all that Jews
suffered in Spain and Poland; all that peasants are suffering in France, and
Indians in Calcutta” (95). Du Bois’s new conception of American blackness
invoked a stagist view of material struggle, which had deposited American
Negroes in a vanguard position:
There is not only the industrial unrest of war and revolutionized work, but there is the call for workers, the coming of black folk, and the deliberate effort to divert the thoughts of men, and particularly of workingmen, into channels of race hatred against blacks. . . . the American Negroes stand today as the greatest strategic group in the world. Their services are indispensable, their temper and character are fine, and their souls have seen a vision more beautiful than any other mass of workers. They may win black culture to the world if their strength can be used with the forces of the world that make for justice and not against the hidden hates that fight for barbarism. (97)

Du Bois’s largely unremarked on revision here of the “souls” of black folk as an untapped touchstone of internationalist race and labor consciousness was grounded in a new apprehension of black labor as a motive force in history. “Of Work and Wealth” posits black workers’ “culture” as African America’s most seductive offering to the world, a downward mobilizing of the “kingdom of culture” in his more famous 1903 formulation in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Too, the culture of black labor carries with it the blood message of ancient wounds suffered across the colored world, the stigmata of economic exploitation from Israel to Calcutta. Du Bois’s pan-internationalism in *Darkwater*, that is, assumed an economist rhetoric absent from his prewar writings. This transformation of tropes and ideas in Du Bois’s work is most fully apprehended through a close reading of his 1928 novel *Dark Princess*, a book encapsulating and dramatizing the events between 1917 and 1928, which reconfigured both his later views on Afro-Asia and the color line as well as the color of his own political ideas.

Subtitled “A Romance,” *Dark Princess*’s story line is both simple and complex: Matthew Towns, a twenty-five-year-old black American medical student, exiles himself from the United States in 1923 after being excluded by race from registering for obstetrics at the University of Manhattan in New York. He arrives in Berlin—where Du Bois himself attended university in 1892—and one day intervenes on behalf of a striking young Indian woman after a white American accosts her with a racist expletive. The woman is the twenty-three-year-old Kautilya, Princess of Bwodpur, daughter of the maharaja, “the last of a line that had lived and ruled a thousand years.”21
Fresh from solidarity visits to China’s Sun Yat-sen, India’s Gandhi, Japan, and Egypt, the princess invites Matthew to meet with a circle of international radicals coordinating the “darker” races against white world power. They include a Japanese, two Indians, two Chinese, an Egyptian and his wife, and a “cold and rather stiff Arab.” The group represents “All the darker world except the darkest,” the black American. One thrust of the group’s deliberation is to unite “Pan-Africa . . . with Pan-Asia” as a response to “dominating Europe which has flung this challenge of the color line” (21). Another is to decide how to act on their recent collective education in the Soviet Union, sketchily referenced in the text, where the theater of Meyerhold and “reports on the American Negro” have left equally deep marks. “Their [the Negroes’] education, their work, their property” and the “odds, the terrible, crushing odds against which, inch by inch, they have fought” have led some in the group, including the princess, to consider it essential to draw the Negro into the global “darker” sphere. For others, like the Egyptian, Moscow is “dangerous company” and like “leaning on broken reeds,” while for the Japanese, “there is a deeper question—that of the ability, qualifications, and real possibilities of the black race in Africa or elsewhere.” This remark elicits in Matthew one of a number of political epiphanies in the text, this one that “there loomed plain and clear the shadow of a color line within a color line, a prejudice within prejudice, and he and his again the sacrifice” (22). The shadow is not only of racial and national enmity (perhaps reflective of Du Bois’s ambivalence in 1927 about Japan’s rising national ambitions), but of class distinction. Matthew, and by extension the laboring class he represents as a descendant of slaves, is the proletariat underdog in this aristocratic international, a point that foreshadows the princess’s later downward mobility. The antiblack prejudice also likely signals Du Bois’s awareness of caste prejudices that function as obstacles to successful international alliance with African Americans, an issue Du Bois otherwise glosses in the novel.

The princess then solicits Matthew to act as an agent of information on black Americans in hopes of orchestrating a U.S. uprising. Back home, Matthew follows instruction and falls in with a man named Perigua, a West Indian (something like a Garveyite) who seeks to explode the “lynching belt” in the United States by persuading Matthew to assist in the bombing of a passenger train carrying Ku Klux Klan members to Chicago. Matthew
agrees, and the scheme is averted by happenstance when the princess ends up a passenger on the same train! When the plot and Matthew’s part in it are exposed, he is sentenced to prison. His release comes through the hard work of an ambitious black Chicago ward politician, Sammy Scott, who is persuaded by his mulatto assistant Sara Andrews to use his case as political bait in his next election. Matthew works for Sammy’s office on his release and enters a chilly political marriage with Sara. The princess meanwhile is promised several times in marriage, including once to a British soldier, but her love for Matthew and a fear that the marriages will abrogate the royal line and Indian home rule persuades her to evade them all. Instead, the partners descend together into the American working class: the princess incognito as a house servant and union organizer; Matthew as a laborer and organizer among subway workers in Chicago. After consummating their affair, the princess travels to Prince County, Virginia, to meet Matthew’s mother, a one-time sharecropper “who sold her forty acres” to pay for Matthew’s education. The book ends at Matthew’s Virginia homestead with a miraculous rendering of their marriage and Kautilya’s surprise presentation of their newborn child, “Messenger and Messiah to all the Darker Races.” The climactic scene takes place at sunrise, 1 May 1927 (310).

Despite its 1923 dateline, the epigraph to Dark Princess, like its finale, suggests a more sweeping political, narrative, and biological cycle. “Earth is pregnant,” writes Du Bois. “Life is big with pain and evil and hope. Summer in blue New York; summer in gray Berlin; summer in the red heart of the world!” (3). Du Bois’s color imagery and geography playfully evokes the “red summer” of 1919, the year of antiblack racial rioting in the United States, which resulted from the violent conflict of southern black migration and white northern labor, and the year, we are told, that Matthew Towns leaves Prince County, Virginia, for New York City. Relatedly, 1919 was also the year of a split in the world socialist movement and the formation of the third Communist International, events with immediate consequences for Du Bois’s fictional political constituents. In the United States, the split occasioned a break in the New York New Negro movement between opponents of the Bolshevik Revolution and its supporters—a schism to which I will return momentarily. The third International was also noteworthy for its description of India as one of the “slaves” of colonialism following a 1919 visit to Moscow
by Mahendra Pratep, a prominent émigré leader of the Berlin “Provisional Government of India,” established by the Indian Revolutionary Committee during World War I. Pratep was no communist, but he did present Lenin with a tract entitled the “Religion of Love,” a nonmaterialist bid to force the Soviet leader to use the provisional government to establish links with revolutionary centers in Bengal and Punjab.\(^2\) His example may well have given Du Bois the idea to use Matthew and Kautilya’s erotic romance as the test case of Afro-Asian solidarity.

Despite these suggestive historical roots, however, 1922 was most likely the year that crystallized the idea for *Dark Princess* in Du Bois’s mind. The fourth congress of the Comintern in Moscow in that year featured its first black representatives from America: the Dutch-Guianan-born Otto Huiswood and the Jamaican poet and resident Claude McKay, pro-Bolshevik survivors of the 1919 New Negro split. Also present and a key player in debate was M. N. Roy, cofounder of the Mexican Communist Party. McKay and Roy in particular left both the Comintern and the triangular relations of the Soviet Union, American blacks, and Asia depicted in *Dark Princess* deeply changed. The former presented a “Report on the Negro Question,” which argued that the great migration, World War I, northern industrialization, and American racism, particularly in the trade union movement, had made “the Negro question . . . at bottom a question of the working class.”\(^23\) By insisting that “The International bourgeoisie would use the Negro race as their trump card in their fight against world revolution,” McKay’s report helped give impetus to the congress’s “Theses on the Negro Question,” exhorting the Communist International to “use every instrument within its control to compel the trade unions to admit Negro workers to membership.”\(^24\) (McKay’s subsequent essay on his Soviet visit, “Soviet Russia and the Negro,” was published by Du Bois in the *Crisis* in 1924.) Indeed, Cedric Robinson, Harry Haywood, and, most recently, Bill Maxwell have demonstrated how McKay and Huiswood’s reports and influence at the 1922 Comintern helped lead to Lenin, Zinoviev, and Stalin’s articulations on the “National Question” and helped to formulate the “Black Belt thesis” of African Americans as a special “nation within a nation,” debated hot and heavily throughout the 1920s.\(^25\) In his autobiography *Black Bolshevik*, Haywood summarized this shift in party line as follows: “As the theory was put into practice, we learned that national
cultures could be expressed with a proletarian (socialist) content and that there was no antagonistic contradictions, under socialism, between national cultures and proletarian internationalism. . . . Thus the Bolsheviks upheld the principle of ‘proletarian in content, national in form.’”

Du Bois registers the impact of these events in *Dark Princess* in several ways. In the book’s opening pages, the princess speaks of her recent study of the “Negro Question” in Moscow as impetus for inviting Matthew to join her colored circle of anticolonialists in Berlin. It is, she says, “a report I read there from America that astounded me and gave me great pleasure—for I almost alone have insisted that your group was worthy of cooperation” (16). Elsewhere in the opening section of *Dark Princess*, Kautilya insists to Matthew that “you American Negroes are not a mere amorphous handful. You are a nation!” (16). Still other events in the novel suggest contemporary real-world fiction black internationalists as models. It was while working as a Pullman porter, for example, that the young Claude McKay wrote the notorious 1919 sonnet “If We Must Die,” urging black compatriots to “nobly die” fighting antiblack, antilabor rioters in cities like Chicago. In part 2 of *Dark Princess*, titled “The Pullman Porter,” Matthew joins the first all-black American trade union and commits to a plan of violent retaliation against the Ku Klux Klan after a failed strike. He justifies his participation by explaining to himself, “He was dying for Death. The world would know that black men dared to die” (85). The Pullman job also allows Matthew to see the Ku Klux Klan and white American labor as parallel organizations, using the threat of Filipino workers to break black strikes and trying to “pit the dark peoples against each other” (78). Du Bois thus presents both violent retaliation and all-black organizing as strategic local responses to attempts to divide the international proletariat by making “colored labor . . . the wage-hammering adjunct of white capital” (58). Indeed, parts 2 and 3 of *Dark Princess*, including a description of Chicago machine-style politics, are rendered as locus classicus reiterations of World War I’s imperialist dimensions: “There was war in Chicago—silent, bitter war. It was part of the war throughout the whole nation; it was part of the World War. Money was bursting the coffers of the banks—poor people’s savings, rich people’s dividends. . . . So there was war in Chicago,—World War, and the Republican machine of Cook County was
fighting in the van. And in the machine Sammy and Sara and Matthew were little cogs” (168).

Meanwhile, at the same 1922 Comintern that formulated the new Negro thesis, the Eastern Commission of the Fourth Congress, in direct response to Roy’s pressuring of Lenin, drafted its “Theses on the Eastern Question,” defining the goal of the Communist International to organize working and peasant masses and to “fight for the most radical possible solution of the tasks of bourgeois-democratic revolution.” John Haithcox has written that the Roy-Lenin debates in the 1922 Comintern were its first attempt to “formulate a policy which would successfully merge the revolutionary aspirations of nationalist anticolonialism and communist anticapitalism.” In his 1922 *Crisis* essay titled “Gandhi and India,” Du Bois cited favorably the observation by a British Labor Party representative at the 1920 Indian National Congress that Gandhi was India’s equivalent to Lenin. Indeed, Du Bois’s 1922 support of the efforts of the Indian National Congress toward self-determination anticipate his epigraph to this essay supporting India as an example for African Americans to follow. In an effort to fuse and sustain his evolving Marxist and anti-orientalist agenda, then, Du Bois sought to literally make analogous what he called the “rising tide of new and popular thought” in all corners of the colored world.

It is this complex moment of theoretical and geographical rapprochement that *Dark Princess* most astutely allegorizes. As Cedric Robinson has noted, Du Bois’s hostility to narrow nationalism and Garveyism and his fabian socialism were romanced and wedded by the 1920s’ turn in the line of international communism. In 1925, Du Bois gave one clear indication of this turn. His December column in the *Crisis*, “The Black Man and Labor,” noted that “two significant moments have recently taken place among us,” the organization of a Pullman porters union and a meeting of “colored Communists” in Chicago. The short-lived American Negro Labor Congress of that year, held in Chicago, was a direct response by the American Communist Party to the new Soviet position on black labor, and so registered by Du Bois: “If black men wish to meet and learn what laborers are doing in England or in Russia and sympathize with their movements they have a perfect right to do so. . . . *The Crisis* . . . asserts the right of any set of American Negroes to investigate and sympathize with any industrial reform whether it springs from
Matthew Towns’s engagement with the Pullman porters and the Chicago setting thus provided Du Bois a symbolic landscape and platform for Towns’s blatant transformation to revolutionary consciousness: “If then in Chicago we can kill the thing that America stands for, we emancipate the world” writes Matthew to Kautilya. “There must be developed here that world-tyranny which will impose by brute force a new heaven on this old and rotten earth” (285). Reciprocally, Matthew’s new “theses” on black labor find parallel in the princesses’ work with the New York Box Makers Union, a fictitious rendering of the Paper Box Union in New York which Du Bois had also singled out for praise in the Crisis for accepting colored workers. Indeed, at every turn of Dark Princess, Du Bois sought to analogize the proletarian content of his protagonists’ respective racial and national experiences: Kautilya suffers sexual harassment from a white overlord while working as an American domestic; Matthew’s work as train car servant and subway digger evokes not just the important role of the All India Railway Federation in the organization of Indian trade unions after 1919, but mirrored the extracurricular labor undertaken by Harry Haywood and his Egyptian, Chinese, and Indian colleagues at the Moscow University of Toilers of the East, a comrade training school opened with the support and instruction of M. N. Roy. Haywood in fact arrived for training at the university in 1926, the same year of Du Bois’s first extensive six-week tour of the Soviet Union, undertaken while writing Dark Princess. Du Bois’s awareness of and support for such training was not so subtly referenced in the novel via Towns’s experience of racism from an Italian worker aboard his steamship home: “They hated and despised most of their fellows,” Du Bois wrote, “and they fell like a pack of wolves on the weakest. Yet they all had the common bond of toil; their sweat and the sweat of toilers like them made one vast ocean around the world” (40).

Du Bois’s image here of “darkwater” as the amniotic fluid of proletarian internationalism also points to the complex configuration of the feminine in Dark Princess, particularly in light of orientalist readings of global politics by his contemporaries. Du Bois’s representation of an essential maternal African nation in Darkwater, for example, was, as noted earlier, consistent with his early Pan-Africanist identification of the female as repository of national—and nationalist—culture. Dark Princess attempts to fuse the princess Kautilya
and Matthew’s black mother into a single image of this idea. Like Matthew
and his mother, the princess emerges from the “black South in ancient days”
(228); India is described as the “birthplace” and “black womb” (227) of
the ancient world; the princess’s and Matthew’s disparate lineage is fused
by the image of Matthew’s mother as “Kali, the Black One; wife of Siva,
Mother of the World” (220). Kautilya’s Bolshevik tough love evokes not
only Kali’s “double” aspect of destruction and compassion, but mirrors Du
Bois’s invocation of the black spirituals as cultural touchstones of Matthew’s
relationship to black earth, including his mother’s experience of forty acres
and a mule. At the same time, Kautilya’s overwrought erotic charms—“She
was a large woman—opulent and highly colored, and she lay there on her
back looking straight up into his eyes” (76)—hint at a flattened orientalist
projection of exoticism that Du Bois baldly succumbs to while attempting
to couple it to the twin forces of radical politics and love. Both of these
aspects Du Bois found lacking in his famous 1926 attack on the Harlem
Renaissance titled “Criteria of Negro Art,” as well as in his critique of
touristic black sexuality in African American literature of the 1920s. As
Claudia Tate aptly notes, Du Bois was “for most of his life a romantic
who linked his revolutionary doctrine to his belief in providential history
and thereby transformed social data into eroticized cultural metaphors.”
Hence Princess Kautilya’s beauty is a “mongrel” miscegenation: her colored
allies believe that the princess’s visit to Russia has “inoculated her with
Bolshevism of a mild but dangerous type” (29). Du Bois’s playful troping
on the “one-drop rule” is deepened by the semantic wedding of the princess
and Matthew: both are called, at various points in the text, “Bolshevik” and
“nigger,” the equation of terms suggesting what might be seen as political
catalysts for their fatal anti-imperialist attraction.

This complex and overdetermined doubling motif, as Paul Gilroy has
noted, shows Du Bois struggling after “not the fusion of two purified essences
but rather a meeting of two heterogeneous multiplicities that in yielding
themselves up to each other create something durable and entirely appropri-
ate to anti-colonial times.” More concretely, Du Bois is straining to release
his own famous figure of “one dark body” in Souls of Black Folk from the
“unreconciled strivings” of a single (and singular) double consciousness. In
“Souls of Black Folk,” Du Bois famously cast the Seventh Son as he who
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is “longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.” This proto-Messianic figure is literally an heir to a cosmopolitan line of descent, “After the Egyptian and the Indian, the Greek and the Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian.” In *Dark Princess*, Kautilya trades her political inheritance as Indian royalty for an internationalist pedigree that includes collaboration with national revolutionary movements in China, Japan, and Egypt. Her and Matthew’s commitment to the international proletariat also adds the specter of class consciousness to “double” racial consciousness. “Can we accomplish this double end in one movement?” asks the princess of their joint efforts to liberate black workers and achieve Indian home rule. “Brain and Brawn must unite in one body. But where shall the work begin?” asks Matthew. The answer is in the physical and theoretical potential of their coupling: “Workers unite, men cry, while in truth always thinkers who do not work have tried to unite workers who do not think,” writes the princess. “Only working thinkers can unite thinking workers” (286). Du Bois’s conception is indeed immaculate: his recipe for the newborn messiah of *Dark Princess* must by necessity be “proletarian in content, international in form!”

*Dark Princess* was completed in 1927 and published in 1928. In February 1927, the Association of Oppressed Peoples (AOP) met in Brussels. The group had been founded in 1924 as the Anti-Imperialist League. According to David Kimche, the AOP had “strong Communist leanings,” but the support of many nationalists and radical noncommunists “centered mainly in Berlin.” Representation at the AOP included 175 delegates from thirty-seven countries and territories, including Nehru, Ho Chi Minh, Muhammad Hatta, Madame Sun Yat-sen, and Léopold Senghor. Kimche has described the 1927 meeting as “the father of Afro-Asian solidarity, the forerunner of the conference at Bandung.” In 1928, the sixth congress in Moscow formalized the Comintern’s “Black Belt thesis.” The congress consummated the hybrid work of Roy, Lenin, McKay, Huiswood, and others before and after the 1922 Comintern. *Dark Princess* prophetically merged these contemporary historical plotlines. The book ends with the princess declaring that “The colored world goes free in 1952,” and Kautilya’s closing description
to Matthew of the need to center their global revolutionary work in the “womb” of his own world-historical experience:

Here in Virginia you are at the edge of a black world. The black belt of the Congo, the Nile, and the Ganges reaches up by way of Guiana, Haiti, and Jamaica, like a red arrow, up into the heart of white America. Thus I see a mighty synthesis: you can work in Africa and Asia right here in America if you work in the Black Belt. (286)

This culminating image of black penetration into the “heart of whiteness” bespeaks the tentative political formula for Du Bois’s Afro-Asian internationale. It was his most pronounced, if veiled, statement of his interest in what he called in 1933 the “Russian experiment,” while providing incontrovertible support for national liberation struggles motivated by the self-determinationist rhetoric of the World War I era, ranging from Woodrow Wilson, to Lajpat Rai, to the Comintern. By enacting Afro-Asian linkages amidst world wars, colonialism, orientalism, the third International, and rising Pan-Africanism, Dark Princess also anticipated the roots and routes of a number of Afro-intellectuals who in its wake would take cause in the cause of both Asian independence and Afro-Asian solidarity. George Padmore, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Paul Robeson, Stokely Carmichael, Martin Luther King Jr., Huey Newton, John Killens, Robert F. Williams, and the Black Panthers would all make the “Asian turn” during the anticolonial period. The princess’s transnational migrations and circulations likewise resonate with the lives and political movements of Asian anticolonials from M. N. Roy to Ho Chi Minh, whose own roots and routes included passages from India and Vietnam through California, London, and New York City, respectively, and back into the crucible of revolutionary struggles. No other American novel of this century provides a better fictional road map to these episodes. At the same time, Dark Princess’s melodramatic and sentimental climax offering a miscegenated messiah as the birth of a new international world order rendered visible the patrician paternalism of Du Bois’s own Asian romance. “With its hallucination of Brahmin royalty, royal blood, and its vision of the golden child as the incarnation of a new inter-racial alliance,” notes Weinbaum, “Dark Princess reinscribed the orientalism we might expect it to challenge, while simultaneously making what may
be called a ‘racial original mistake,’ an essentializing argument about racial genealogy and belonging that is on a structural level a mere revamping of that made by advocates of racial nationalism in the U.S. context”—notably his adversaries Stoddard and Grant.38

Finally, *Dark Princess*’s rendering of World War I Berlin, Moscow, New York, and Chicago as epicenters of Afro-Asian revolution also anticipates most obviously and directly the seminal Afro-Asian moment of this century, the 1955 summit meeting of decolonizing African and Asian internationalists at Bandung, Indonesia. In stunning prophecy of this period, Princess Kautilya declares near novel’s end, “The colored world goes free in 1952.” Ironically, 1952 would see the revocation of Du Bois’s passport as American citizen—a revocation that prevented him from attending the Bandung Conference. Du Bois’s lost passport may perhaps be seen as a final footnote on the discursive internationalisms predicted by *Dark Princess*. Among those it anticipated was Du Bois’s own rebirth as Communist Party member preceding his exile to Ghana. This moment is inscribed and foretold in *Dark Princess* on the occasion of the author’s last visit to Maoist China. On 1 May 1959, thirty-two years to the day after the fictional birth of the “messiah of all the darker races,” Du Bois dedicated the poem “I Sing to China.” Its appeal to China to help wake a “sleeping” African continent carried the apocalyptic anger of a last judgment, the millennial hopes of liberation theology, and the utopian aspiration of a committed Marxist. It also conjured Asia one final time as the black world’s significant other, or as Matthew says of his love for Kautilya, “the rubbing of a kindred soul—the answering flash of another pole” (272):

Help her, China!
Help her, Dark People, who half-shared her slavery;
Who knows the depths of her sorrow and humiliation;
Help her, not in Charity,

But in glorious resurrection of that day to be,
When the Black Man lives again
And sings the Songs of the Ages!
Swing low, Sweet Chariot—
Good news! the Chariot's a' coming! . . .
. . . Communes, Communes, with the elect of Heaven
With Mother Earth, daughter of Sky and Sun
Born of Democracy, fertilized by Communism
Parents of Revolution, Makers of the World! . . .
. . . Shout, China!
Roar, Rock, roll River;
Sing, Sun and Moon and Sea!
Move Mountain, Lake and Land,
Exalt Mankind, Inspire!
For out of the East again, comes Salvation!
Leading all prophets of the Dead—
Osiris, Buddha, Christ and Mahmoud
Interning their ashes, cherishing their Good;
China save the World! Arise, China!

Notes

1 See Adolph Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Despite the pronouncement of his socialism and Marxist leanings as early as 1905, few of Du Bois’s critics or biographers have taken seriously the task of discerning their finer points or influences particularly regarding *Dark Princess*. Manning Marable’s *W. E. B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), folds Du Bois’s “radicalism” neatly into his “democratism.” He reads *Dark Princess* primarily as emblematic of Du Bois’s polemics against Garvey’s UNIA nationalism and literary debates with Locke and younger Harlem Renaissance artists. While these are certainly features of the novel, Marable doesn’t, for example, link Du Bois’s 1926 visit to the Soviet Union to the Bolshevik themes of the text. Likewise, Adolph Reed, claiming his own fabian socialist Du Bois against Marable, writes that “throughout the interwar years, Du Bois was hardly a radical democrat” (65). He notes Du Bois’s “pro-Bolshevik rhetoric” of the 1920s, but glosses over careful analysis of this rhetoric and the text of *Dark Princess*. Paul Gilroy’s interpretation of the novel’s “heterogeneous multiplicities” is consistent with his deployment of Du Bois’s “double consciousness” as an aspect of diasporic hybridity, but looks past the overt dialectical imagery and rhetoric of the novel—much less Du Bois’s reactions to events like the Russian Revolution and bolshevism (Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993]). Claudia Tate meanwhile reads the novel’s erotic politics as consistent with Du Bois’s configuration of the maternal
black mother with Pan-Africanism or black culture, drawing parallels between the princess and the character Zora Cresswell from *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (New York: AMS Press, 1972). Tate’s argument doesn’t account for the ethnic and national difference of the princess in this formulation, nor the possibility of Du Bois’s “gendering” as a response to discourses like orientalism. See Claudia Tate, introduction to *Dark Princess*, by W. E. B. Du Bois (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), ix–xxxvi. In general, these important, insightful analyses of Du Bois and the novel reflect a critical tendency to shy away from the historical details of Du Bois’s engagement with communism. For such an engagement, one can look to the work of Herbert Aptheker, particularly his introduction to *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, by W. E. B. Du Bois (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson, 1975), and Cedric J. Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983).

2 Qtd. in Aptheker, introduction to *Darkwater*, 513.


4 *Horizon*, February 1907, 9.


10 Qtd. in Aptheker, introduction, 6, 7.


14 In the spring of 1921, Du Bois tied the exploitation of women in India to the breakdown of industrialism under colonialism in the *Crisis*. See Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet*, 26. Rai’s 1928 book *Unhappy India* (Calcutta: Banna Publishing, 1928) is in large part an attack on Mayo as imperialist stooge: “Miss Mayo’s mentality is the mentality of the white race as a whole against
the black or brown or yellow peoples of Asia. She is only the mouth-piece of the oppressors of the East” (xviii).


16 For a fuller account of orientalism’s relationship to Afrocentrism and nineteenth-century African American conceptions of Asia, see Moses’s *Afrotopia*. Cooper dissented from popular romantic readings of Asia by remarking on foot binding and enforced domesticity of women in China as remnants of feudalism. See Moses, *Afrotopia*, 132.


18 Qtd. in Aptheker, introduction, 19.

19 Qtd. in ibid.

20 Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 49.

21 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess* (1928; Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 228. All subsequent references to this edition will be cited in the text.


24 Qtd. in ibid., 90.


26 Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 158.


28 Ibid., 18.

29 Du Bois, “Gandhi and India,” 206.


31 Ibid.

32 John Haithcox has noted that early twentieth-century Bengal revolutionary societies adopted Kali as a symbol of independent rebellion. Society newspapers described her as bloodthirsty and imploring of political sacrifice. See his *Communism and Nationalism in India*.


34 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 144.

37 Ibid., 4, 5.