

WEB DuBois and Otto von Bismarck

predominantly black university in Nashville.⁷ Four Protestant churches of Great Barrington came together to pay Du Bois' education at Fisk, demonstrating how the community continued to support his success.⁸

At Fisk, likely influenced by prior exposure to Latin literature, Du Bois became fascinated by Germany. He took more than 190 hours' worth of German classes and followed contemporary German issues.⁹ Du Bois even wrote a poem in German, read Schiller, and made Otto von Bismarck the focus of his valedictorian commencement speech.¹⁰ In 1888, Du Bois fulfilled his dream and enrolled at Harvard, but the institution demoted his four-year Fisk degree to a three-year degree, forcing Du Bois to complete another year of undergraduate studies at Harvard.¹¹ This humiliation and the racist baniers at Harvard dispelled Du Bois' illusions of befriending white classmates.¹² Still, Du Bois persisted in engaging Germany where possible, for example studying Tacitus' histories of German people and slavery, titled *Germania*.¹³ Historical and contemporary Germany, it would seem, was the centerpiece of Du Bois' education.

Perhaps this was why, when Du Bois enrolled at Harvard as a doctoral student, his advisors, Albert Hart and William James, suggested that Du Bois continue his graduate study in Germany.¹⁴ Studying abroad at the time was not unheard of, and Du Bois jumped in 1890 on the scholarship opportunity of John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Negroes to "send [any young colored man] to Europe."¹⁵ Remarkably, Du Bois got rejected, and even more remarkably, over the next two years he sent several letters to the Fund, which eventually funded his study at the University of Berlin.¹⁶

To understand Du Bois' fascination with Germany that precipitated his study in Berlin, I selected relevant letters from his prolific correspondence. A theme of contrasting and paralleling Germany with

7 Barkin, 156

8 Du Bois, *The Correspondence*, 5

9 Lewis, 66

10 Beck, "W. E. B. Du Bois as a Study Abroad Student in Germany, 1892-1894," *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 2, no. 1 (1996): 1.

11 Michaela Orizu, "The German influence on the life and thought of W. E. B. Du Bois," *Master's Theses* (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2001): 7.

12 Marring Marble, *W. E. B. Du Bois, Black Radical Democrat*, (Boston: Twayne, 1986), 13.

13 Barkin, 160

14 *Ibid.*, 161.

15 W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter to the Slater Fund," *ibid.*, 161.

the US appears throughout these texts and arrives first in Du Bois' German poem "The New Fatherland" (1887-88), addressed to German immigrants in the US.¹⁷ Relevantly, in his Fisk commencement speech (June 1888), Du Bois celebrates his youth idol, Bismarck, as a man who unified Germany in ways that the US could follow.¹⁸ Deploying Germany as an inspiration for the US, Du Bois' first letter from abroad is addressed to the Great Barrington Sunday school and identifies the town of Eisenach, where Martin Luther preached, as Great Barrington's spiritual predecessor.¹⁹ Yet, before he received the scholarship to travel to Germany, Du Bois explained in a letter to the John F. Slater Fund (April 3, 1892) that going to Europe is necessary for him to "properly finish [his] education" and help resolve the "Negro problem," suggesting a broader racial theme within which Du Bois understood his educational mission.²⁰

Together, these sources point to the seed of Du Bois' conviction that education was a collective, anti-racist effort, planted by Great Barrington's religious and financial investment in young Du Bois. For Du Bois the scholar, "the great weight of the responsibility . . . rest[ed] upon the younger generation of Negroes" to obtain such an education, he writes, to be as successful as "white fellow students."²¹ A critical component of this education for Du Bois was his grand tour of Europe, especially Germany. It was in Germany that Du Bois for the first time in his life felt, as he writes, "free from most of those iron bands that bound [him] at home," a sensation that fueled his liberation efforts by asserting that blacks do not have to inhabit the subhuman category.²² The degree to which Du Bois anticipated the racist US as a foil to Germany when at Fisk is uncanny and best shows through his fixation on German immigrants and their political leader, Bismarck.

In "The New Fatherland," Du Bois celebrates German immigrants as a force of good because he sees them as blacks' natural allies in their struggle for liberation from "southern prejudice."²³ As David Lewis claims, Du Bois benevolently saw the immigrants as "disciples of two great . . . religious rebels, Jan Hus and Martin Luther," and at least in

17 W. E. B. Du Bois and Uisula Marcum, "The New Fatherland," *The Journal of African American History* 91, no. 4 (2006): 450

18 Du Bois, "Bismarck," 1.

19 Du Bois, "To Sunday School," 1892.

20 W. E. B. Du Bois, "Correspondence with Rutherford B. Hayes, Francis G. Peabody, Daniel C. Gilman Slater Fund loan, 1890-1892," April 3, 1892.

21 Du Bois, "Letter to John F. Slater Fund" 1893.

22 Beck, 10-11.

23 Du Bois and Marcum, "The New Fatherland."

