

8-21-2019

Chapter 5: 'Ghana Calls' to UD

Laura M. Leming F.M.I.
University of Dayton, lleming1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cip_ges_2019

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#), and the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leming, Laura M. F.M.I., "Chapter 5: 'Ghana Calls' to UD" (2019). *Myth and Reality: Reflections on Our Travels through West Africa*. 9.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cip_ges_2019/9

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Programs at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Myth and Reality: Reflections on Our Travels through West Africa by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

CHAPTER 5

'Ghana Calls' to UD

*Laura M. Leming, F.M.I.
Professor, Department of Sociology, Anthropology,
and Social Work*

... I lifted up mine eyes to Ghana
And swept the hills with high Hosanna;
Above the sun my sight took flight
Till from that pinnacle of light
I saw dropped down this earth of crimson, green and gold
Roaring with color, drums and song....
Come with us, dark America:
The scum of Europe battened here
And drowned a dream
Made fetid swamp a refuge seem:
Enslaved the Black and killed the Red
And armed the Rich to loot the Dead;
Worshipped the whores of Hollywood
Where once the Virgin Mary stood
And lynched the Christ.

Awake, awake, O sleeping world
Honor the sun;
Worship the stars, those vaster suns
Who rule the night

Where black is bright
And all unselfish work is right
And Greed is Sin.

And Africa leads on:
Pan Africa!

—W.E.B. Du Bois, 1960

These excerpts from “Ghana Calls” by W.E.B. Du Bois, one of my sociology forebears, serve as a frame for my experience in West Africa with the University of Dayton’s Global Education Seminar (GES). As a sociologist of religion, a Marianist Sister, and a US citizen and teacher, I struggle to find the best ways to acknowledge and work against racism within the contexts in which I live and move. W.E.B. DuBois’ life and experience have touched me deeply since I first encountered him as a graduate student, and I think his observations and theoretical work can give us context and inspiration for the work we still need to do here at UD in our quest for deeper inclusivity and authentic community.

On one of the first days of our time in Ghana’s capital, Accra, we visited the W.E.B. Du Bois Center for Pan African Culture. For a sociologist, this was a dream come true. Du Bois received a Ph.D. in Sociology from Harvard in 1895, the first African American to do so in any field. The Center is the site of Du Bois’ home in Accra, where he moved in 1961 at the invitation of independent Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, to help further the Pan African movement. The opportunity to look at the books on the shelves of Du Bois’ office was like making a direct connection to someone whose life I revere and whose ideas I teach on a regular basis. It excited me even more to find there a book of the poetry of Dayton-born Paul Laurence Dunbar, classmate and collaborator of the Wright brothers, so I found a connection not only through our shared discipline, but also through the city that I now call home. Du Bois was present to me all during our time in Ghana, not just in the Center, and so my one regret is that I didn’t buy the volume of his writings that I saw in



the bookstore of El Mina Castle, a center of the slave trade on the Gold Coast. That day was the most disturbing of our trip, and in retrospect I suspect he might have helped me make more sense of it—or at least help give the immensity of it some expression.

The Du Bois Center is also the site of Du Bois' grave. He became a naturalized citizen of Ghana in 1963, just a few months before he died. Ghana for him was a wondrous place where he finally seemed to be able to fulfill his life's vocation and striving: "I lifted up mine eyes to Ghana, and swept the hills with high Hosanna"! I am happy for him in that, but it is a great sadness to me that after his making so many amazing contributions, the United States rejected him for his political leanings. His co-founding of the NAACP, his teaching and research at the University of Pennsylvania and Atlanta University, and his efforts to establish global relations that could open doors to greater international peace did not balance out the suspicion many people held of his connection to socialism. The mausoleum is a stylized African "round house" that is set apart from the home where he and his wife lived. Du Bois' tomb is at the center and is surrounded by a number of Ashanti stools, which

signify the power and leadership of the chiefs, each adorned with an Adinkra symbol. These symbols are traditional graphics that represent specific concepts, beliefs, and sometimes proverbs (e.g., Only God, Family, Unity, and Security) that the people used to convey meaning, and they appear on festive clothing and on household and ritual furnishings. One of the most striking of these



Sankofa

symbols is the “Sankofa,” the bird looking back, which represents finding wisdom for one’s journey forward by looking back to the past.

So much about Ghana gave us the opportunity to look to the past, so the Sankofa holds special significance. For example, we toured two historic castles where enslaved people were held in dungeons while two stories above Europeans lived in airy apartments with spectacular views of the sea and surf. A haunting realization is that the two castles had a chapel at each of their centers where worship services were held, even as people were dying in the dungeons below. Du Bois again: “The scum of Europe battered here and drowned a dream.” One of the T-shirts on sale in the gift shops of the castles was popular among the African American students that we saw on our travels home. It proclaimed, “I am my ancestors’ wildest dream!” So true! One leaves Elmina castle with the firm conviction that the descendants of the enslaved came from people who were incredibly strong and determined to survive.

“Ghana Calls” presents “dark America” with an invitation to “come with us,” and it presents the “sleeping world” with an invitation to “awake.” Visiting Ghana was for me an experience of awakening. In just our few days there, the realization dawns that the American mind-set lacks much awareness of the African continent, and what awareness does exist tends to center on stereotypes of animals, rural landscapes, and poverty. For me it was a time to awaken to something I knew but didn’t fathom—that Africa is composed of 54 countries, more than one-quarter of the world’s countries, but that we often refer to “Africa” and actually give the

life on this vast continent very little attention in our news and daily awareness. For instance, my surprise at Accra's size, its obvious position as a crossroads of business, and its amenities betrayed my stereotypes. *Ghana Calls* resonates: "this earth of crimson, green and gold, roaring with color, drums and song..." This waking also grew into a reaffirmation of the utility of Du Bois' concept of "Double-consciousness." Double-consciousness is the theoretical concept for which W.E.B. Du Bois is likely most noted, and the concept moves beyond social science and into literary analysis and gender studies. He used it first in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to describe the awareness of how other people's perception shapes and inhibits identity formation. He portrayed the "soul," or inner consciousness, of people of color as having a sense of "twoness" or a split identity, experiencing themselves as whole and free and with high aspirations, yet seen in the eyes of others who beheld them as "a problem." Du Bois went on to state that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (1903/1994, p. v). It is troubling not only that he largely correct when considering U.S. society, but also that we are well into the 21st century and still have so far to go to develop the deep appreciation that we need for the color line to cease being a problem.

And this is where the Global Education Seminar is rife with meaning for the University of Dayton community. We have long been hearing from our students and colleagues of color that they have experiences on campus that challenge the sense of wonderful community that UD assumes as its hallmark. In the last two years, the AIM4 Community Excellence Processes have analyzed UD's progress and needs in Diversity and Inclusion. Across the board, students of color "reported as having less of a sense of belonging to UD than white student respondents" (Halualani, 2019, p. 2). The evidence from focus groups is even more challenging. A summary of comments culled from the discreet groups of students and employees labeled Historically Underrepresented Persons in terms of Race/Ethnicity include the following comments: "feeling unsafe"; "feeling like an 'outsider'"; "having to find anchor points to cope (OMA, affinity groups, certain individuals)"; "fatigue at having to

educate white peers on racism/oppression (‘racial education/battle fatigue’); and “having to negotiate a level of whiteness (adaptation skill) to succeed at UD” (Halualani, 2019, p.14-15). The University is very proud of its “Commitment to Community,” a standard rooted in its Catholic and Marianist lived tradition. The commitment has been in place, at least in seed, since 2005, and it has shaped practice in the classroom and beyond as C2C since 2010. But our “community” still needs to deepen in authenticity, acknowledging and valuing the reality that not all the members of our community truly feel at home. Double consciousness, a sense of twoness, happens every day.

I was surprised at Du Bois’ reference to “the Virgin Mary” in his poem. He laments that her image is replaced, and that Jesus is lynched. These stark images shock our sensibilities, as should the list of concerns have quoted above from UD students and employees. Mary, a woman of Nazareth, stands on our campus in multiple places, calling our community to be attentive to the messages of her son—“Repent,” “Love,” “Forgive,” “Heal”—all without regard for nationality, gender, social status. While she is rightly considered as humble and receptive, we often forget her strength and determination. Mary is a gentle person, but she is also a woman who defied social convention at Cana and the mother of a man executed by the state, a woman who stood (in protest?) at his cross. When we at UD are challenged by our shortcomings in inclusivity, we have this strong advocate to help us face our realities and work to move beyond.

Two significant aims of the Global Education Seminars are to educate and sensitize the faculty and staff who participate to the beauties and realities of the parts of the world we are privileged to visit and to forge relationships with scholars who call those places home. This life experience and the subsequent responsibility to share it with students and colleagues open pathways for creating strategies to value diverse gifts and people and to form more life-giving relationships on our campus. For all. Du Bois recognized that “Africa leads on” in bringing the world to consciousness of persistent cruelty to people of color, and in the emergence of this

consciousness, revealing a reality where “black is bright and all unselfish work is right.”

We have our work cut out for us—both those who participated in the Global Education Seminars and all of us who desire true and inclusive excellence.

W.E.B. Du Bois, in a message he wrote in 1957 with instructions that it be read after his death (August 27, 1963), has another piece of wisdom that reassures and sustains: “One thing I charge you. As you live, believe in Life. Always human beings will live and progress to greater, broader and fuller life. The only possible death is to lose belief in this truth simply because the great end comes slowly, because time is long.” May we progress to greater, broader and fuller life.

References

- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1961. “Ghana Calls.” Retrieved at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43027/ghana-calls>
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903/1994. *The Souls of Black Folk*. NY: Dover Publications.
- Halualani & Associates. 2019. AIM4 Community Excellence Executive Summary. Dayton, OH: University of Dayton.
- The Last Message of Dr. W.E.B. DuBois to the World. 1957. *The Journal of African American History* Vol. 49, No. 2: 145.

