

EMANUELE NIDI

Introduction

A Transatlantic Discussion on the Meaning of Pan-Africanism: The Panda-Du Bois Correspondence

The following document is an excerpt from the correspondence between Mfumu Paul Panda Farnana, a Congolese activist, World War I veteran, and former Belgian colonial official,¹ and W. E. B. Du Bois, the preeminent African American scholar and activist widely regarded as the “Father of Pan-Africanism” (Padmore 117-46).² The letter, dated May 31, 1921, comes from the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a collection recently digitized and made freely accessible online.

The epistolary conversation took place in the context of emerging Black nationalist and internationalist movements after World War I (see Blain; Foley; Makalani), when Du Bois founded the Pan-African Congress (PAC) as a conference of Black intellectuals and colonial administrators, creating a political institution to engage in the debate over the future of African colonies in the new world order (Lewis, *Biography of a Race* 574-78). From the perspective of its founder, the PAC represented a gradualist project that aimed to improve the situation of Black people through dialogue and cooperation with colonial powers. The goal of Pan-Africanists was not so much the immediate self-determination of African populations, whom they patronizingly regarded as still unprepared for democracy, but the legitimization of a global Black intelligentsia as a political subject worthy of respect and consideration on the international stage. Driven by this goal, Du Bois convened four Pan-African Congresses in major European and US cities between 1919 and 1927 (Adi 43-59; Geiss 229-62; Langley 41-103). The Second Pan-African Congress saw the largest attendance, with 110 delegates from 26 countries, and was organized between August and September 1921 around three sessions in three European capitals –

respectively, London, Brussels, and Paris (Lewis, *The Fight for Equality* 37-50).

In the spring of 1921, Du Bois sought collaborators to help him plan the meeting. He approached Panda, born in Congo and raised in Brussels, who seemed to him the perfect choice to organize the Belgian session.³ In his reply, Panda expressed his willingness to help and requested further information. Apart from the organizational issues, he was particularly interested in clarifying the racial nature of the Pan-African Congress. Should it be a conference for Blacks only, or an interracial conference? What role should the Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey play? Finally, he emphasized the “scientific” nature of the symposium (that is, its dedication to historical and ethnographic issues) and suggested that a visit to the Tervuren Museum in Brussels be arranged to appraise Pan-Africanists of their African heritage. Du Bois responded by welcoming Panda’s cooperation. He explained that he had conceived the Congress as a discussion among all those interested in the fate of people of African descent, and although most of the delegates would be Black, it was not appropriate to prohibit the participation of whites. He then politely but firmly stated that Garvey should not be considered an ally, but an opponent of the Pan-African Congress and a proponent of an unrealistic and fraudulent program. “We can not,” he concluded, “count upon him or trust him” (Letter from Du Bois to Paul Panda, June 17, 1921, Du Bois Papers 1). Finally, he cautioned against approaching the discussion in too strictly scientific a manner. After all, the goal of the meeting was not only to heighten the delegates’ historical and anthropological awareness of the African continent, but also to work out a set of political demands and reach an “agreement on lines of action” (2).⁴

This transatlantic discussion hints at two possible conceptions of internationalism. On the one hand, Panda saw the Pan-African Congress primarily as an instrument to promote the study of African problems by a group of dedicated intellectuals and political leaders. On the other hand, Du Bois stressed the need for a common program and a political agenda. This dichotomy is particularly noteworthy when one considers the debate surrounding the Second Pan-African Congress. In fact, fierce controversies characterized the event. Despite its moderate program, the

pro-colonial press saw it as an emanation of Garveyism and Bolshevism, a revolutionary meeting organized to threaten the colonial order in Africa. These allegations affected the internal discussion, which was polarized between the French-speaking delegates, headed by Senegalese deputy Blaise Diagne, who staunchly defended French and Belgian policies in Africa, and the English and US delegates, led by Du Bois, who advocated a more radical, though by no means anti-colonial, agenda. After the heated final session in Paris, a new Pan-African Association was officially constituted, but the rift between Du Bois and Diagne was now public knowledge and led to an irreparable fracture within the nascent movement (Adi 49-55; Dunstan 14-47).

In this inflamed debate, Farnana had to choose a side. Paul Panda Farnana was born in Bas-Congo in 1888 and grew up in Brussels, where he pursued advanced studies in horticulture. He spent the years before World War I between his motherland and what he now considered his adopted country, studying in Belgium and working as an agricultural officer in the Congo. When the Germans attacked Belgium, he decided to join the Congolese Volunteer Corps to fight the invaders, and eventually ended up in a prison camp in Germany. As was the case for other Black soldiers around the world, the experience of war proved to be a turning point for Farnana. In 1919, he founded the Union Congolaise, an association defending the rights of Congolese veterans (Adi 52). Despite its loyalty to the Belgian Empire, the Union Congolaise took a combative stance in the face of racist accusations from the metropolitan press. When the Belgian *Journal des combattants* portrayed the Black soldiers as uncivilized brutes and suggested their deportation to the African savannah, the Union Congolaise replied defiantly:

In the trenches the soldiers never tired of repeating that we were brothers and we were treated as the whites' equals. Nevertheless, now that the war is over and our services are no longer required, people would rather see us disappear. In that regard we are in complete agreement, but then under one condition: if you insist so vehemently on the repatriation of blacks, it would be only logical for us to demand that all whites now in Africa be repatriated as well. (qtd. in Van Reybrouck 17)

Notwithstanding this defiant language, Panda Farnana was no radical Black nationalist. Rather, he advocated a gradualist reform of the colonial system, in the strain of Belgian pacifist intellectuals such as Paul Otlet. Otlet, a philanthropist and bibliographer, worked with Farnana and the 1913 Nobel Peace Prize winner Henri La Fontaine to guarantee a prestigious venue for the Pan-African Congress, the Palais Mondial in Brussels.⁵ He had long championed the cause of African peoples. As early as 1888, he wrote a pamphlet titled *L'Afrique aux Noirs*, a proto-Pan-African essay.⁶ His thesis posited that European civilization was too far removed from African reality to engage in effective missionary activity. Europeans needed allies closer to African customs and culture, a kind of intermediate layer between the Old World and the Dark Continent, and these were the “millions of Negroes already Christianized, accustomed to regular work, and endowed with all the requirements of an advanced civilization” (Otlet, *L'Afrique aux Noirs* 12-13; my translation),⁷ that is, African Americans in the United States. Otlet wrote of a “Black Moses,” Gilles Moss, a preacher from Indiana who advocated mass emigration to Africa to Christianize and educate the illiterate, heathen masses. He fantasized about a collaboration between Moss and King Leopold II, envisioning a future Congolese state ruled by Blacks in which Léopoldville and Banana would shine as African New York and Chicago (12-15).

Panda Farnana certainly shared Otlet's commitment to the education of the African people. He firmly believed in the intellectual equality of all races and was convinced that men like him, raised and educated in Europe, could contribute to the cultural uplift of the masses at home. True to the spirit of the Pan-African Congress, he was a fierce critic of the Belgian government, but he did not advocate national liberation. Instead, he argued that the empire must involve Black leaders and local chiefs in colonial administration or risk igniting discontent and revolt. Racial prejudice, in his view, was a mortal danger to colonialism itself.⁸ In his correspondence with Du Bois, Farnana expressed his admiration and support for the African American leader, but when the discussion flared at the Second Pan-African Congress, he was puzzled and repelled by the behavior of the Americans, who appeared unreasonable and extremist in their polemical stance. He eventually sided with Diagne and distanced himself from what he perceived

as the most radical positions of the US delegation.⁹ This event marked a break in his relations with African American Pan-Africanists. Jessie Fauset, the African American writer and Du Bois's principal collaborator at the Second Pan-African Congress, regretted that the few Africans present at the session of Brussels had nothing even remotely critical to say about Belgian policy in the Congo (15). According to Fauset's account, even a proposal to send African American teachers to the Congo was rejected by Panda, who worried about the predictable Belgian reactions (13). When Du Bois called for a Third Pan-African Congress in 1923, Panda declined the invitation, adding bitterly that participation in the 1921 event had been detrimental to the cause of his people.¹⁰ Years later, Du Bois commented on the falling out, stating that the Union Congolese leader still wrote to him, "now and then,"

but fairly spits his letters at me, – and they are always filled with some defense of Belgium in Africa, or rather with some accusation against England, France and Portugal there. I do not blame Panda, although I do not agree with his reasoning. Unwittingly summer before last I tore his soul in two. His reason knows that I am right, but his heart denies his reason. ("The Negro Mind" 389-90)

Given Panda's political opinions, his interest in Marcus Garvey in the letter of May 31, 1921 deserves careful consideration. Marcus Garvey was the most prominent Black nationalist of his era, heading the first Black mass organization in the United States, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a group with outposts throughout the world that (Garvey boasted) counted millions of followers. Despite Garvey's contradictory and at times reactionary views on economic, social, and gender issues, the UNIA was perceived by both opponents and friends as a revolutionary, anti-colonialist organization. The slogan "Back to Africa" became the signature of its emigration program, far beyond the Garveyists' actual commitment to mass departure to the African continent. The UNIA, with its huge conventions in Harlem, its sensational military parades, and its self-owned naval society, the Black Star Line, seemed to be on the rise (see Ewing *The Age of Garvey*; Stein).

The rise of a powerful Black nationalist organization aroused fear and suspicion among the colonial powers, often to the point of paranoia. Belgium was particularly alarmed by the specter of an indigenous Garveyist movement in Congo. The spread of “Kimbanguism” seemed to confirm these fears. In April 1921, just a month before the exchange of letters between Panda and Du Bois, a Congolese mystic named Simon Kimbangu placed himself at the head of a messianic movement that caused the colonial government considerable concern. Kimbangu, inspired by prophetic visions, founded a new church that sought to present a syncretic alternative to white denominations, combining Christian faith with homegrown religious traditions. Kimbangu’s disciples claimed to have witnessed healings by the prophet and devoted themselves to his idea of an African religion for African people. The worship of the thaumaturge struck the colonial administration as dangerous, and British control behind the movement was suspected. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Kimbangu, who went into hiding in June. More and more preachers appeared throughout the Congo, claiming to be inspired by his example and calling for disobeying the whites and refusing to pay taxes. This prompted Belgium to increase its military occupation of the area and further restrict religious freedom. Kimbangu was finally arrested in September 1921 (Ewing, “Kimbanguism, Garveyism” 156-65; Kodi 56-64).

The Kimbangu affair was crucial in drawing Belgian attention to Garveyism. The fact that the Garveyist newspaper *Negro World* circulated in the Congo, together with the similarities between Kimbanguism and the African Orthodox Church of the UNIA, were seen by colonial officials as irrefutable evidence of the connection between the two movements. The colonial press also linked the turbulent events of the spring to Panda Farnana, already strongly suspected of being an agent of the UNIA and an ally of Kimbangu, although Farnana always denied any such involvement (Kodi 65-69). *L’Avenir Colonial Belge* attacked Panda for his sympathetic statements toward the “Back to Africa” movement and the “energetic and humanitarian action” of “Afro-American Moses” (qtd. in Kodi 67). Given the many legends and rumors that circulated, it is legitimate to speculate what the Union Congolaise leader actually knew about Garvey and the UNIA. According to his letter to Du Bois, his curiosity was piqued by

an article authored by Victor Forbin, published in April 1921 by *Lectures pour tous*, an illustrated magazine.¹¹ Forbin, who described himself as a “negrophile,” gave in his article (“Un Moïse Nègre”) a brief overview of African American history from the Civil War to World War I, focusing on Garvey’s role in fostering a new sense of pride – and revolt – in Black people. His analysis was largely based on his readings of *Negro World* issues, therefore providing a glossed-over account of UNIA’s activities, which were obliterated by all the financial and legal problems surrounding the Black Star Line enterprise at that time. Forbin explained that while Garvey’s confrontational attitude towards colonialism might be feasible in the future, it posited a dangerous utopia in the present, as Africans hardly had the strength to resist French, British, and Belgian rule. “What I wish,” he concluded, “is that the movement organized by Marcus Garvey [...] will lead the United States to treat its millions of Negroes with a broader sense of justice and humanity” (Forbin 856; my translation).¹²

Forbin did not forget to mention Garvey’s bitter polemic against other notable Black political leaders, Du Bois included (852). Panda was therefore aware of the rivalry when he wrote to his interlocutor inquiring about the participation of “[v]otre célèbre Marcus Garvey” (Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, May 31, 1921, Du Bois Papers 3). How could he possibly think that one of the main opponents of the Garvey movement could agree to the invitation? This apparent naiveté might be viewed in light of Panda’s subsequent reference to the Universal Races Congress, to which Du Bois made no response.

The Universal Races Congress, held in London in 1911, was the venue for recognized personalities and intellectuals concerned with the state of race relations economically, politically, and scientifically. In addition to Du Bois and Paul Otlet, participants included such diverse figures as Austrian biologist Felix von Luschan, Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin, British theosophist Annie Besant, and former Haitian president François Denys Légitime (see Holton; Rich; Lewis, *Biography of a Race* 439-43). Panda likely regarded the PAC as a context for a similarly eclectic discussion. If that was the case, even people who held opposing political views, such as Marcus Garvey and Blaise Diagne, could share the same stage.

Du Bois thought differently. His demeanor made clear that he saw the

Pan-African Congress as an organ of action, not just discussion, organized around a program, even if only broadly defined. This goal was hampered by the suspicious attitude of his international interlocutors, who were often concerned about being associated with a political agenda that they had not agreed on nor discussed in advance. The dynamic was evident in the preparations for the Second Pan-African Congress. Alice Werner, a scholar of African languages and professor at the School of Oriental Studies who assisted Du Bois in organizing the first London session, was initially skeptical of direct participation and changed her mind only when she was assured that none of the resolutions adopted at the Congress would bind the participants in any way.¹³ F. H. Hawkings and Frank Lenwood, the foreign secretaries of the London Missionary Society, also sought assurances before attending that they would not be forced to adhere to the positions adopted by the Pan-Africanists.¹⁴ John Hobbis Harris, the London secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, was even more explicit, demanding that the list of participants and the resolutions to be adopted be discussed in advance.¹⁵

Many expressed concerns about Garvey's possible involvement and stressed the need to clearly separate PAC from Garveyism. Du Bois even wrote to the British ambassador and to US Secretary of State Charles Hughes to officially distance himself from his rival and to declare that the sole purpose of the Pan-African Congress was to promote communication and friendship among Blacks.¹⁶ So it is not difficult to understand the resolute tone in which the PAC founder answered Panda's questions. The latter was sufficiently aware of the colonial press's suspicions and attacks to reassure him and declare that he fully agreed on this point: Garvey's name should not be associated in any way with the Congress.¹⁷ What he could not have known was that the Belgian press, despite all the Pan-Africanists' attempts to placate the colonial establishment, would still lash out at them. This hostile environment greatly affected internal debate. Panda was more influenced than others, due to his national background and, during the Congress, would come to see the intransigence of the US delegation as an obstacle to an effective discussion of Africa's current problems. When he declined the invitation to the Third Pan-African Congress a few years later, he declared that the Congolese had nothing in common with African

Americans and accused Du Bois of being a hypocrite. Du Bois denied the allegation, arguing that one could not question the sincerity of the Pan-African Congress, regardless of whether one agreed or disagreed with the lines of action it propagated.¹⁸

The discussion over the internal democracy of the PAC is of great interest to historians of Pan-Africanism. Although the Pan-African Congress presented itself as the voice of Africans and Blacks throughout the world, its actual representativeness was questioned by both opponents, such as the Garveyists,¹⁹ and supporters and founding members of the movement, such as Ida Gibbs Hunt (Roberts 121-45). Du Bois, in particular, was accused of manipulating the debate to promote his own political vision, while he and his allies in turn lamented that their opponents within the PAC used undemocratic methods to control the internal vote and promote moderate positions (Fauset 13-16).

In addition to differing assessments of the colonial order, Pan-Africanists were also divided by contrasting visions of what Pan-Africanism should be: an informational conference or a political organ. It is reasonable to assume that the interest in Marcus Garvey in Panda's letter to Du Bois was not so much an expression of fascination with Black nationalism as an attempt to broaden the conversation and potentially bring more attention to the PAC. His idea of an informative and inclusive gathering hinted at a different version of internationalism, one that more closely resembled a Palais Mondial seminar than the kind of League of Nations shadow cabinet that Du Bois had in mind. There is little reference of this or other similar questions in the reports published by PAC officials during their congresses. Scholars of Pan-Africanism must confront what Jake Hodder has called the "elusive history" of early Pan-Africanism, namely the opacity of sources, the conflicting information provided by participants, and the unreliability of journalistic accounts (115-18). Overall, historiography devoted to the PAC is seriously hampered by the fact that most accounts of the congresses are filtered through Du Bois's interpretation.²⁰

To overcome this obstacle, one must go beyond the official documentation and the bulletins signed by Du Bois and Diagne to examine the dense web of contacts and international connections between activists and associations that made the convening of the Congress possible in the first

place. This requires a microscopic view that contrasts with the *long durée*, synoptic and diachronic approach often adopted in the historiography of Pan-Africanism.²¹ The task is to research scattered documents and personal correspondence with the aim of expanding existing archives on Black internationalism and heeding hitherto unheard voices (Hodder et al. 8-10). This fragment of correspondence between Paul Panda Farnana and W. E. B. Du Bois, when placed in its proper historical and political context, provides a clue to the broader debate that surrounded the Pan-African Congress about the nature and goals of the movement.

Notes

¹ For a biographical account of Paul Panda Farnana see Tshitungu Kongolo. See also Brosens; Kanobana; Kodi 49-51; Van Reybrouck 178-80.

² On Du Bois's Pan-Africanism see Mullen 89-104; Rabaka; Reed 79-83.

³ See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Paul Otlet, ca. May 16, 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

⁴ Full bibliographic details of the letter in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

⁵ Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine were among the most influential European intellectuals and philanthropists at the turn of the century. After World War I, they founded the Union des Associations Internationales, an association of humanitarian groups that sought to secure world peace by promoting universal knowledge. To this end, they developed a special bibliographic system, the Universal Decimal Classification, and sponsored conferences dealing with international issues, from the emancipation of women to the racial question. See van den Heuvel. On Paul Otlet, see Otlet *International Organisation*; Wright.

⁶ The pamphlet is housed by the Mundaneum Archives in Mons, Belgium, in the collection Les papiers personnels Paul Otlet. A digitized version is available at *Mundaneum*. <<https://catalogue.mundaneum.org/index.php/Detail/objects/76653>>.

⁷ "Il existe dans les États de l'Amérique des millions de nègres déjà christianisés, habitués au travail régulier et faits à toutes les exigences d'une civilisation avancée."

⁸ For an interesting document proving Panda's commitment to the cultural uplift of his people, see Union Congolaise, "Développement intellectuel de la Race Nègre Congolaise," ca. Nov. 1920, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

⁹ See "Notes Coloniales," *L'Echo de la Bourse*, 6 Sept. 1921, 3, Les Papiers personnels Paul Otlet (PP PO 0819/1).

¹⁰ See Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, 19 Sept. 1923, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹¹ Although several editions of *Lectures pour tous* have been digitized (see *Gallica*. <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32805602k/date>>), this does not apply to the year 1921. The author has consulted the copy housed by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.

¹² “Ce que je souhaite est que le mouvement organisé par Marcus Garvey [...] amène les États-Unis à traiter leurs millions de nègres avec un plus large sentiment de justice et d’humanité.”

¹³ See Postcard from Alice Werner to Frances Hoggan, 31 May 1921; Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Alice Werner, 17 June 1921; both in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁴ See Letter from London Missionary Society to W. E. B. Du Bois, 5 Apr. 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁵ See Letter from John H. Harris to W. E. B. Du Bois, 6 May 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁶ See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to British Embassy, Washington DC, 27 May 1921; Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Charles Huges, 23 June 1921; both in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁷ See Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, 11 July 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁸ See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Paul Panda Farnana, 18 Aug. 1923; Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, September 19, 1923; Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Paul Panda Farnana, October 6, 1923; all in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁹ For a selection of documents about the Garvey movement and the Second Pan-African Congress, see Hill.

²⁰ The point was energetically raised by classic historians of the Pan-African movement such as Immanuel Geiss and Ayodele Langley. See Geiss 232; Langley 3.

²¹ See Adi; Esedebe; Geiss; Langley; Padmore.

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Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, May 31, 1921

Bruxelles. Le 31 Mai 1921

Monsieur W. E. Burghardt Du Bois
70 Fifth Avenue
New York

Cher Monsieur Du Bois,

Je m'empresse de vous accuser réception de votre bien aimable mot du 16 courant. Nous sommes donc parfaitement d'accord pour le congrès Pan-Africain au Palais Mondial à Bruxelles. Aussitôt que je serai en possession de renseignements plus détaillés, je commencerai à m'occuper de l'organisation ici. Quant à la reconnaissance pour le Gouvernement elle existe effectivement pour le fait que le Congrès peut se faire au Palais Mondial qui appartient au gouvernement: j'ai d'ailleurs eu un entretien à ce sujet avec messieurs Otlet et La Fontaine.

Voulez-vous donc me faire parvenir le plus rapidement possible les renseignements suivants:

A) Le Congrès sera-t-il fait uniquement par des Noirs?... c'est-à-dire que les Européens ne seraient que des auditeurs.

B) Le Congrès sera-t-il fait en collaboration par des congressistes Noirs et Blancs? Je crois que ce sont bien vos intentions personnelles. Donc il faudrait prier les personnes compétentes à y prendre part. S'il y a un nombre suffisant de Congressistes Noirs, il vaudrait mieux peut être que la discussion se fasse entre les hommes de la Race Noire les vœux seuls seraient adressés aux divers pays ayons des relations avec les Noirs.

Peut-on compter sur la présence de représentants Noirs de divers pays? Votre célèbre Marcus Garvey voudra-t-il exposer son plan et idées? en même temps que vos collègues du Congrès des Races (à Londres en 1911)?

Enfin voulez-vous me répondre sur les questions suivantes que j'annexe à cette missive. Je le répète, dès que je serai fixé je commencerai à lancer toute l'affaire. Il faut nous dépêcher pour être prêts en Août. En attendant de vos bonnes nouvelles, je vous envie l'expression de mes confraternels sentiments.

M'fumu Panda

9 Rue St. Georges

Bruxelles

Mrs. Vinck et sa famille vont bien ils habitent à 5 minutes d'ici.

Avez vous lu dans "Lectures pour tous" du mois d'Avril le compte rendu sur un "Moïse Nègre" (Marcus Garvey) l'article est de Victor Forbin?

Questionnaire

A. Organisation du Congrès?...

- a) Le Comité organisateur (sa composition)
- b) Horaire: temps ou nombre de mots par congressistes (textes et voeux)

B.

a) But du Congrès? (naturellement les droits de la Race)

b) Questions à discuter:

1. Histoire de la race... Ethnographie
2. Histoire des civilisations africaines
3. Évolution générale de la Race...
4. Droits politiques... etc...
5. Revendications des Droits de la Race

N.B. (La 1^{ère} ou la 3^e journée) on devrait aller visiter le Musée de Tervuren c'est-à-dire le Musée du Congo de cette façon vous vous rendez compte de toutes les richesses de l'Afrique.

Enfin, les questions que je suggère pour chaque journée peuvent bien entendu être complètement modifiées. Mais pour avoir un résultat plus tangible, on devra être très scientifique ce qui aidera pour les revendications qui doivent ensuite être envoyées à chaque gouvernement ayons des relations avec les Noirs.

Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, May 31, 1921¹

Brussels, May 31, 1921

Mr. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois
70 Fifth Avenue
New York

Dear Mr. Du Bois, I hasten to acknowledge receipt of your kind letter of the 16th of this month. We have definitely agreed to hold the Pan-African Congress at the Palais Mondial in Brussels. As soon as I have more detailed information, I will start organizing it here. The recognition of the Government is a fact, as the Congress can meet in the Palais Mondial, which belongs to the government itself.² I have already exchanged views with Mr. Otlet and Mr. La Fontaine on this subject.

Please send me the following information as soon as possible.

A) Should the Congress be composed only of Blacks? That is, the Europeans would only be spectators.

B) Should the Congress consist of a joint effort of Black and white delegates? I think this option is in line with your personal intentions. Then it would be necessary to invite the most qualified people. If there are enough Black delegates, it would be better to have the discussion among the Black race and only submit the resolutions to the various countries that have relations with Blacks.

Can we rely on the presence of Black representatives from different countries? Would your famous Marcus Garvey be willing to present his plan and ideas? As well as your colleagues of the Races Congress (in London in 1911)?³

And finally, please answer the following questions at the end of this letter.

As I said, as soon as I have all the information, I will begin to organize the whole thing. We must hurry to be ready in August. While I am waiting for your good news, I would like to express my brotherly feelings to you.

Mfumum Panda
9 Rue St. Georges
Brussels

Mr. Vinck and his family are well and live about five minutes from here.⁴

Did you read the report on the “Black Moses” Marcus Garvey in the April issue of *Lectures pour tous*? The article was written by Victor Forbin.

Questionnaire

A. Organization of the Congress

- a) The Organizing Committee (its composition)
- b) Time: available time or number of words for each delegate (written and oral)

B.

- a) Aim of the Congress (of course, the rights of the race)
- b) Topics to be discussed:
 1. History of the race (ethnography)
 2. History of African civilizations
 3. General evolution of the race
 4. Political rights, etc.
 5. Claims to the rights of the race

N.B. On the first or third day, we should visit the Tervuren Museum, that is the Congo Museum, so that you can experience all the treasures of Africa.⁵

Finally, I would like to say that the topics I propose for each day can be completely changed, of course. But to achieve tangible results, we need to be very scientific. This will help us to make demands that must be sent immediately to every government that has relations with Black people.

Notes

¹ English translation by Emanuele Nidi.

² The Palais Mondial was an international center for non-governmental international organizations and the headquarters of the Union of International Associations of La Fontaine and Otlet. It was directly sponsored by the Belgian government and later changed its name to Mundaneum. See Rayward 454-56.

³ Panda is referring to the London Universal Race Congress of 1911.

⁴ In his May 16 letter, Du Bois pointed out some political figures with whom he was on friendly terms and could help in the organizational work, among them the socialist senator Emile Vinck.

⁵ In fact, the Pan-Africanists visited the Museum after the September 1 session. See Members of the Pan-African Congress visit the Congo Museum, September 1, 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.