1900 TO 1945 · LONDON · PARIS · BRUSSELS · LISBON · NEW YORK · MANCHESTER

THE PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESSES

While Garvey filled Liberty Hall, W. E. B. Du Bois gathered delegates from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and the Americas in a series of congresses. He led four of them, 1919 to 1927, after helping write the address of the 1900 conference that came first, and he chaired sessions at Manchester in 1945, the one that fed straight into African independence.

1900	1919	1921	1923	1927	1945
London conference	Paris 1st congress	London · Brussels · Paris	London · Lisbon	New York 4th congress	Manchester 5th congress

Black boxes: the four congresses Du Bois led.

LONDON, 1900

23–25 JULY · WESTMINSTER TOWN HALL

Called by the Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams. Du Bois chaired the committee that wrote the "Address to the Nations of the World," with the line he made famous: *"The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colour-line."*

PARIS, 1919

FEBRUARY · GRAND HÔTEL · DURING THE PEACE CONFERENCE

Organized by Du Bois with Blaise Diagne, Senegal's deputy in the French parliament, Ida Gibbs Hunt and others. The U.S. and Britain refused passports to some who planned to come. Asked that Africa move toward self-rule.



"A Session of the Pan-African Congress, Paris, February 19–22, 1919." The caption names Candace, Diagne, King of Liberia, Du Bois, Ida Gibbs Hunt, Mrs. Hunton, John Hope and others. The Crisis, May 1919. Public domain.

LONDON · BRUSSELS · PARIS, 1921

LATE AUGUST TO EARLY SEPTEMBER

The Crisis listed 110 delegates from 32 countries; public sessions drew more than two thousand. The resolutions went to the League of Nations in Geneva. The Negro World called it a *"select gathering of personally invited and self-appointed"* delegates.



Second Pan-African Congress, Palais Mondial, Brussels, September 1921. Mundaneum. Public domain.

LONDON · LISBON, 1923

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER

Asked for home rule in British West Africa and the British West Indies, an end to white-minority rule in Kenya, Rhodesia and South Africa, and an end to lynching in the U.S. Whether a full congress ever met in Lisbon is still argued over.

NEW YORK, 1927

21–24 AUGUST · HARLEM CHURCHES

The first congress in the Americas, called and run by a committee of ten women, the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, chaired by Addie Waite Hunton (see the call on the back).

MANCHESTER, 1945

15–21 OCTOBER · THE FIFTH CONGRESS

Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore and Ras Makonnen were there. Du Bois chaired sessions; Amy Ashwood Garvey chaired the opening one. The demand was independence.



The Manchester plaque names "Amy Garvey" among the participants. Photo: KGGucwa, CC BY-SA 3.0.

SOURCES: WIKIPEDIA, "FIRST PAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE" AND "PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS"; JAKE HODDER, "THE ELUSIVE HISTORY OF THE PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS, 1919–27," HISTORY WORKSHOP JOURNAL 91 (2021): 113–31; PHOTO CAPTIONS READ OFF THE IMAGES. BLACK STAR ARCHIVE × RADICAL IMAGINATION.

SAME GOAL, DIFFERENT ROOMS

DU BOIS'S CONGRESSES, GARVEY'S CONVENTIONS

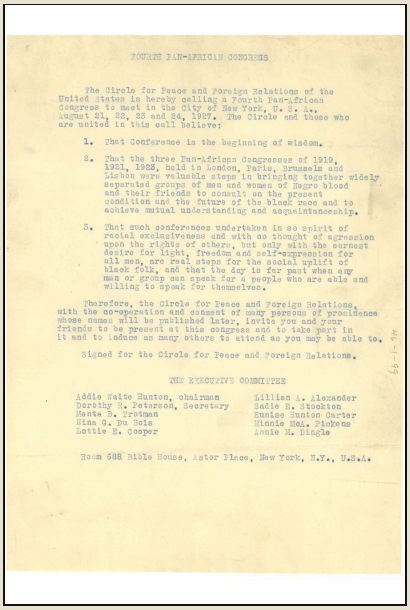
Both men wanted a free Africa and a free people of African descent. They disagreed about who should speak for that people, and how.

THE CONGRESSES · DU BOIS

- Delegates, many of them invited, meeting in European capitals and New York.
- Petitions to powerful bodies: the Paris Peace Conference, the League of Nations.
- Asked for self-rule step by step at first; by 1945, independence.
- Du Bois kept his distance from Garvey, and the 1927 resolutions never mention him or the UNIA.

THE CONVENTIONS · GARVEY

- A mass membership organization with divisions across the Caribbean, the Americas and Africa.
- Its own institutions: the Negro World, the Black Star Line, Liberty Hall.
- Wrote its own Declaration of Rights in 1920 and elected its own leaders.
- Called the 1921 congress a "select gathering of personally invited and self-appointed" delegates.



FOURTH PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS

The Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations of the United States is hereby calling a Fourth Pan-African Congress to meet in the City of New York, U. S. A., August 21, 22, 23 and 24, 1927. The Circle and those who are united in this call believe:

1. That Conference is the beginning of wisdom.
2. That the three Pan-African Congresses of 1919, 1921, 1923, held in London, Paris, Brussels and Lisbon were valuable steps in bringing together widely separated groups of men and women of Negro blood and their friends to consult on the present condition and the future of the black race and to achieve mutual understanding and acquaintanceship.
3. That such conferences undertaken in no spirit of racial exclusiveness and with no thought of agression upon the rights of others, but only with the earnest desire for light, freedom and self-expression for all men, are real steps for the social uplift of black folk, and that the day is far past when any man or group can speak for a people who are able and willing to speak for themselves.

Therefore, the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, with the co-operation and consent of many persons of providence whose names will be published later, invite you and your friends to be present at this congress and to take part in it and to induce as many others to attend as you may be able to.

Signed for the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations,

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Addie Waite Hunton, chairman — Lillian A. Alexander
Dorothy R. Peterson, Secretary — Sadie E. Stockton
Menta B. Trotman — Eunice Hunton Carter
Nina G. Du Bois — Minnie McA. Pickens
Lottie E. Cooper — Annie M. Dingle

Room 688 Bible House, Astor Place, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

The call for the Fourth Pan-African Congress, 1927. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, UMass Amherst, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

THE 1927 CALL, SIGNED BY TEN WOMEN

The Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations called the congress "to meet in the City of New York, U.S.A., August 21, 22, 23 and 24, 1927." Its executive committee: Addie Waite Hunton (chairman), Dorothy R. Peterson (secretary), Menta B. Trotman, Nina G. Du Bois, Lottie E. Cooper, Lillian A. Alexander, Sadie E. Stockton, Eunice Hunton Carter, Minnie McA. Pickens and Annie M. Dingle.

> *"...the day is far past when any man or group can speak for a people who are able and willing to speak for themselves."*
>
> CALL FOR THE FOURTH PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS, 1927

> *"The attitude of all the imperial powers who own Africa is fundamentally wrong."*
>
> 1927 RESOLUTIONS, AS PRINTED IN THE NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS, 26 AUG 1927

WHY THE FACTS ARE FUZZY · Dates, venues and delegate counts for these meetings disagree from source to source: 57 delegates in 1919 or fewer; Lisbon in 1923, 1924 or not at all. The historian Jake Hodder argues the confusion is itself evidence: *"inconsistencies in reports of the Congress are themselves important historical artefacts of the political manoeuvres undertaken by race reformers."*

AFTER 1945 · The congress movement kept going: Dar es Salaam, 1974; Kampala, 1994; two rival eighth congresses in Johannesburg and Accra, 2014–15; Lomé, Togo, December 2025.

"Able and willing to speak for themselves." Who is that line aimed at?

Petitioning the powerful or building your own institutions: which moved Africa closer to freedom?

Amy Ashwood Garvey sat in both rooms. What does that tell you about the rivalry?

1927 CALL: DU BOIS PAPERS (MS 312), UMASS AMHERST SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, READ OFF THE DOCUMENT. 1927 RESOLUTIONS: BLACK AGENDA REPORT TRANSCRIPTION OF THE NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS, 26 AUG 1927. NEGRO WORLD QUOTE AND HODDER: HISTORY WORKSHOP JOURNAL 91 (2021). LATER CONGRESSES: WIKIPEDIA. BLACK STAR ARCHIVE × RADICAL IMAGINATION.