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Nnamdi Azikiwe and W. E. B. Du Bois: *A Transatlantic Connection in the Fight Against Colonial Oppression*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**W. E. B. Du Bois with Nnamdi
Azikiwe, ca. 1930 by Cecil Layne,
University of Massachusetts
Amherst.**

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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In January 1930, during the height of the Women's War in Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe, one of the most influential figures in Nigeria's struggle for independence, penned a powerful letter to W. E. B. Du Bois. This letter, written from Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, where Azikiwe was studying, was more than just correspondence, it was a call for solidarity and a demand for justice, connecting the African anti-colonial struggle with the broader global fight against racial oppression.

01

Context: The Aftermath of the Women's War

The Women's War (Ògù Ụmùnwaànyị), which began in 1929, was a monumental uprising led by Igbo and Ibibio women cluster in southeastern Nigeria. The British colonial government's attempts to impose new taxes on women, combined with the oppressive indirect rule system enforced through warrant chiefs, sparked widespread protests. Women organized massive demonstrations, disrupted colonial administrative operations, and confronted both British officials and local collaborators.

The British response was brutal. In places like Opobo, Aba, and other

towns across the Owerri and Calabar provinces, colonial forces opened fire on peaceful protesters. Over 50 women were killed in one protest alone, with many more injured or arrested across the region. This atrocity reverberated not just within Nigeria but also across the African diaspora.

<https://ozikoro.com/the-womens-war-of-1929-a-defiant-stand-against-colonial-oppression/>

02

Azikiwe's Letter: A Voice of Defiance

Azikiwe's letter to Du Bois, dated January 16, 1930, reflects both his outrage and strategic intent. He submitted an article about the massacre to *The Crisis*, a journal founded by Du Bois in 1910 as the official publication of the NAACP. *The Crisis* served as a critical platform for civil rights advocacy, highlighting racial injustices globally.

"It is not news in that part of the world when defenceless women are shot down by whites. Of course, if white women are shot down by African natives, the entire British Navy would be on the scene."

This scathing remark explains the hypocrisy of colonial powers that dehumanized African lives while upholding the sanctity of European lives. His words were prophetic:

"The African native is being educated to the machine gun methods of Western culture and within few decades he will prove equal to the task."

Azikiwe foresaw the inevitable consequence of colonial violence, resistance would evolve, and Africans would eventually rise to

challenge and dismantle oppressive systems.

03

The Transatlantic Network of Resistance

The connection between Azikiwe and Du Bois highlights the transatlantic nature of the anti-colonial and civil rights struggles. Both men believed in Pan-Africanism, the idea that people of African descent worldwide shared a common history and destiny. Du Bois had long advocated for the political and social liberation of African nations, seeing their struggles as interconnected with those of African Americans facing systemic racism in the U.S.

Azikiwe's engagement with Du Bois wasn't just about reporting colonial atrocities; it was about building a network of resistance. By publishing in *The Crisis*, Azikiwe aimed to draw international attention to British colonial violence, hoping to galvanize support among African Americans and the broader African diaspora.

04

Legacy and Impact

Nnamdi Azikiwe would go on to become Nigeria's first President after independence in 1960, embodying the very resistance he wrote about in 1930. His collaboration with figures like Du Bois was part of a broader Pan-African movement that united intellectuals, activists, and political leaders across continents.

The Women's War also left an indelible mark on Nigerian history. It challenged colonial authority, led to reforms in governance, and demonstrated the formidable power of women in political activism.

The events of 1929 laid the groundwork for future anti-colonial movements, ultimately contributing to Nigeria's path to sovereignty.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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