

1900 Pan African Conference Petition to Queen Victoria

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Coming as it did on the heels of the Berlin Conference the Pan-African Movement was rapid and determined, although the first conference lacked clarity of purpose. Henry Sylvester Williams, a Trinidadian barrister practicing in London, called the Pan-African Conference in London in 1900. Often this congress is not thought of properly as one of the major congresses because of several factors. The opening address was given by an Englishman^ the bishop of London, who was considered liberal in the context of the England of the day and who wanted to see Africans educated enough to be able to have a sense of responsibility that would lead to self-government. In a word, the bishop believed that Africans were not yet ready, owing to lack of intelligence, civilization, or culture, to run governments. The conference had another problem that would be questioned by some of the more progressive forces in the African world. The thirty or so delegates petitioned Queen Victoria through the British government to look into the treatment of Africans in South Africa and Rhodesia.

DuBois led the African American delegation, which included a number of women, notably Anna Jones, who was on the Executive Committee, and Anna Julia Cooper. One of the leaders who drafted the petition to Queen Victoria was Anna Julia Cooper, the African woman from America who received a doctorate from the Sorbonne. **The memorial to Queen Victoria of England included the following acts of injustice in Africa perpetrated by whites against the people:**

1. The degrading and illegal compound system of labor in vogue in Kimberley and Rhodesia.
2. The so-called indenture, i.e., legalized bondage of African men and women and children to white colonists.
3. The system of compulsory labor in public works.
4. The "pass" or docket system used for people of color.
5. Local by-laws tending to segregate and degrade Africans such as the curfew; the denial to Africans of the use of footpaths; and the use of separate public conveyances.
6. Difficulties in acquiring real property.
7. Difficulties in obtaining the franchise.

In response to the memorial to Queen Victoria, her respondent wrote the following to Henry Sylvester Williams, the General Secretary for the Conference:

Sir. I am directed by My Secretary Chamberlain to state that he has received the Queen's commands to inform you that the Memorial of the Pan-African Conference requesting the situation of the native races in South Africa, has been laid before Her

Majesty, and that she was. graciously pleased to command him to return an answer to it on behalf of her government. Mr. Chamberlain accordingly desires to assure the members of the Pan-African Conference that, in settling the lines on which the administration of the conquered territories is to be conducted; Her Majesty's Government will not overlook the interests and welfare of the native races.

Source: Molefi K. Asante, *The History of Africa*, New York & London: Routledge, 2007, p.260