

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

An Online Professional Development Seminar



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from the National Humanities Center

GOALS

- Deepen your understanding of the relationship between the thought of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois
- Take their rivalry beyond the issue of manual training vs. the liberal arts
- Offer advice on how to teach the Washington-Du Bois rivalry

Framing Questions

- On what issues did Washington and Du Bois disagree?
- Why did they disagree?
- How extensive were their disagreements?
- To what extent were their disagreements due to philosophical, political, or tactical considerations?

FROM THE FORUM

Challenges, Issues, Questions

- On what issues did Washington and Du Bois disagree?
- How did the black public react to their different approaches to African American advancement? How did the white public react? How were their views received in the North and in the South? What was the international reaction?
- What was the relationship between Washington and Marcus Garvey?
- How did the support of Northern philanthropists influence Washington's views and the educational approach of the Tuskegee Institute?
- Is the Martin Luther King-Malcolm X rivalry a replay of the Washington-Du Bois rivalry?

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White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP
(2003)

Honorable mention in the Outstanding Book Awards
from the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Bigotry and
Human Rights in North America.

*Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American
Intellectual*
(1993)

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

Booker Taliaferro Washington 1856-1915

- Born into slavery in southwestern Virginia
- Moved to West Virginia, where he performed a variety of manual labor job
- Graduated from Hampton Institute in Virginia and Wayland Seminary in Washington, DC
- Returned to teach at Hampton
- Named president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1881
- Built influential “Tuskegee Machine”

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois 1868-1963

- Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts
- Graduated from Fisk University in Nashville
- Earned a Ph.D. Harvard, first African American to do so
- Taught history, sociology, and economics at Wilberforce University in Ohio, the University of Pennsylvania, and Atlanta University
- Leader of Niagara Movement
- Co-founder of the NAACP

Booker T. Washington's speech to the Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, September 1895

- Came to be known as the Atlanta Compromise
- Catapulted him into the national spotlight as the most prominent African American spokesperson, succeeding Frederick Douglass who died the previous February
- Delivered to an audience of northern whites, southern whites, and African Americans
- Proposed a framework for the adjustment of race relations in the United States: African Americans would not participate in the political life of the South, vote, or otherwise pursue or claim equal rights under the law and would accede to segregation; in exchange, whites would allow African Americans, starting at the bottom, to pursue economic advancement and would shield them from violence. Washington's program for racial uplift
- Incorporated in *Up from Slavery* (1901), Washington's autobiography

- Originally a review of *Up from Slavery* but was revised for inclusion in *Souls*
- A polemic against Washington's program of racial accommodation
- Criticized Washington for his narrow focus on accumulating material wealth and renouncing the right to vote and participate in civic and political life.

Six Areas of Disagreement

- On Emancipation and Reconstruction
- On education
- On capitalism
- On political rights
- On relations with whites
- On political leadership

Teaching the Disagreements

- Move away from a resolution that either condemns Washington and praises DuBois or vice versa.
- Avoid the wrestling match.
- Avoid cliches:
 - “Du Bois was an elitist.”
 - “Washington understood that you have to crawl before you can walk.”
 - “If it wasn’t for Du Bois arguing for full rights, African Americans would not be where they are today.”
 - “Washington was a hypocrite for telling blacks not to be involved in politics, while he was heavily involved in them.”
- Avoid the temptation to say that both men had the same goals and only needed to work together.

Disagreement on Emancipation and Reconstruction

- Washington and Du Bois disagreed over the results of Emancipation and Reconstruction.
- Not simply an academic debate.
- How one understood the immediate past had direct bearing on how one defined appropriate strategies for the future.

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *Up from Slavery*, chap. 14:

Atlanta Compromise Speech

“Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden....”

“...Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands...It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top....”

Discussion Questions

From your understanding of Reconstruction, is it accurate to say that what African Americans were trying to accomplish by participating in political life was unrelated to economic advancement?

Here are two statements based on the ideas expressed in the above passages: a) African Americans will accumulate influence in proportion to the wealth they amass. b) African Americans will be unable to protect themselves and their accumulated wealth unless they have access to the political arena. Which makes more sense to you?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *The Souls of Black Folk*, chap. 3:

[After surveying the main characteristics of black leadership from the American Revolution to the outbreak of the Civil War, Du Bois made the following observations about the direction of black politics during Reconstruction:]

“After the war and emancipation, the great form of Frederick Douglass, the greatest of American Negro leaders, still led the host. Self-assertion, especially in political lines, was the main programme, and behind Douglass came Elliot, Bruce, and Langston, and the Reconstruction politicians, and, less conspicuous but of greater social significance, Alexander Crummell and Bishop Daniel Payne.

“Then came the Revolution of 1876, the suppression of the Negro votes, the changing and shifting of ideals, and the seeking of new lights in the great night. Douglass, in his old age, still bravely stood for the ideals of his early manhood, – ultimate assimilation through self-assertion, and on no other terms”

Disagreement on Education

- Traditional polarity—Washington = industrial education/ Du Bois = college education—is simplistic.
- Washington recognized the need for college-educated teachers; he hired them for the Tuskegee faculty.
- Du Bois advocated for universal common education and industrial training for the majority of African Americans.
- The differences between the two revolved more around their conceptions of the purpose of education and work.

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *Up from Slavery*, chap. 8:

“Of one thing I felt more strongly convinced than ever, after spending this month in seeing the actual life of the coloured people, and that was that, in order to lift them up, **something must be done more than merely to imitate New England education as it then existed.** I saw more clearly than ever the wisdom of the system which General Armstrong had inaugurated at Hampton [industrial education with an emphasis on discipline]...

“...They were all willing to learn the right thing as soon as it was shown them what was right. I was determined to start them off on a solid and thorough foundation, so far as their books were concerned.... **While they could locate the Desert of Sahara or the capital of China on an artificial globe, I found out that the girls could not locate the proper places for the knives and forks on an actual dinner-table, or the places on which the bread and meat should be set.**”

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *Up from Slavery*, chap. 14:

Atlanta Compromise Speech

“...[W]e shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws [sic] of life and the useful. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.”

Discussion Questions

In Washington’s view, what were appropriate subjects to teach in schools for African Americans?

What was the “payoff” of industrial education?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From “The Talented Tenth”

“I am an earnest advocate of manual training and trade teaching for black boys, and for white boys, too. I believe that next to the founding of Negro colleges the most valuable addition to Negro education since the war, has been industrial training for black boys. Nevertheless, **I insist that the object of all true education is not to make men carpenters, it is to make carpenters men**; there are two means of making the carpenter a man, each equally important: the first is to give the group and community in which he works, liberally trained teachers and leaders to teach him and his family what life means; the second is to give him sufficient intelligence and technical skill to make him an efficient workman.”

Discussion Questions

What does Du Bois mean by saying that the object of true education is to make carpenters men and note vice versa? How does that approach differ from Washington’s?

Does this approach *require* that students attend college, or can this be taught in grades K-12?

Disagreement on Capitalism

Washington embraced the capitalism that was ascendant after the Civil War. He seized it as an opportunity for African Americans to find a place within the growing American economy. He intuited that a leadership that was grounded in moral appeals, such as that of Frederick Douglass (whom Washington greatly admired), would no longer have traction in the new economic and political situation.

Du Bois, on the other hand, at the least displayed suspicion of Gilded Age capitalism.

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

Atlanta Compromise Speech

“Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world, and in nothing is this Exposition more eloquent than in emphasizing this chance....

“To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits of the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race: ‘Cast down your bucket where you are.’...Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded [sic] your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South. Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand, and heart, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories.”

Discussion Questions

“Cast down your bucket” is an enduring metaphor from the Atlanta Compromise. What are the different meanings of this metaphor for whites and blacks in the South?

Drawing also on what you know about the Gilded Age, why does Washington single out for suspicion “those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits”? Who are these people?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *The Souls of Black Folk*, chap. 3:

“Mr. Washington came, with a simple definite programme, at the psychological moment when the nation was a little ashamed of having bestowed so much sentiment on Negroes, and was concentrating its energies on Dollars....

“... [B]y singular insight he intuitively grasped the spirit of the age which was dominating the North. And so thoroughly did he learn the speech and thought of **triumphant commercialism**, and the ideals of material prosperity, that the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities. One wonders what Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi would say to this....

“...This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming **a gospel of Work and Money** to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life.”

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From Du Bois, “Education and Work” (1930):

[After observing that Washington’s industrial education program trained blacks for outdated tasks in the new industrial and monopoly capitalist order, an obsolescence that few could clearly see in the late 19th century and at the turn of the 20th, Du Bois critiques the industrial education model for genuflecting before capitalism.]

“In one respect, however, the Negro industrial school was seriously at fault. It set its face toward the employer and the capitalist and the man of wealth. It looked upon the worker as one to be adapted to the demands of those who conducted industry. Both in its general program and in its classroom, it neglected almost entirely the modern labor movement.... [T]he very vehicle which was to train Negroes for modern industry neglected in its teaching the most important part of modern industrial development: namely, the relation of the worker to modern industry and to the modern state.”

Discussion Questions

What made Du Bois uncomfortable about the “spirit of the age” that dominated the North and which Washington intuitively grasped?

What subjects or types of things did Du Bois think it was necessary to teach in K-12?

Disagreement on Political Rights

- Washington's Atlanta Compromise accepted segregation.
- Du Bois agreed with this concession "in its broadest interpretation."
- They did not share the same understanding of the compromise.
- Washington was willing to give up political rights and equality temporarily in exchange for a promise of economic progress.
- Du Bois was willing to accept racial separation temporarily but not at the expense of political rights.

Atlanta Compromise Speech

“[W]e shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defence of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress....

“The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized [sic]. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.”

Discussion Questions

Another enduring metaphor from the Atlanta Compromise is this: “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” What does Washington mean by this? What are the implications and logical conclusions that follow from this statement?

What advice is Washington offering to African Americans? What is he asking of whites? Should rights under the law be contingent upon one or another concept of development?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *The Souls of Black Folk*, chap. 3:

“This group of men honor Mr. Washington for his attitude of conciliation toward the white South; they accept the ‘Atlanta Compromise’ in its broadest interpretation; they recognize, with him, many signs of promise, many [white] men of high purpose and fair judgment, in this section; they know that no easy task has been laid upon a region already tottering under heavy burdens.”

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *The Souls of Black Folk*, chap. 3:

“Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things, –

First, political power,

Second, insistence on civil rights,

Third, higher education of Negro youth,–

and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, and accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South. This policy has been courageously and insistently advocated for over fifteen years, and has been triumphant for perhaps ten years. **As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:**

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro....

These movements are not, to be sure, direct results of Mr. Washington’s teachings; but his propaganda has, without a shadow of doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment. The question then comes: Is it possible, and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meagre chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic No.”

Discussion Questions

According to Du Bois, what were the results of Washington’s repudiation of political participation by African Americans? Drawing also on what you know about the trend of American history in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are Du Bois’s points accurate or exaggerated?

How did Washington understand the Atlanta compromise?

How did Du Bois?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *Up From Slavery*, chap. 14:

“I do not believe that the Negro should cease voting, for a man cannot learn the exercise of self-government by ceasing to vote, any more than a boy can learn to swim by keeping out of the water, but I do believe that in his voting he should more and more be influenced by those of intelligence and character who are his next-door neighbours....

“As a rule, I believe in universal, free suffrage, but I believe that in the South we are confronted with peculiar conditions that justify the protection of the ballot in many of the states, for a while at least, either by an education test, a property test, or by both combined; but whatever tests are required, they should be made to apply with equal and exact justice to both races.”

Discussion Questions

What qualifications or modifications did Washington place on the Atlanta Compromise in these passages? Do you think it substantially changes the thrust of the Compromise?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

**From Booker T. Washington to Ednah Dow Littlefield Cheney, October 15, 1895,
The Booker T. Washington Papers, vol. 4:**

“...I find by experience that the southern people often refrain from giving colored people many opportunities that they would otherwise give them because of an unreasonable fear that the colored people will take advantage of opportunity given them to intrude themselves into the social society of the south. I thought it best to try to set at rest any such fear. **Now of course I understand that there are a great many things in the south which southern white people class as social intercourse that is not really so. If anybody understood me as meaning that riding in the same railroad car or sitting in the same room at a railroad station is social intercourse they certainly got a wrong idea of my position.**”

Discussion Questions

What qualifications or modifications did Washington place on the Atlanta Compromise in these passages? Do you think it substantially changes the thrust of the Compromise?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *The Souls of Black Folk*, chap. 3:

“It would be unjust to Mr. Washington not to acknowledge that in several instances he has opposed movements in the South which were unjust to the Negro; he sent memorials to the Louisiana and Alabama constitutional conventions, he has spoken against lynching, and in other ways has openly or silently set his influence against sinister schemes and unfortunate happenings. Notwithstanding this, it is equally true to assert that on the whole the distinct impression left by Mr. Washington’s propaganda is, first, that the South is justified in its present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro’s degradation...”

Discussion Questions

Is it fair to hold Washington responsible for the “distinct impression” he left, despite the several times he “openly or silently” opposed the rising tide of segregation and disfranchisement?

Disagreement on Relationship with Whites

- Washington told racially deprecating stories, which invited white condescension and supervision.
- Du Bois and his supporters believed in “manly” confrontation.

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *Up from Slavery*, chap. 14:

“Starting thirty years ago with ownership here and there in a few quilts and pumpkins and chickens (gathered from miscellaneous sources)...”

From *Up from Slavery*, chap. 8:

“It was also interesting to note how many big books some of them had studied, and how many high-sounding subjects some of them claimed to have mastered. The bigger the book and the longer the name of the subject, the prouder they felt of their accomplishment. Some had studied Latin, and one or two Greek. This they thought entitled them to special distinction.

“In fact, one of the saddest things I saw during the month of travel which I have described was a young man, who had attended some high school, sitting down in a one-room cabin, with grease on his clothing, filth all around him, and weeks in the yard and garden, engaged in studying a French grammar. ...

“...In registering the names of the students, I found that almost every one of them had one or more middle initials. When I asked what the ‘J’ stood for, in the name of John J. Jones, it was explained to me that this was a part of his ‘entitles.’ Most of the students wanted to get an education because they thought it would enable them to earn more money as school-teachers.”

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From Interview of W. E. B. Du Bois by William Ingersoll, June 9, 1960:

“Oh, Washington was a politician. He was a man who believed that we should get what we could get. It wasn't a matter of ideals or anything of that sort. He had no faith in white people, not the slightest, and he was most popular among them, because if he was talking with a white man he sat there and found out what the white man wanted him to say, and then as soon as possible he said it.”

From Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “Mr. Booker T. Washington and His Critics”:

“But some will say Mr. Washington represents the masses and seeks only to depict the life and needs of the black belt. There is a feeling that he does not do that when he will tell a cultured body of women like the Chicago Women’s Club the following story:

““Well, John, I am glad to see you are raising your own hogs.”

““Yes, Mr. Washington, ebber sence you done tole us bout raisin our own hogs, we niggers round here hab resolved to quit stealing hogs and gwinter raise our own.””

Discussion Questions

What is Washington implying in his comment about “chickens (gathered from miscellaneous sources)”?

Do these representations of African Americans soften white resistance to giving assistance, as Washington likely intended? Or do they create a bigger problem?

Does Du Bois’s observation help you to understand Washington?

How do you think Du Bois’s approach differed from Washington’s?

Disagreement over Political Leadership

- Major cause of the bitterness that infused the Washington-Du Bois rivalry
- Critics felt that Washington was not playing fairly.
- He sought to suppress criticism and debate to preserve his position in black politics and among his white patrons.
- Washington's tactics, more than differences over education, that led to the rupture between the two camps.

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *Up from Slavery*, chap 14:

“The coloured people and the coloured newspapers at first seemed to be greatly pleased with the character of my Atlanta address, as well as with its reception. But after the first burst of enthusiasm began to die away, and the coloured people began reading the speech in cold type, some of them seemed to feel that they had been hypnotized. They seemed to feel that I had been too liberal in my remarks toward the Southern whites, and that I had not spoken out strongly enough for what they termed the ‘rights’ of my race. For a while there was a reaction, so far as a certain element of my own race was concerned, but later these reactionary ones seemed to have been won over to my way of believing and acting.”

Discussion Question

How did Booker T. Washington characterize his opponents? How do you think that may have affected his opponents’ opinions of him and relationships with him?

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

From *The Souls of Black Folk*, chap 3:

“But the hushing of the criticism of honest opponents is a dangerous thing. It leads some of the best of the critics to unfortunate silence and paralysis of effort, and others to burst into speech so passionately and intemperately as to lose listeners. Honest and earnest criticism from those whose interests are most nearly touched, – criticism of writers by readers, – this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society. If the best of the American Negroes receive by outer pressure a leader whom they had not recognized before, manifestly there is here a certain palpable gain. Yet there is also irreparable loss, – a loss of that peculiarly valuable education which a group receives when by search and criticism it finds and commissions its own leaders.”

From Interview of W. E. B. Du Bois by William Ingersoll, June 9, 1960:

“I remember one time – I never met him very much, but one time I was on the streetcar going up Madison Avenue. We were having a meeting, to try to reconcile the pro- and anti- Washington people, and I was put on a committee to ask Andrew Carnegie to come down and address us. As a matter of fact, the thing had all been arranged, but the committee wanted us to do this, and I went with Washington, and we were standing on the back of the car. He very seldom said anything, but he looked at me and he said, ‘Have you read Carnegie’s book?’ You know Carnegie had a ghost-written book about the rise of the worker and so forth. I said, ‘No.’

“He said, ‘You ought to read it. He likes it.’

“We went up to Carnegie’s house, out on Riverside Drive, and I sat down in the lower hall, and Washington went into Carnegie’s bedroom, and then came down and said, ‘Mr. Carnegie (or, something permitted?) is coming to address us.’ That was the end of the visit.

“...I had called together a number of my friends. I did it with great reluctance, because I always regarded myself as a student and I wanted to study, I didn’t want to lead men because I didn’t have any faculty for leading men. I couldn’t slap people on the shoulder, and I forgot their names. But it seemed to me that I had to get these people together, and so we got I think about seventeen who promised to meet at Niagara Falls. We had difficulty in getting a hotel, so we went across the river into Canada, and had a meeting of what we called the Niagara Movement.”

Discussion Questions

In these passages, Du Bois strongly implies that Washington was appointed the leader of black America by outside forces. Assuming for the moment that this charge was accurate, what impact would the way Washington became so influential have on debate within African America over race advancement? How might Booker Washington respond to these charges?

How did Washington's actions affect Du Bois's actions?

Six Disagreements

- On Emancipation and Reconstruction
- On education
- On capitalism
- On political rights
- On relations with whites
- On political leadership

Rethinking Booker T. and W.E.B.

**Booker T. and W.E.B.
Dudley Randall**

"It seems to me," said Booker T.,
"It shows a mighty lot of cheek
To study chemistry and Greek
When Mister Charlie needs a hand
To hoe the cotton on his land,
And when Miss Ann looks for a cook,
Why stick your nose inside a book?"

"I don't agree," said W.E.B.
"If I should have the drive to seek
Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,
I'll do it. Charles and Miss can look
Another place for hand or cook,
Some men rejoice in skill of hand,
And some in cultivating land,
But there are others who maintain
The right to cultivate the brain."

"It seems to me," said Booker T.,
"That all you folks have missed the boat
Who shout about the right to vote,
And spend vain days and sleepless nights
In uproar over civil rights.
Just keep your mouths shut, do not grouse,
But work, and save, and buy a house."

"I don't agree," said W.E.B.
"For what can property avail
If dignity and justice fail?
Unless you help to make the laws,
They'll steal your house with trumped-up clause.
A rope's as tight, a fire as hot,
No matter how much cash you've got.
Speak soft, and try your little plan,
But as for me, I'll be a man."

"It seems to me," said Booker T.--

"I don't agree,"
Said W.E.B.

Last Shot

Have we addressed your questions?

Use The Forum

To continue the discussion.

To share fresh approaches and discussion questions that work.

We will monitor the forum until March 13, 2012.

Next FLVS-NHC Seminar

Over There: Why America Entered World War I

Dirk Bonker
Duke University
March 13, 2012

Please submit your evaluations.

Thank You