

# Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: Issue of the Color Line

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**Master's thesis / Diplomski rad**

**2017**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet u Rijeci**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:186:693449>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2025-01-21**



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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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**BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND W.E.B. DU BOIS:**

**ISSUE OF THE COLOR LINE**

*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the M.A. in English Language  
and Literature and Pedagogy at the University of Rijeka*

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Rijeka, June 2017

## **ABSTRACT**

In this M.A. thesis I will explore and compare the ideas introduced and expressed in the works of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, focusing on the topics where they overlap. The reason I chose these two authors and this subject matter is because I believe it to be extremely relevant today. These works of literary art were written over a century ago and yet almost all the issues these authors talk about are omnipresent in the world today except on a global scale. These works deal with issues of racial relations in the United States of America at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century/beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and while some progress has definitely been made there is still much work to be done to achieve the kind of equality these authors, their forefathers and successors like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X talk about. I feel these issues can be translated into others we face as a society today, ranging from feminism to LGBTQ+ rights to religious discrimination. The reason I chose these two authors is because they present two very different approaches to achieving the same goal. It is interesting to see different perspectives on certain issues and to understand where they come from and why they are in opposition. The goal of this thesis is to explore how the authors' philosophical and political agendas are expressed in their literary work and, in a smaller capacity, how they influenced the movements that followed.

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## **1. Historic context: reconstruction era<sup>1</sup>**

Reconstruction, in U.S. history, the period (1865–77) that followed the American Civil War and during which attempts were made to redress the inequities of slavery and its political, social, and economic legacy and to solve the problems arising from the readmission to the Union of the 11 states that had seceded at or before the outbreak of war. Long portrayed by many historians as a time when vindictive Radical Republicans fastened black supremacy upon the defeated Confederacy, Reconstruction has since the late 20th century been viewed more sympathetically as a laudable experiment in interracial democracy. Reconstruction witnessed far-reaching changes in America's political life. At the national level, new laws and constitutional amendments permanently altered the federal system and the definition of American citizenship. In the South, a politically mobilized black community joined with white allies to bring the Republican Party to power, and with it a redefinition of the responsibilities of government.

The national debate over Reconstruction began during the Civil War. In December 1863, less than a year after he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Pres. Abraham Lincoln announced the first comprehensive program for Reconstruction, the Ten Percent Plan. Under it, when one-tenth of a state's prewar voters took an oath of loyalty, they could establish a new state government. To Lincoln, the plan was an attempt to weaken the Confederacy rather than a blueprint for the postwar South. It was put into operation in parts of the Union-occupied Confederacy, but none of the

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<sup>1</sup>Found on <https://www.britannica.com/>, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Reconstruction-United-States-history>

new governments achieved broad local support. In 1864 Congress enacted (and Lincoln pocket vetoed) the Wade-Davis Bill, which proposed to delay the formation of new Southern governments until a majority of voters had taken a loyalty oath. Some Republicans were already convinced that equal rights for the former slaves had to accompany the South's readmission to the Union. In his last speech, on April 11, 1865, Lincoln, referring to Reconstruction in Louisiana, expressed the view that some blacks—the “very intelligent” and those who had served in the Union army—ought to enjoy the right to vote.

Following Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, Andrew Johnson became president and inaugurated the period of Presidential Reconstruction (1865–67). Johnson offered a pardon to all Southern whites except Confederate leaders and wealthy planters (although most of these subsequently received individual pardons), restoring their political rights and all property except slaves. He also outlined how new state governments would be created. Apart from the requirement that they abolish slavery, repudiate secession, and abrogate the Confederate debt, these governments were granted a free hand in managing their affairs. They responded by enacting the black codes, laws that required African Americans to sign yearly labour contracts and in other ways sought to limit the freedmen's economic options and reestablish plantation discipline. African Americans strongly resisted the implementation of these measures, and they seriously undermined Northern support for Johnson's policies.

When Congress assembled in December 1865, Radical Republicans such as Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania and Sen. Charles Sumner from Massachusetts called for the establishment of new Southern governments based on equality before the law and universal male suffrage. But the more numerous moderate

Republicans hoped to work with Johnson while modifying his program. Congress refused to seat the representatives and senators elected from the Southern states and in early 1866 passed the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills. The first extended the life of an agency Congress had created in 1865 to oversee the transition from slavery to freedom. The second defined all persons born in the United States as national citizens, who were to enjoy equality before the law.

A combination of personal stubbornness, fervent belief in states' rights, and racist convictions led Johnson to reject these bills, causing a permanent rupture between himself and Congress. The Civil Rights Act became the first significant legislation in American history to become law over a president's veto. Shortly thereafter, Congress approved the Fourteenth Amendment, which put the principle of birthright citizenship into the Constitution and forbade states to deprive any citizen of the "equal protection" of the laws. Arguably the most important addition to the Constitution other than the Bill of Rights, the amendment constituted a profound change in federal-state relations. Traditionally, citizens' rights had been delineated and protected by the states. Thereafter, the federal government would guarantee all Americans' equality before the law against state violation.

In the fall 1866 congressional elections, Northern voters overwhelmingly repudiated Johnson's policies. Congress decided to begin Reconstruction anew. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 divided the South into five military districts and outlined how new governments, based on manhood suffrage without regard to race, were to be established. Thus began the period of Radical or Congressional Reconstruction, which lasted until the end of the last Southern Republican governments in 1877.

By 1870 all the former Confederate states had been readmitted to the Union, and nearly all were controlled by the Republican Party. Three groups made up Southern Republicanism. Carpetbaggers, or recent arrivals from the North, were former Union soldiers, teachers, Freedmen's Bureau agents, and businessmen. The second large group, scalawags, or native-born white Republicans, included some businessmen and planters, but most were non-slaveholding small farmers from the Southern up-country. Loyal to the Union during the Civil War, they saw the Republican Party as a means of keeping Confederates from regaining power in the South.

In every state, African Americans formed the overwhelming majority of Southern Republican voters. From the beginning of Reconstruction, black conventions and newspapers throughout the South had called for the extension of full civil and political rights to African Americans. Composed of those who had been free before the Civil War plus slave ministers, artisans, and Civil War veterans, the black political leadership pressed for the elimination of the racial caste system and the economic uplifting of the former slaves. Sixteen African Americans served in Congress during Reconstruction—including Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce in the U.S. Senate — more than 600 in state legislatures, and hundreds more in local offices from sheriff to justice of the peace scattered across the South. So-called “black supremacy” never existed, but the advent of African Americans in positions of political power marked a dramatic break with the country's traditions and aroused bitter hostility from Reconstruction's opponents.

Serving an expanded citizenry, Reconstruction governments established the South's first state-funded public school systems, sought to strengthen the bargaining power of plantation laborers, made taxation more equitable, and outlawed racial discrimination in public transportation and accommodations. They also offered lavish aid to railroads



and other enterprises in the hope of creating a “New South” whose economic expansion would benefit blacks and whites alike. But the economic program spawned corruption and rising taxes, alienating increasing numbers of white voters.

Meanwhile, the social and economic transformation of the South proceeded apace. To blacks, freedom meant independence from white control. Reconstruction provided the opportunity for African Americans to solidify their family ties and to create independent religious institutions, which became centers of community life that survived long after Reconstruction ended. The former slaves also demanded economic independence. Blacks’ hopes that the federal government would provide them with land had been raised by Gen. William T. Sherman’s Field Order No. 15 of January 1865, which set aside a large swath of land along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia for the exclusive settlement of black families, and by the Freedmen’s Bureau Act of March, which authorized the bureau to rent or sell land in its possession to former slaves. But President Johnson in the summer of 1865 ordered land in federal hands to be returned to its former owners. The dream of “40 acres and a mule” was stillborn. Lacking land, most former slaves had little economic alternative other than resuming work on plantations owned by whites. Some worked for wages, others as sharecroppers, who divided the crop with the owner at the end of the year. Neither status offered much hope for economic mobility. For decades, most Southern blacks remained propertyless and poor.

Nonetheless, the political revolution of Reconstruction spawned increasingly violent opposition from white Southerners. White supremacist organizations that committed terrorist acts, such as the Ku Klux Klan, targeted local Republican leaders for beatings or assassination. African Americans who asserted their rights in dealings with white employers, teachers, ministers, and others seeking to assist the former slaves also

became targets. At Colfax, Louisiana, in 1873, scores of black militiamen were killed after surrendering to armed whites intent on seizing control of local government. Increasingly, the new Southern governments looked to Washington, D.C., for assistance.

By 1869 the Republican Party was firmly in control of all three branches of the federal government. After attempting to remove Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, in violation of the new Tenure of Office Act, Johnson had been impeached by the House of Representatives in 1868. Although the Senate, by a single vote, failed to remove him from office, Johnson's power to obstruct the course of Reconstruction was gone. Republican Ulysses S. Grant was elected president that fall (*see* United States presidential election of 1868). Soon afterward, Congress approved the Fifteenth Amendment, prohibiting states from restricting the right to vote because of race. Then it enacted a series of Enforcement Acts authorizing national action to suppress political violence. In 1871 the administration launched a legal and military offensive that destroyed the Klan. Grant was reelected in 1872 in the most peaceful election of the period.

During the 1870s, many Republicans retreated from both the racial egalitarianism and the broad definition of federal power spawned by the Civil War. Southern corruption and instability, Reconstruction's critics argued, stemmed from the exclusion of the region's "best men"—the planters—from power. As Northern Republicans became more conservative, Reconstruction came to symbolize a misguided attempt to uplift the lower classes of society. Reflecting the shifting mood, a series of Supreme Court decisions, beginning with the Slaughterhouse Cases in 1873, severely limited the scope of Reconstruction laws and constitutional amendments.

By 1876 only South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana remained under Republican control. The outcome of that year's presidential contest between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden hinged on disputed returns from these states. Negotiations between Southern political leaders and representatives of Hayes produced a bargain: Hayes would recognize Democratic control of the remaining Southern states, and Democrats would not block the certification of his election by Congress (*see* United States presidential election of 1876). Hayes was inaugurated; federal troops returned to their barracks; and as an era when the federal government accepted the responsibility for protecting the rights of the former slaves, Reconstruction came to an end.

By the turn of the century, a new racial system had been put in place in the South, resting on the disenfranchisement of black voters, a rigid system of racial segregation, the relegation of African Americans to low-wage agricultural and domestic employment, and legal and extralegal violence to punish those who challenged the new order. Nonetheless, while flagrantly violated, the Reconstruction amendments remained in the Constitution, sleeping giants, as Charles Sumner called them, to be awakened by subsequent generations who sought to redeem the promise of genuine freedom for the descendants of slavery. Not until the 1960s, in the civil rights movement, sometimes called the "second Reconstruction," would the country again attempt to fulfill the political and social agenda of Reconstruction.

## 2. Literature of the Reconstruction Era<sup>2</sup>

Rather than as a historically valuable but artistically less significant bridge between the antebellum origins of the African American novel and the celebrated explosion of literary creativity during the New Negro Renaissance, postbellum African American fiction is now being reevaluated as important in its own right for its formal experimentation with, and revision of, a large variety of novelistic genres.

African American authors wrote historical, utopian, political, and religious novels, juvenile and detective fiction, and *Bildungsromane*<sup>1</sup>. They explored international themes, expanding their focus to include not only Europe but also Africa and the Caribbean, and they were actively engaged with contemporary literary movements such as local color fiction, realism, naturalism, and, in the early twentieth century, modernism. Actively opposing the stereotypes and prejudices prevalent in contemporary mainstream American literature and determined to intervene as writers in the culture wars raging at the time, they forcefully opened a new literary space for the representation of blacks in fiction. They challenged restrictive definitions of American literature, and of American culture as a whole, through a radical revision of prevalent literary modes and the use of metanarrative clues that call attention to those revisionary practices, as well as through the elaboration of innovative strategies of representation, including the transgressive blending of different genres. In the novels of Charles W. Chesnutt, Frances E. W. Harper, Pauline E. Hopkins, Sutton E. Griggs, Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman, J. McHenry Jones, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and W. E. B. Du Bois, for instance, realism is cross-fertilized by romance and the oral folk tradition, as well as by intricate family sagas and utopian longings that bring the

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<sup>2</sup>Graham, Maryemma. "Reconstructing the race: the novel after slavery." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, Cambridge University Press, 2004

weight of the past or the politically charged hopes for a better future to bear upon the representation and interpretation of the present. The decades that followed the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the abolition of slavery witnessed both the opening up of new opportunities for former slaves and the continuation of old racial hierarchies and prejudices under new forms. Since there was no redistribution of land in the South and the promise of “40 acres and a mule” remained unfulfilled, freedom for millions of ex-slaves came without any structural improvement in their condition of economic dispossession and subordination. Nevertheless, against overwhelming odds, African Americans fought actively to change that situation, pursuing the goals of social, political, and economic advancement. Education was deemed central to the uplift of the race. Postbellum decades saw a proliferation of freedmen’s schools, black colleges, literary societies and clubs, journals, and independent black presses.

At the national level, however, the increasing disinterest in the plight of former slaves and the end of Reconstruction in 1877 led to a rapid reorganization of the old racialized power structure in the South and to an increase of racial tension and discrimination also in the North. The economic neoslavery of tenancy and sharecropping, the violence and intimidation of terroristic white-supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, and the systematic political disenfranchisement of African Americans, with the proliferation of “Jim Crow” laws which eroded the civil rights supposedly guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments, were accompanied by an increase in racial violence that saw the outbreak of major anti-black riots both North and South and a dramatic rise in the number of lynchings, which reached a peak in the 1890s. Lynchings, ritualized and publicized spectacles of mutilation and murder that drew large crowds of men, women, and also children, emerged as tools of social

control and repression of blacks considered “too” determined or enterprising, as African American journalist Ida B. Wells documented at the time.

The epitome and the emblem of the virulent racism of the times, racial violence and lynchings, are themes present in most of the major novels discussed in this chapter. They are also featured prominently in lesser-known African American works of fiction such as Walter H. Stowers and William H. Anderson’s *Appointed: An American Novel* (published under the pseudonym “Sanda” in 1894), G. Langhorne Pryor’s *Neither Bond nor Free: A Plea* (1902), Charles H. Fowler’s *Historical Romance of the American Negro* (1902). Novels like J. McHenry Jones’s *Hearts of Gold* (1896) featured also other kinds of violence, such as that directed against black prison inmates in labor camps in the South. As had happened during slavery, “Jim Crow” segregationist practices, which were institutionalized in 1896 with the infamous “separate but equal” Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>2</sup>, enforced two dramatically different experiences of American life for blacks and whites. Significantly, the years at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, which American historians call respectively the “Gilded Age” and the “Progressive period,” have been defined the low point of African American history.

Segregation, of course, had a devastating impact not only at a social, but also at a cultural level. Societal inequalities and discriminatory practices were in fact actively rationalized and legitimized by pseudo-biological theories on the inferiority of blacks, alternatively portrayed as “naturally” docile Sambos or violent brutes. The numerous pseudo-scholarly treatises on the topic were compounded and reinforced at a more capillary level by the prevailing demeaning stereotypes of African Americans in popular culture. The success of blackface minstrel shows, with their caricatural

portrayals of blacks, is but an example of the mainstream cultural consensus on the inferiority of blacks which also found more “highbrow” expression in literature: from the violent racism of Thomas Dixon’s Ku Klux Klan novels to the insidious condescension of bestselling plantation fiction `a la Thomas Nelson Page (which reinterpreted slavery as a benign institution that took care of a supposedly defenseless and naturally servile race).

In response to this extremely hostile cultural terrain, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a veritable flowering of African American fiction, stimulated by the growth of a black readership, by the multiplication of African American journals and publishing houses, and by the conviction, prevalent among black intellectuals and activists, that literature was a powerful tool to combat prevalent racial stereotypes, to reinforce the cultural pride and self-awareness of African Americans, and to foster the process of racial uplift. In combating the “battle of images” that raged in this period, the strategy of African American novelists was not simply to produce propagandistic work that reversed popular stereotypes. Rather, they proposed complex and literarily innovative representations of the rich cultural heritage, the complex humanity, and the history of resistance of African Americans. Indeed, it is one of the ironies of literary history that the extremely oppressive historical circumstances in which African American writers produced their fictions have for a long time been invoked more as a benign excuse for the supposedly poor quality of their craft (and therefore as a reason for the critical neglect of their work), rather than as proof of the irrepressible determination and artistic self-awareness with which African American authors defied contemporary dicta of race and gender, devising transgressive and original literary means for the counter-hegemonic representation of blacks. Their proclaimed faith in the power of the pen notwithstanding, African American authors could not, of course,

magically rectify contemporary injustices, but they did actively intervene as writers in the battle to shape the cultural imagery of their time in less racially oppressive ways. Their strategies of literary intervention had a crucial, albeit not yet fully recognized, impact on the development of subsequent African American and American fiction as a whole.

The challenges that African American novelists faced in their determination to represent a segregated world from their marginalized point of view were many and serious. In the first place, they faced a double and profoundly divided audience of black and white readers with often diametrically opposed perspectives, histories, and experiences of American society, as well as with very disparate degrees of knowledge of black culture and evaluations of its significance.

Since one of the aims of the African American novel was not only to preach to the converted, but also to promote intercultural understanding and undermine the prevailing stereotypes of blacks in white minds, typically the novel after slavery is a multilayered, multiple-voiced text, aimed at a dual audience and readable at a variety of levels depending on the kinds of cultural knowledge the reader brings to the text. The interpretation of any novel is always contingent upon the reader's degree of knowledge, but the specificity of these African American texts rests in their deliberate multiple-voicedness, in their use of strategies of signifying, of coded communication, and in the systematic metanarrative ways in which the authors draw the readers' attention to the process of interpretation, pointing to the treacherousness of the act of reading, foregrounding the unreliability of appearances, underlining the superficiality of traditional cultural scripts, and questioning the politics of production and transmission of knowledge. Explicit comments on the revisionary goals and the dual audience of African American fiction are made in the forewords, openings, or



closures of such different novels as Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice* and *Iola Leroy*; or, *Shadows Uplifted* (1892), Hopkins's *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900) or Griggs's *The Hindered Hand; or, The Reign of the Repressionist* (1905), which explicitly critiques Dixon's Ku Klux Klan novels. Along similar lines, the deferred happy endings that characterize many African American domestic novels of this period (e.g. Johnson's 1890 *Clarence and Corinne*), and the predominance of the theme of passing-for-white, or passing as it is generally known, are narrative devices that unsettle, respectively, the readers' expectations and their sense of the legibility of reality in ways that foreground the process of interpretation itself.

The African American novel after slavery is characteristically also dominated by a deconstructive approach to the past which prefigures late twentieth-century literary concerns. It re-told and reinterpreted the past, reading the black experience as an inextricable part of the nation's past and as an indispensable vantage point to interpret American culture and society as a whole. This reflexive attitude toward the past dominates not only those works that are set in the slavery period, like James H. W. Howard's antiplantation *Bond and Free: A True Tale of Slave Times* (1886), Thomas Detter's *Nellie Brown; or, The Jealous Wife* (1871), or Hopkins's *Winona* (1902). The emphasis on the continued impact of the slave past on the social and cultural hierarchies of the present, as well as on the most personal choices of the protagonists (including the choice of a marriage partner) characterizes also those African American novels that focus mostly on the decades that followed the end of the Civil War. In both cases, the emphasis on the past serves a dual goal. On the one hand, the reinterpretation of slavery and the focus on the culture of resistance of the slaves – issues which African American novelists knew to be absent from traditional history

books – revised the history of African America, stimulated cultural pride, and functioned as a means of community building. On the other, they represented a way to anticipate objections and to help suspend the white readers’ disbelief when presented with a black-centered view of American society that questioned dominant historical accounts and ran against white readers’ own experiences and self-interest.

In response to these complex and conflictual representational needs, mulatto heroes and heroines feature prominently in the African American novel after slavery. In white fiction, the mulatto was a stock literary figure that had enjoyed great popularity in the antebellum period, and had prospered also in postbellum decades. Several ideological issues coalesced in the white stereotype of the tragic mulatto. What spelled the tragic fate of these in between figures, in fact, was the supposedly clear differentiation and incompatibility of the races, which fed the reassuring conviction that racial difference was ultimately always legible and easy to regulate, since “blood will tell.” Precisely because of its popularity and stereotyped qualities, the mulatto had been profoundly revised in the works of the founding authors of African American fiction. Also in the hands of postbellum African American authors, the mulatto could be profoundly subversive, emerging as the living symbol of the historical reality of racial interconnectedness and as proof that, contrary to racist mythology, blacks and whites were “of one blood.” While the option to pass for white is characteristically rejected in favor of belonging to the black community, mulattoes more often than not enjoy a far from tragic fate in black fiction. In fact, the mulatto hero’s or heroine’s survival against all stereotypes, discriminations, and societal odds parallels and highlights that of the black community as a whole.

Long indicted as a symptom of middle-class bias, racial self-hatred, and internalization of white values, in African American fiction before the New Negro

Renaissance, the trope of passing functions instead as an aggressive strategy to reinterpret race as a sociocultural construct, rather than a biological destiny, and to appropriate and deconstruct the oppressive, albeit elusive, notion of whiteness that served as the normative standard to identify and evaluate blackness. African American novelists explored explicitly this transgressive potential of passing as a theme, using it as a literary device to cross the color line, to bridge fictionally the social separation between blacks and whites that was systematically enforced by segregation, to undermine pseudo-biological arguments on the naturalness of racial hierarchies, as well as to show, through the increased social mobility and success of the white looking passer, the systematic discriminatory practices that enforced separate social destinies for blacks and whites. The dislike of white readers for and the interest of black audiences in this literary transgression of the societal norms of racial segregation emerge clearly from Hopkins' 1903 reply to the letter of complaint of a white reader of the *Colored American Magazine*.

Through their use of the trope of passing and the foregrounding of seemingly more conventional all-but-white protagonists, African American writers also opened a space for the non-caricatural representation of visibly black characters and for a reevaluation of the distinctiveness of African American culture. The black characters who surround the all-but-white protagonist do not provide stereotypical comic relief, they are the spokespersons of those historic and cultural values of black America that lead Iola Leroy, for instance, to relinquish the possibility of passing and instead to cast her lot with her mother's people. In turn, the passer's preference for the black community reinterprets African Americanness as the consciousness of a distinctive historical, social, and cultural heritage, rather than as an intrinsic condition of dispossession.

Dark-skinned folk characters emerge not only as major supporting actors, but as the unquestioned protagonists of several novels of this period, such as Tillman's *Clancy Street* (1898–1899), Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), and Du Bois' *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911). The conflicting representational needs that led many African American authors to deploy the mulatto as a “narrative device of mediation” also led them to adopt and adapt the conventions of utopian fiction, which centers on the imaginative construction of an ideal society, had become extremely popular at the turn of the century. In their enormously influential works, white bestselling authors like Edward Bellamy projected into the future the racist and eugenicist tendencies of their times, imagining in *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (1888) a perfect future from which blacks have disappeared or where they enjoy separate and unequal status. Building on a little-known early antecedent like Lorenzo D. Blackson's Christian utopia, *The Rise and Progress of the Kingdoms of Light and Darkness; or, The Reigns of Kings Alpha and Abandon* (1867), turn-of-the-century African American writers profoundly revised the formal conventions and thematic concerns of utopian fiction. Blending utopia with the *Bildungsroman*, the romance, and intricate family sagas to emphasize the continued impact of the past on the future, African American writers focused less on the description of a perfect future social order than on the process of personal and social change that could make such a perfect society possible by preparing individuals worthy of inhabiting it.

The focus on the plight of the black woman, as paradigmatic of the condition of oppression and also of the ethos of resistance of the black community as a whole, dominates the fiction written by Harper, Hopkins, and other literary exponents of the BlackWoman's Era at the turn of the century, including Amelia E. Johnson, Emma Dunham Kelley-Hawkins, and Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman. As critic Claudia

Tate has argued, these domestic novels foreground female-centered environments, marginalizing and subverting patriarchal power relations, and centering on new models of more independent women who are able to reconcile familial duties with a satisfying professional career, as in the case of Lucille Delany in *Iola Leroy* or of the title character of Tillman's *Beryl Weston's Ambition*.

The work of Amelia E. Johnson reveals a different strategy to deal with the dilemmas of representing race in a segregated society. Johnson was the first black woman to write Sunday School fiction for the American Baptist Publication Society, one of the largest white publishing houses of the time, and her fiction represents an important and long-neglected early moment in the tradition of African American juvenile fiction. Amelia E. Johnson was an activist in the African American community, and in her essays for such journals as T. Thomas Fortune's *The New York Age* she was outspoken on racial issues, including, for instance, the need for "race publishing houses" to enable African American authors to write without incurring white censorship.<sup>7</sup> However, her three Sunday School novels (*Clarence and Corinne; or, God's Way*, 1890; *The Hazeley Family*, 1894; *Martina Meriden; or, What Is My Motive?*, 1901) feature racially indeterminate characters, that is, characters who are not explicitly described as black and could therefore be assumed to be white by white readers. This choice was not unique, nor was it only a defensive strategy to circumvent white readers' disinterest in black matters. In these novels that engaged in passing for white, the choice of racially indeterminate or white characters afforded a way to address problematic issues, without presenting them as specifically racialized problems linked with the supposed social pathology of blacks.

In his first novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), the famous African American intellectual Du Bois focused both on the South and the North to give voice, like

Dunbar, to the changing realities of African America, including the early stages of the Great Migration that in the years around World War I would bring millions of black Southerners to the major Northern cities. Du Bois, however, eschewed Dunbar's naturalistic sense of inescapability and doom. He blended his analysis of the economics of racism and the exploitation of blacks in the cotton industry with a romance, unsettling the literary conventions of naturalism (with its problematic emphasis on racial destiny) and opening instead a narrative space for the celebration of the culture and the spirituality of black folk.

Published a year after *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912) also reflects the cultural and social impact of the changing demographics of African America, while celebrating the rich expressive culture of black folk. In this novel, Johnson deliberately builds on the previous tradition of African American prose. He puts classic tropes to new modernist literary uses, but also shows the continuity and distinctiveness of black American culture. Johnson engages in an innovative and experimental play with the limited point of view and with parodic intertextuality to construct a fictional first-person narrator who is profoundly unreliable. *The Ex-Coloured Man* reveals his unreliability in the very process of recounting his life. His ambition to present himself as a race hero is constantly undercut by his egotistic self-pity, by superficial evaluations that bespeak his alienation from African American culture, and by a deep-seated materialism that leads him to admire uncritically the white American world he will eventually join permanently by passing. Significantly, the narrator remains nameless throughout the novel because, having passed into white society and, unhampered by discrimination, having prospered as a businessman, he does not want to jeopardize his social standing and economic success by making his racial heritage known.

The peregrinations of the fictional narrator follow classic trajectories in African American history and fiction, foregrounding also tropes and environments that will become characteristic of New Negro fiction: the migration from the rural South to the urban North, the expatriation to Europe, the return to the South, where the Ex-Coloured Man, who at one point decides to make a career as a musician, looks for sources of inspiration in the folk traditions of music and oratory. Johnson filters reality through the eyes of his protagonist, whose unreliability emerges obliquely and ironically through his self-aggrandizing attempt to compare himself to such heroic protagonists of African American history and culture as Frederick Douglass and William E. B. Du Bois, while misinterpreting in unwittingly parodic ways their life and work. Similarly revealing are the intertextual references to classic dramatic situations in nineteenth-century African American fiction, like lynching. While in previous African American novels the reality of racial violence motivated the protagonists to commit themselves even more fully to the cause of racial justice, in the case of the Ex-Coloured Man, on the contrary, the lynching he witnesses leads him to praise the murderers as belonging to “a great people,” to express contempt for the victim, as well as to finalize his decision to pass.

While parody is unwitting in the case of the fictional narrator, it is deliberately and finely tuned by the author. The selfishness and racial alienation of the Ex-Coloured Man emerge by contrast to the heroic models he misinterprets, and serve a dual narrative function. On the one hand, the Ex-Coloured Man becomes a ridiculing parody of the racial prejudices of the white society he so deeply admires. On the other, that same parody celebrates, indirectly but powerfully, the values of race solidarity, loyalty, and pride the protagonist cannot live up to.

Ironically, Johnson's sophisticated modernist parodic novel has for a long time been taken at face value. First published anonymously in 1912, it was largely read as a real autobiography, and it did not elicit much interest. Republished explicitly as a novel in 1927, with the author's name appended to it, at the height of the New Negro Renaissance, at a time when Johnson was famous as the curator of important anthologies and as NAACP secretary, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* was received triumphantly, though it was still praised for its documentary value. Six years later, in 1933, Johnson would publish his real autobiography, *Along This Way*, also in the attempt to dispel misconceptions about his novel. Today, the critical work of Robert B. Stepto, Valerie Smith, and Lucinda MacKethan has conclusively established the generic status and literary sophistication of Johnson's novel.

The history of the reception of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, however, remains revealing and paradigmatic of the underestimation from which African American fiction, and especially pre-Harlem Renaissance fiction, has suffered and, to some extent, continues to suffer. The process of recovery and reinterpretation of the early texts that is currently under way is slowly changing and expanding our perception of the African American, as well as of the American literary canon. Much critical work still needs to be done, however, to restore a more historically and critically sensitive appreciation for the literary craft of early African American novelists, for the depth and originality of their revision of contemporary genres, as well as for the intra- and interracial intertextual relationships they established with other contemporaneous American writers. Most importantly, recovering a fuller sense of the power of their vision and their innovative contributions to the development of the art of fiction will open up the possibility of revising traditional literary genealogies, moving beyond long-standing assumptions of a one-way influence of



white on black writers, and enriching in new and complex ways our reading of American literary history and culture as a whole.

### **3. Booker Taliaferro Washington (5 Apr. 1856?-14 Nov. 1915)**

**Booker Taliaferro Washington**<sup>3</sup>(henceforth Booker T. Washington)(5 Apr. 1856?-14 Nov. 1915), African-American educator and race leader, was born on the plantation of James Burroughs, near Hale's Ford in Franklin County, Virginia, the son of an unknown white father and Jane, a slave cook owned by Burroughs. Washington was never certain of the date of his birth and showed little interest in who his father might have been. His mother gave him his first and middle names, Booker Taliaferro; he took his last name in 1870 from his stepfather, Washington Ferguson, a slave whom his mother had married. In his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901), he recalled the poverty of his early years as a slave on Burroughs's plantation, but because emancipation came when he was around nine, he was spared the harsher experiences of the slave system. In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, his mother moved him, his half-sister, and his half-brother to Malden, West Virginia, where her husband had found work.

Two women were influential in Washington's early education. The first was his mother. He displayed an intense interest in learning to read; although illiterate herself, she bought her son a spelling book and encouraged him to learn. While working in the mines, Washington also began attending a local elementary school for black youths.

The other female influence was Viola Ruffner, wife of General Lewis Ruffner, owner

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<sup>3</sup>Biography found on <https://www.britannica.com/ww.britannica.com/biography/Booker-T-Washington>

of the mines. Probably around the age of eleven, eager to escape the brutal mine work, he secured a position as Viola Ruffner's houseboy. Early on Ruffner spotted the ambition in young Washington: "He seemed peculiarly determined to emerge from his obscurity. He was ever restless, uneasy, as if knowing that contentment would mean inaction. 'Am I getting on?'--that was his principal question" (quoted in Gilson Willetts, "Slave Boy and Leader of His Race," *New Voice* 16 [24 June 1899]: 3).

In 1872, at age sixteen, Washington entered Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia.

Hampton Institute, only four years old at the time, was a monument to its principal, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, probably the single most influential person in Washington's life. In Washington he found an extraordinarily apt and ambitious pupil. Washington not only learned agriculture, brickmasonry, and the standard academic subjects taught at Hampton, more importantly he absorbed the entire philosophy of character building and utilitarian education stressed by the handsome and charismatic Armstrong.

Somewhat adrift in the late 1870s, having rejected the ministry, law, and public school teaching as viable careers, Washington was invited back to Hampton in 1879 by General Armstrong to run the night school and later to supervise the dormitory for Indian boys, who had recently been admitted. In the spring of 1881 Armstrong received a request from three education commissioners in Alabama to recommend a white principal for a new Negro normal school to be established in Tuskegee. He wrote a persuasive letter urging them to accept Washington instead. They agreed, and the young educator was soon on the way to what would be his life's work. On arriving

in Alabama, he learned that the state legislature had appropriated \$2,000 for salaries only. There was no land, no buildings, no campus.

Plunging into unremitting activity, Washington won over local whites in the community, began to recruit black students who were hungry for education, and held the first classes in a shanty. One of his mentors at Hampton was the school's treasurer, James F. B. Marshall, an elderly and kindly ex-general who now began coaching Washington in the arts of financial management and extracting money from wealthy white benefactors. With a \$200 loan from Marshall, Washington purchased land outside of town for a permanent campus. Student labor erected the initial buildings of Tuskegee Institute, and student farming supplied much of the foodstuff for the dormitory kitchen.

In spite of Washington's national fame in years to come, Tuskegee never ceased to be his base of operations and the enterprise to which he devoted most of his time. Among the notable benefactors of Tuskegee were steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, oilman John D. Rockefeller, camera manufacturer George Eastman, and Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck, and Co.

In many respects Tuskegee was a "colony" of Hampton Institute, as Washington had imbibed General Armstrong's emphasis on industrial skills and character building. Female students specialized in cooking, sewing, and other domestic skills. In addition to the standard academic subjects, from grammar and composition to history, mathematics, chemistry, and bookkeeping, strong emphasis was placed on personal hygiene and moral development and on daily chapel services. At the time of Washington's death the student body numbered more than fifteen hundred.

Washington was married three times. His first wife, Fannie N. Smith, gave birth to a child in 1883, the year after their marriage, but died prematurely the next year. In 1885 Washington married Olivia Davidson; they had two children. Unfortunately, she had suffered from physical maladies for years and died in 1889. Four years later he married Margaret J. Murray, a Fisk graduate who had replaced Davidson as lady principal. She remained Washington's wife for the rest of his life, helping to raise his three children and continuing to play a major role at Tuskegee.

By the mid-1880s Washington was becoming a fixture on the nation's lecture circuit. This exposure both drew attention and dollars to Tuskegee and allowed the black educator to articulate his philosophy of racial advancement. In a notable 1884 address to the National Education Association in Madison, Wisconsin, Washington touted education for Negroes--"brains, property, and character"--as the key to black advancement and acceptance by white southerners. "Separate but equal" railroad and other public facilities were acceptable to blacks, he argued, as long as they really were equal. During the 1880s and 1890s Washington went out of his way to soft-pedal racial insults and attacks on blacks (including himself) by whites. He courted southern white politicians who were racial moderates, arguing that black Americans had to exhibit good citizenship, hard work, and elevated character in order to win the respect of the "better sort" of whites.

The apogee of Washington's career as a spokesman for his race occurred at the opening of Atlanta's Cotton States and International Exposition in September 1895. Blacks had their own, albeit segregated, exhibit space at the exposition, and the Atlanta leaders of the affair invited Washington to give a ten-minute address.

Dubbed the "Atlanta Compromise," the speech unquestionably secured Washington's position as the leading spokesman for American blacks to the larger white community and particularly to the white power structure of American politics, and it was lavishly praised by white leaders. Washington had tapped into the classic American myth that hard work, self-discipline, and economic independence would win for any citizen the respect of his neighbors. He conveniently ignored or chose to omit the fact that at the very time he spoke American race relations were at their worst point since the end of the Civil War, with lynchings and other violence, grinding poverty, and legal and extralegal discrimination at the ballot box a fact of life for most American blacks. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision the very next year in *Plessy v. Ferguson* would place the fiction of "separate but equal" on segregated public facilities.

Yet the decade after 1895 was for Washington the most influential period of his life, if that influence is measured by his demand as a speaker and the power he wielded among white political leaders. In 1898 President William McKinley paid a visit to Tuskegee Institute. McKinley's successor, Theodore Roosevelt, had been a friend of Washington's for several years. Roosevelt regularly though privately consulted Washington on matters involving race and southern policies, and almost all of the minority political appointments Roosevelt made as president were first cleared with the Tuskegeean. Washington's relationship with Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, was cooler, given Taft's greater reluctance than Roosevelt to make significant black political appointments; but Washington scored an occasional minor victory with Taft, and it was one of the many ironies of his career that while he urged ordinary blacks to eschew politics and humbly go about their daily work, he himself wielded more political power than any other black American of his day.

Washington's prolific writing also helped to spread his influence; moreover, much of the royalties from his books went into the coffers of Tuskegee. He wrote scores of articles and ten books, often with the help of ghost-writers, due to his busy schedule. Among them were *The Future of the American Negro* (1899), a collection of his articles and speeches; *The Story of My Life and Work* (1900), the first of three autobiographies; *Up from Slavery* (1901), his most critically acclaimed autobiography, translated into some eighteen languages.

Washington's power involved not only close relationships with influential white political leaders and industrialists but also a secret network of contacts with journalists and various organizations. He schemed with white and black Alabamians to try to keep other black schools from locating near Tuskegee. He planted spies in organizations unfriendly to him to report on their activities and at one time even used a detective agency briefly. Despite public denials, Washington owned partial interests in some minority newspapers. This allowed him to plant stories and to influence their news coverage and editorial stands in ways beneficial to himself. Beginning in the mid-1880s, and lasting for some twenty years, he maintained a clandestine relationship with T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age*, the leading black newspaper of its day. He helped support the paper financially, was one of its stockholders, and quietly endorsed many of Fortune's militant stands for voting and other civil rights and against lynching. He also supported the Afro-American League, a civil rights organization founded by Fortune in 1887. Washington secretly provided financial and legal support for court challenges to all-white juries in Alabama, segregated transportation facilities, and disfranchisement of black voters. As black suffrage decreased nonetheless around the turn of the century, Washington struggled to keep a modicum of black influence and patronage in the Republican party in the

South. From 1908 to 1911 he played a major, though covert, role in the successful effort to get the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn a harsh Alabama peonage law under which Alonzo Bailey, a black Alabama farmer, had been convicted.

It is clear, from research in Washington's massive correspondence, that he supported the full agenda of civil and political rights put forward by Fortune, the Afro-American League, and later the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. But he refused to go public with such efforts, fearing, probably rightly, that to reveal his involvement would undercut if not destroy his support from white politicians and philanthropists and perhaps threaten his beloved Tuskegee.

After about 1900 Washington came under increasing criticism from black opponents who questioned his measured and nonaggressive responses to legalized segregation, loss of voting rights, and violence against blacks. His critics referred disrespectfully to his enormous influence as the Tuskegee Machine. Among the most vocal were William Monroe Trotter, the militant editor of the *Boston Guardian*, and noted sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois.

More serious for Washington was the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. Melvin J. Chisum, a northern confidant of Emmett Scott, had infiltrated Trotter's Boston Suffrage League and later the Niagara Movement, the forerunner of the NAACP, and reported the activities of both groups back to Tuskegee. Characteristically, Washington had a spy planted at the NAACP's founding meeting. Nonetheless he was unable to prevent the creation of the NAACP, the membership of which included blacks, sympathetic white progressives, Jews, and even a few white southerners, or to influence its agenda, which included a broad-based call for a major assault on all fronts against racial injustice and white

supremacy. Washington's old nemesis Du Bois became editor of the organization's monthly magazine, the *Crisis*.

Washington died of overwork and arteriosclerosis at Tuskegee, shortly after returning from New York City, where he had been hospitalized.

To most of his students and faculty at Tuskegee, and to millions of poor blacks nationwide, he was a self-made and beneficent, if stern, Moses leading them out of slavery and into the promised land. "When persons ask me," he said once, "how, in the midst of what sometimes seem hopelessly discouraging conditions, I can have such faith in the future of my race in this country, I remind them of the wilderness through which and out of which a good Providence has already led us." When he also wrote that he would "permit no man, no matter what his color, to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him," he was undoubtedly sincere. His message to his fellow blacks that hard work, good citizenship, patient fortitude in the face of adversity, and love would ultimately conquer the hatred of the white man was appealing to the majority of whites of his time and foreshadowed the similar message of a later leader, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Washington's hardscrabble "up from slavery" background made it difficult for him to communicate with his college-educated critics, such as Trotter and Du Bois. Yet their point that the race needed lawyers and doctors as well as farmers and bricklayers was valid, and the growing crescendo of criticism against Washington on this issue made the last decade of his life probably his most difficult. The irony, of course, was that Washington was secretly supporting the campaign against legal segregation and racial violence and for full civil rights. But he was unwilling to reveal his covert role for



fear that it would undercut his power base among blacks and sympathetic whites, and he was doubtlessly right.

Close analysis of Washington's autobiographies and speeches reveals a vagueness and subtlety to his message lost on most people of his time, whites and blacks alike. He never said that American minorities would forever forgo the right to vote, to gain a full education, or to enjoy the fruits of an integrated society. But he strategically chose not to force the issue in the face of the overwhelming white hostility that was the reality of American race relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this sense, he did what he had to do to assure the survival of himself and the people for whom he spoke.

#### **4. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois(23 Feb. 1868-27 Aug. 1963)**

African-American activist, historian, and sociologist, **William Edward Burghardt** (henceforth W.E.B.) **Du Bois**<sup>4</sup> was born 23 Feb. 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, the son of Mary Silvina Burghardt, a domestic worker, and Alfred Du Bois, a barber and itinerant laborer. In later life Du Bois made a close study of his family origins, weaving them rhetorically and conceptually into almost everything he wrote. He died 27 Aug. 1963 in Accra, Ghana.

W.E.B. Du Bois' father Alfred Du Bois, born in Haiti and descended from Bahamian mulatto slaves, enlisted during the Civil War (April 12, 1861 – May 9, 1865; by proclamation) as a private in a New York regiment of the Union army but has apparently deserted shortly afterward. Rooted in New England, the Burghardts descended from a freedman of Dutch slave origin who had fought briefly in the American Revolution. Under the care of his mother and her relatives, young Du Bois spent his entire childhood in a small western Massachusetts town of 4,000, where African-Americans made up a minority of inhabitants. He received a classical, college preparatory education in Great Barrington's racially integrated high school, where he became the first African-American graduate in June 1884. Being a highly intelligent and motivated young man, Du Bois not only excelled in his high school studies but contributed numerous articles to two regional newspapers, the *Springfield Republican* and the black-owned *New York Globe*, then edited by T. Thomas Fortune.

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<sup>4</sup>Biography found on <https://www.britannica.com/ww.britannica.com/biography/W-E-B-Du-Bois>

In high school Du Bois received mentorship from his principal, Frank Hosmer, who encouraged his extensive reading and helped him receive scholarship aid that enabled him to enroll at Fisk University in September 1885, six months after his mother's passing. One of the best of the southern colleges for newly freed slaves founded after the Civil War, Fisk offered a continuation of his classical education and a strong influence of teachers who were heirs to New England and Western Reserve (Ohio) abolitionism. It also served as an introduction of sorts to southern American racism and African-American culture for Du Bois, who was raised in the northern part of the country as a free man. A teaching position in the hills of eastern Tennessee during the summers of 1886 and 1887, heavily influenced his later writings and thought.

In 1888 Du Bois enrolled at Harvard as a junior. He received a B.A. *cum laude* in 1890, an M.A. in 1891, and a Ph.D. in 1895. During his travels between 1892 and 1894, he discovered new intellectual influences in Germany, where he enrolled at the Friedrich-Wilhelm III Universität (then referred to as the University of Berlin but renamed the Humboldt University after World War II). Upon his return to the United States in the summer of 1894, Du Bois taught classics and modern languages for two years at Wilberforce University in Ohio. While teaching there, he met Nina Gomer, a student at the college, whom he married in 1896 at her home in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The couple had two children. By the end of his first year at Wilberforce, Du Bois had completed his Harvard doctoral thesis, "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870," which was published in 1896 as the inaugural volume of the Harvard Historical Studies series.

Although he had written his Berlin thesis in economic history, received his Harvard doctorate in history, and taught languages and literature at Wilberforce, Du Bois made

some of his most important early intellectual contributions to the emerging field of sociology. In 1896 he was invited by the University of Pennsylvania to conduct a study of the seventh ward in Philadelphia. There he completed the monumental study, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). The Philadelphia study was both highly empirical and hortatory, a prelude of sorts to the politically engaged scholarship that Du Bois pursued in the years that followed and reflected the two main strands of his intellectual engagement during this formative period: the scientific study of the so-called Negro Problem and the appropriate political responses to it. While completing his fieldwork in Philadelphia in November 1896, Du Bois delivered to the Academy of Political and Social Science "The Study of the Negro Problem", a methodological manifesto on the purposes and appropriate methods for scholarly examination of the condition of black people. In March 1897, while addressing the newly founded American Negro Academy in Washington, D.C., he outlined for his black intellectual colleagues, in "The Conservation of the Races," both a historical sociology and theory of race as a concept and a call to action in defense of African-American culture and identity. During that same summer, *Atlantic Monthly* published the essay "The Strivings of the Negro People," a revised version of which later served as the opener for his most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

Together these works make up the frame for Du Bois's evolving conceptualization of, methodological approach to, and political values and commitments regarding the issue of race in America.

Upon completion of the Philadelphia study in December 1897, Du Bois began the first of two long tenures at Atlanta University, where he taught sociology and directed empirical studies of the social and economic conditions, as well as, the cultural and

institutional lives of southern African Americans. During this first tenure at Atlanta he wrote two more books, *The Souls of Black Folk*, a collection of passionate essays on race, labor, and culture, and *John Brown* (1909), an interpretation of the life and martyrdom of the militant abolitionist.

With the publication of *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois emerged as the most prominent spokesperson for the opposition to Booker T. Washington's policy of political conservatism and racial accommodation. Ironically, Du Bois had maintained a discrete distance from Washington's opponents and had made few overt statements in opposition to the "Wizard of Tuskegee". There had, in fact, been numerous times during his career when he himself might have ended up teaching at Tuskegee. Du Bois had been charged with overseeing the African American Council's efforts to encourage black economic enterprise and worked with Washington's partisans in that effort. By his own account his overt rupture with Washington was sparked by the growing evidence of a conspiracy, emanating from Tuskegee, to dictate speech and opinion in all of black America and to crush any opposition to Washington's leadership. After the collapse of efforts to compromise their differences through a series of meetings in 1904, Du Bois joined William Monroe Trotter and other Washington opponents to form the Niagara Movement, an organization militantly advocating full civil and political rights for African Americans.

Although it enjoyed some success, the Niagara Movement was fatally hindered by lack of funds and the (c) overt and opposition of Washington and his allies. Indeed, the vision and program of the movement were fully realized only with the founding of a new biracial organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP grew out of the agitation and a 1909 conference

called to protest the deteriorating status of and escalating violence against black Americans. Racial rioting in August 1908 in Springfield, Illinois, the home of Abraham Lincoln, sparked widespread protest among blacks and liberal whites appalled at the apparent spread of southern violence and lynch law into northern cities. It launched legal suits, legislative lobbying, and propaganda campaigns that embodied uncompromising, militant attacks on lynching, Jim Crow, and disfranchisement. In 1910 Du Bois left Atlanta to join the NAACP as an officer, its only black board member, and to edit its monthly magazine, the *Crisis*.

As editor of the *Crisis* Du Bois finally established the journal of opinion that had so long eluded him, one that could serve as a platform from which to reach a larger audience among African Americans and one that united the multiple strands of his life's work. In its monthly issues he rallied black support for NAACP policies and programs and excoriated white opposition to equal rights. The journal's cover displayed a rich visual imagery embodying the sheer diversity and breadth of the black presence in America. Thus the journal constituted, simultaneously, a forum for multiple expressions of and the coherent representation and enactment of black intellectual and cultural life.

From his vantage as an officer of the NAACP, Du Bois also furthered another compelling intellectual and political interest, Pan-Africanism. He had attended the first conference on the global condition of peoples of African descent in London in 1900 and six other gatherings followed between 1911 and 1945.

During World War I he had written "Close Ranks," a controversial editorial in the *Crisis* (July 1918), which urged African Americans to set aside their grievances for the moment and concentrate their energies on the war effort.

Du Bois accepted an appointment as chair of the sociology department at Atlanta University, where he had already been teaching as a visiting professor during the winter of 1934. There he founded and edited a new scholarly journal, *Phylon*, from 1940 to 1944. There, too, he published his most important historical work, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (1935), and *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940), his most engaging and poignant autobiographical essay since *Souls of Black Folk*. During this period Du Bois continued to be an active lecturer and an interlocutor with young scholars and activists; he also deepened his studies of Marxism and traveled abroad.

Conflicts with the U.S. delegation to the United Nations (which included Eleanor Roosevelt, who was also a member of the NAACP board) and disillusionment with the evolving role of America as a postwar world power reinforced his growing radicalism and refusal to be confined to a safe domestic agenda. He became a supporter of the leftist Southern Negro Youth Congress at a time of rising hysteria about Communism and the onset of the Cold War. In 1948 he was an active supporter of the Progressive party and Henry Wallace's presidential bid. All of this put him at odds with Walter White and the NAACP board, who were drawn increasingly into collusion with the Harry S. Truman administration and into fierce opposition to any leftist associations. In 1948, after an inconclusive argument over assigning responsibility for a leak to the *New York Times* of a Du Bois memorandum critical of the organization and its policies, he was forced out of the NAACP for a second time, after which he joined the Council on African Affairs, where he chaired the Africa Aid Committee and was active in supporting the early struggle of the African National Congress of South Africa against apartheid.

Cold War tensions and their potential impact on his ability to travel and remain active in the future led Du Bois to look favorably on an invitation in May 1961 from Kwame Nkrumah and the Ghana Academy of Sciences to move to Ghana and undertake direction of the preparation of an "Encyclopedia Africana," a project much like one he had long contemplated.

From late 1961 to 1963 Du Bois lived a full life in Accra, the Ghanaian capital, working on the encyclopedia, taking long drives in the afternoon, and entertaining its political elite and the small colony of African Americans during the evenings at the comfortable home the government had provided him. Du Bois died the day before his American compatriots assembled for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. It was a conjuncture more than rich with historical symbolism. It was the beginning of the end of the era of segregation that had shaped so much of Du Bois's life, but it was also the beginning of a new era when "the Negro Problem" could not be confined to separable terrains of the political, economic, domestic, or international, or to simple solutions such as integration or separatism, rights or consciousness. On 29 August 1963 Du Bois was interred in a state funeral outside Castle Osu, formerly a holding pen for the slave cargoes bound for America.



*Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.*

Martin Luther King Jr.

## **5. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: From allies to enemies<sup>5</sup>**

To say that Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois had a complicated relationship would be a massive understatement. The two men are known as polar opposites when it comes to stance on how to achieve equality and rights for blacks but they did not start off that way. The two had a decade-long collaboration and were supportive of each other for the better part of those ten years, even publically praising one another. But upon a series of unfortunate events and circumstances they slowly started to drift apart and their political and ideological differences became greater.

Their relationship began on July 27, 1894, when Du Bois, 26-years old at the time, applied for a position at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He had just returned from a two-year study in Europe and was a “Fisk and Harvard man”. While Du Bois’ education and connection, including references from Daniel Coit Gilman, president of John Hopkins University, and knowing Washington’s wife with whom he attended university, he was still an unknown black intellectual and not the prominent and influential advocate for African American rights he would later become. A month later Washington replied to Du Bois’ inquiry and offered him a position teaching Mathematics but having already accepted a position as the chair of classics at Wilberforce University in Ohio, he turned the offer down. This first exchange between the two men set the pattern of communication for the years to come.

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<sup>5</sup>Based on information found on:

<http://archive.wilsonquarterly.com>, <http://archive.wilsonquarterly.com/essays/washington-du-bois-and-black-future>

<https://www.britannica.com/>, [www.britannica.com/biography/Booker-T-Washington](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Booker-T-Washington)

<https://www.britannica.com/>, [www.britannica.com/biography/W-E-B-Du-Bois](http://www.britannica.com/biography/W-E-B-Du-Bois)

Although their ideologies differed greatly, with Washington believing in the power of labor and growing his network of loyal followers and donors and acquiring political power and position, and Du Bois focusing on sociological research and fighting for more than social and political equality (basing that fight in the data collected in his research), the two communicated and collaborated rather frequently until their ultimate falling out in 1905. Washington viewed Du Bois as a potential follower, and Du Bois treated Washington as a discreet patron. It was mutually beneficial relationship, one filled with respect, negotiations and growing suspicions. They organized conferences together, discussed legal strategies and gave public respect for each other's work.

By 1906 the two had openly become enemies. Their political views and ideologies had officially become polar opposites – Washington advocated “accommodationism” and Du Bois militant protest. After Washington's death in 1915, Du Bois wrote in *Crisis* (the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) “In stern justice, we must lay on the soul of this man a heavy responsibility for the consummation of Negro disfranchisement, the decline of the Negro college and public school, and the firmer establishment of color caste in this land.” A stark contrast to his initial praise and support for Washington in 1895, after Washington's speech at the Atlanta Exposition.

From 1894 to 1904, the two men had a good relationship. Following Washington's speech at the Atlanta Exposition, where he advocated that progress for blacks will come from economic prosperity and security and not from protesting, Du Bois publically congratulated Washington on the success of his address, perceiving a brilliant strategy underneath Washington's tame tone: in order to ask for political

power and equality, one must first attain economic power. Du Bois' public backing of Washington's speech wasn't without private reasons, as Du Bois wanted to get out Wilberforce and thought Washington could be his ticket out. Washington did offer him a position once more, but Du Bois turned it down.

While Washington had already positioned himself as the leading figure in the fight for African-American rights, Du Bois saw his status beginning to grow due to his sociological research in Philadelphia, entitled *The Philadelphia Negro*. Upon the release of his study, Du Bois found wider acclaim and acceptance for his ideology of basing the fight for African-American rights in sociological findings, and was elected vice president of the American Negro Academy, and gave lectures to the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, as well.

In 1899, Du Bois, with his colleague John Hope, organized a meeting at Atlanta University called "The Negro in Business", a topic Washington was extremely fond of, as it was the basis for his entire political agenda. The meeting was very successful and Washington loved the idea so much that he, with Du Bois' help, founded the National Negro Business League. Du Bois was made head of the African-American Council to coordinate local chapters of the proposed guild. He agreed to this under the condition that the council supplies funds for postage. When his request was denied, Du Bois left the project but still passed on his list of black businessmen to Washington, which he used to recruit members into the league.

Around the time of "The Negro in Business" meeting, a couple of lynching scandals that shocked and disgusted Du Bois occurred. After these lynching incidents, Du Bois focused on his work. He says of this period in his book *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*: "One could not be a calm, cool,

detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered and starved.” These events marked a shift in Du Bois’ political stance towards a more radical, militant approach he would later become known for.

Despite the growing differences between their ideologies, Washington and Du Bois actively worked together in 1900 to stop a disfranchisement bill pending in the Georgia legislature. White supremacists wanted to install literacy tests at voting polls that included a “grandfather clause”, which meant that only blacks whose ancestors had the right to vote in 1867, could vote. This was meant to further protect the position of power that southern whites held over blacks.

Du Bois visited the Tuskegee Institute in February that same year. The visit had marked the fourth time that Du Bois had turned down a position at the Institute, as he questioned the compatibility of his values with those of the Institute and thought he would be more of an “ornamental use than a fundamental necessity.” (Written in a letter to Washington following his visit to the Tuskegee Institute). However, Du Bois hadn’t completely given up on the idea of a teaching position at Tuskegee, partly because he needed Washington’s endorsement for the position of Superintendent of Negro schools in Washington, D.C. which he asked for in a letter a few days following his visit. His competition for the position was Robert Terrell, husband of Mary Church Terrell – a prominent writer, suffragist, founder of the Colored Women’s League and member of the D.C. Board of education, which meant that Du Bois needed the endorsement from Washington if he was going to beat an inside candidate like Terrell. Washington offered private support for Du Bois but withdrew his support after several of his followers called Bookerites, including T. Thomas Fortune, protested his endorsement.

Despite the increasing cracks in their relationship, the two men continued working together on other projects including the “Negro Section” at the Paris Exposition in Savannah in 1900. Du Bois even praised Washington’s seminal work *Up from Slavery* upon its release in 1901. However, as time passed and each of them worked on their respective program, they became spokespersons for two opposing ways to deal with race question. If they had played their cards differently and found a common ground their collaboration could have continued until Washington’s passing in 1915.

The turning point in their relationship came in 1903, after an incident at the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church on Columbus Avenue in Boston. Boston was known as basically the Anti-Booker-T-Washington city, as his fiercest opponent Monroe Trotter and his followers resigned there. Washington was slated to speak at the Church but trouble ensued as Trotterites (Trotter’s followers) protested at the gathering. As this was going on in Boston, Du Bois was finished teaching his summer-school class at Tuskegee and he headed north. Much to Washington’s disbelief and disgust he stayed at Trotter’s house as a guest. Du Bois claimed he didn’t know about the incident that had occurred but the damage was done and his relationship with Washington was forever changed.

Their collaboration officially ended in 1905, when Du Bois published a draft of “Debit and Credit” in the monthly magazine *The Voice of the Negro*, mentioning “\$3000 of hush money to subsidize the press”. (DuBois, "Debit and Credit," *Voice of the Negro*, II (January 1905), 677.)

Despite him not mentioning Washington or Tuskegee by name everyone knew what he meant. For over a decade Washington had sole control and influence over all

things race related, and when a different viewpoint appeared, i.e. W.E.B. Du Bois, he saw it as a power struggle instead of a chance for finding new options together. The two were able to work together for a while, but both ultimately felt the other had failed the cause and committed personal betrayal.

## 6. On their most famous pieces of work

### 6.1. *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington

Just as *The Souls of Blackfolk* is Du Bois' masterpiece, *Up from Slavery* is undoubtedly Washington's seminal piece of work. Upon its release in 1901, it outshined all the works that came before it that deal with similar topics, like Frederick Douglas' *Narrative* (1845) and Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). What sets it apart from *Narrative*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and other pieces of work from antebellum slave narrators, is that Washington's *Up from Slavery* doesn't depict slavery as hell on earth but rather as a "school" from which African-Americans have graduated, and through which they have acquired the will and the skill set to keep rising. One of the reasons Washington took this approach to his autobiography is so that white Americans could see the freed blacks as a valuable resource that could help take the United States of America to the next level, rather than a liability. He also didn't want to be perceived as a victim, but as a leader who focused on the future and progress and not on the past.<sup>6</sup>

This revisionist aspect that engulfs *Up from Slavery* is what makes so polarizing. Washington's refusal to portray slavery in the "usual" way opens up the door for interesting discussions and different interpretations. Because of this, people either agree with Washington and believe this to be the perfect way to approach the issue, especially for the time period when it was published, while others feel that it negates and diminishes the horrors blacks were put through, as well as, feeling that the book gives white America a free pass for everything it has done in the past in the name of reconciliation and the hope for a better future.

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<sup>6</sup>McKay, Nellie Y. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, W.W. Norton & Company, First Printing Edition, 1996



*Up from Slavery* tells Booker T. Washington's life story. It is written in first person, supplemented with excerpts from letters and newspaper editorials about his work. It is primarily a book about the power of education and about how education can change a person's life. Washington views education, especially industrial and vocational education, as the key to the gates of freedom for Negroes, which is the reason he favors education over politics.

Throughout *Up from Slavery*, Washington promotes the importance of self-reliance, as well as, the importance of helping others. These messages are in direct relation to his stressing of the urgency for education, as he feels that education will provide Negroes with the tools necessary to help, first themselves and then their fellow man. He speaks of the joy and fulfillment one gets from helping others and offers examples of how even the smallest good deeds go a long way. Throughout the book, it is unmistakable that Washington holds (manual) labor in high regard, as he sees labor, alongside education, the key to self-reliance and ultimately happiness and freedom.

He also encourages collaboration between the races (Whites and Blacks) and he forgives White America for many of sins in hopes for a better future. There is a certain apologetic tone to his writing when he addresses racial issues and it's the parts of *Up from Slavery* that deal with race that are the source of controversy and disagreement among readers and historians.

One cannot deny the brilliance of Washington's writing, as it accomplished what it was meant to, and that is to stir up conversation among its readers. As time went by the criticisms for his revisionist approach have certainly amplified, but he hasn't lost his defenders either. The main thing about Washington's autobiography that people take umbrage with is that in depicting slavery and all the injustice African-Americans

had suffered as more of a help than a hindrance, he came very close to implying that slavery and racism weren't that as bad for blacks as history would have you believe. His revisionist take on slavery and racism also appears to glance over the responsibility that white America has to accept for centuries of dehumanizing an entire group of people based solely on the color of their skin. Instead of demanding change from white institutions he calls for conformity among African-Americans, which some feel isn't the right approach for creating meaningful change. Others, however, feel that the ideas presented in *Up from Slavery* were exactly what they should have been. Washington's defenders believe that because white America refused to accept responsibility for the horrors it inflicted on African-Americans for centuries and that the only way to get ahead was to be self-reliant and not to expect more than being "separate but equal" for the foreseeable future.

What makes *Up from Slavery* a great piece of work is that neither Washington's critics, nor his defenders, were ever able to convince readers of who he truly was. Regardless of one's stance on Washington and his ideology, it cannot be denied that he had enormous influence on the position of blacks in America and that his work did help pave way for the Civil Rights Movement.

## **6.2. *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois**

A collection of essays, covering African-American history, politics, sociology and music, *The Souls of Black Folk*, tells of a collective experience of “life within the veil” through Du Bois’ personal exposition. “Life within the veil” refers to a metaphorical line, a shadow that separates African-Americans from white Americans, as well as, their experiences of living in Black America and White America and what that entails. Throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*, there is an echo of the second line from *The Forethought*: “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.”<sup>7</sup>

Du Bois was a revolutionary in many ways. He organized many conferences and other events for the betterment of the Negro, but his main weapon of choice was his writing, which is just revolutionary as he was. Du Bois knew that in order to protest the issue he had to make it not just a social and legal fact, but personal, to give it emotional depth and value. What sets Du Bois apart from his contemporaries is his ability to make the color line a profound psychological factor in the Negro experience, especially relating to a sense of self and the relationship with society.

He introduces his white readers to the concept of *double-consciousness*, which refers to specific dualities and conflicts that come as a result of being black in America. For Du Bois, the double-consciousness defined the struggle of African-Americans to identify themselves and the merging of their African and American identities into something they and the entire nation could be proud of. Along with the idea of double consciousness Du Bois introduces the concept of the veil, which refers to African-

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<sup>7</sup>McKay, Nellie Y. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, W.W. Norton & Company, First Printing Edition, 1996

Americans' experience in the United States, of living in both White America and Black America. *The Souls of Black Folk* gives us a glimpse into life behind the veil.

In order to illustrate what it means to be black in America, Du Bois gives examples of situations that black people have experienced throughout the period of reconstruction. Throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois covers several different topics, from discrimination in *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*, the marginalization processes that occur due to the existence of the veil in *Of the Dawn of Freedom*, through the relation between education and industrialization in *Of the Training of the Black Man*, in which he addresses the need for new training and education programs for Negroes due to their submissive role in American society, to more personal topics like religion and the societal position of Blacks in the South. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois also deals with personal issues and trauma in the chapter titled *Of the Passing of the Son*, in which he details the devastating loss of his son when he was an infant. This chapter provides a glimpse into Du Bois' personal turmoil, as opposed to his usual sociological topics. The book is also interwoven with Negro spirituals, which are supposed to evoke the tragedy of the past, reflect the present and provide hope for the future.

Apart from its social and historical literary relevance, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is known for hosting one of Du Bois' most influential essays, *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others*, in which he scrutinized the program Washington presented at the Atlanta Cotton Exposition. His critique of Washington earned Du Bois a national following as a civil rights champion.

Although *The Souls of Black Folk* has its uncompromising moments, such as *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others* and *Of the Sons of Masters and Man*, the piece begins in a prose that's more evocative than provocative, and it ends the same way by

Du Bois celebrating the Negro's spiritual aspirations through his folklore and music in the hopes that his "simple faith and reverence" in "the ultimate justice of things," when "America shall rend the Veil and the prisoned shall go free."<sup>8</sup>

## **7. Policies and philosophies reflected in their literary works**

The beginning of the twentieth century was a critical time in African-American history. As segregation and discrimination were on the rise, two prominent figures began to debate on how best to deal with racial problems. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois developed different strategies for racial uplift as they actively competed for the support of the black community. In the process, Washington and Du Bois made a permanent mark on the debate over how blacks should achieve equality in America. Washington an accommodationist (A person or political group that seeks compromise with an opposing point of view; according to oxforddictionaries.com) believed economic independence was most important to racial equality. W.E.B. Du Bois adopted more radical strategies, arguing that social and political equality not just economic opportunity were essential to racial uplift.

When talking about the differences in Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois' political views one need not look further than their personal backgrounds. As Du Bois himself said in an interview published in the Atlantic Monthly in 1965 (the interview was originally recorded in 1963): "He and I came from different backgrounds. I was born free. Washington was born slave. He felt the lash of an overseer across his back. I was born in Massachusetts, he on a slave plantation in the South. My great-grandfather fought with the Colonial Army in New England in the American

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<sup>8</sup>McKay, Nellie Y. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, W.W. Norton & Company, First Printing Edition, 1996

Revolution.(This earned his grandfather his freedom.)I had a happy childhood and acceptance in the community. Washington's childhood was hard. I had many more advantages: Fisk University, Harvard, graduate years in Europe. Washington had little formal schooling. I admired much about him.”<sup>9</sup>

The main goal for Du Bois was equality in all aspects – social, political and economic. One might argue, for the time period, an idealistic, almost utopian equality. This is where he and Washington differed the most. While Washington also wanted equality, he believed that the best way to achieve social and political equality was by securing economic equality first. He famously presented his thoughts on this issue and his vision for the future in his speech known as the Atlanta Exposition Speech, in 1895. Du Bois said of his former ally: “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.” Du Bois “bestowed” the title of the “Atlanta Compromise” on Washington’s speech, because he felt the deal Washington had struck didn’t give Blacks the rights they deserved and focused solely on the economic aspects of the equality issue.

One of the main differences between Du Bois and Washington, in terms of their writing, is that Washington was a realist, while Du Bois’ work has elements of romanticism, and comes across as more traditional literature, i.e. literary art. Unlike Washington’s work, which is heavily rooted in reality, some of Du Bois’ works have a poetic sensibility to them. Although he has written works stylistically similar to those of Washington, albeit with a richer vocabulary and a more complex structure

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<sup>9</sup>Found on <https://www.theatlantic.com>,  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/flashbks/black/mcgillbh.htm>

due to his education, he often used metaphors and allegories to get his political points across. While it is difficult to view either of these authors outside of the constraints of their political activism and the role they played in American history outside of literature, Du Bois manages to bring a more traditionally artistic quality to his work.

## **8. Washington vs. Du Bois: Clash of the Titans**

*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, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor, 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 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. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top.*

Booker T. Washington *Atlanta Exposition Speech*, aka *The Atlanta Compromise*

The differences in opinion and what they demanded for African Americans between Washington and Du Bois is summed up perfectly in this part of Washington's Atlanta Exposition Speech: "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."

Like everything else, their perspectives on what ought to be given to African Americans as essential human rights, goes back to their childhood and education, as well as their paths in life, i.e. the ways in which they, especially Washington, found

freedom, regardless of being born a slave or a freedman. Du Bois demanded equality across the board, while Washington felt the best way to get to true equality, the kind Du Bois advocated, was to start from the bottom with economic equality and then slowly build from there. In a sense, though not completely the same, they could be considered predecessors to Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, two other contemporaries almost synonymous with each other, in the sense that both pairs of these historical figures presented two different paths to achieving the same goal: one more conservative, the other more radical; one more rational, the other more emotional.

On 18 September, 1895, Booker T. Washington delivered his famous speech, later dubbed the Atlanta Compromise by W.E.B. Du Bois at the Cotton States and International Exposition held in Atlanta. The speech is considered to be the definitive statement of the so-called “accommodationist” strategy for racial relations in the South. The “accommodationist” strategy comes down to blacks and whites being separate but equal, or as Washington himself said: “as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” It refers to securing economic rights for blacks in the South by assuring white leaders that if they allow blacks to get ahead economically they will lift them (whites) even higher with them, but that they need not worry about blacks taking over the South or demanding equal treatment.

Two years prior to speaking at the Exposition, Washington gave a speech in Atlanta during the international meeting of Christian Workers. He advocated for a vocational-industrial education for blacks, which he believed would help improve race relations in the South. In the spring of 1895, Washington traveled to Washington, D.C. with a Georgian delegation, consisted mostly of whites, to ask for Congressional support for an exposition on social and economic advances in the South. During the meeting he



pointed out that there have been advancements in racial relations since emancipation and that those advancements should be highlighted during the event. He also urged federal support for the event to be held in Atlanta. This, along with his speech at Christian Workers meeting, prompted the board to ask Washington to speak during the opening ceremony for the Exposition.

Washington's speech dealt with the "Negro problem", i.e. the issue of how to handle the horrible social and economic conditions of blacks and the relationship between blacks and whites in the economically and socially changing South. He promised the audience, comprised mostly of white southerners, that he would promote agriculture, mechanics, commerce, and domestic service among blacks and that he would encourage them to "dignify and glorify common labor, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life". He assured the attendees that blacks were loyal and that they believed they would prosper as much as their work. He also called for white Southerners to take responsibility and do their part in improving the relations between the two races. Washington asked them to give blacks as many opportunities as possible so that industrial and agricultural advancement could be made for both races.

The speech was a great success and was widely accepted by whites. It cemented Washington's position as the most influential black educator and leader in the US between 1895 and 1915 and also led to Washington serving as an advisor to presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, the latter was mainly due to Washington's conditional acceptance of segregation and racial subordination, as both presidents were extremely racially biased. He helped Roosevelt and Taft select black candidates for traditionally black political positions. Washington also controlled most of the funding for black southern schools by advising rich industrialists on how to direct their finances to black education.

However, Washington wasn't without his critics, most vocal of which was W.E.B. Du Bois. Although he had initially praised Washington's speech, Du Bois found himself growing further apart from the Wizard of Tuskegee's ideology and practice. Du Bois' critique of the speech, which he famously dubbed The Atlanta Compromise, appeared in the third chapter of his opus *The Souls of Black Folk*, titled *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others*.

What makes Du Bois' critique of Washington so compelling is that it is written in such a way that it's clear he's trying to be objective and give genuine criticism. He achieves this by positioning Washington as the protagonist and the antagonist. For every miscalculation he names a success. In his essay he recognizes Washington's importance in American history: "To-day he stands as the one recognized spokesman of his ten million fellows, and one of the most notable figures in a nation of seventy millions. One hesitates, therefore, to criticise a life which, beginning with so little has done so much."

In the essay he portrays Washington's words, and his life in many regards, as a contradiction of statements and ideals. He praises Washington's personal success and all that he has achieved, despite having all odds against him, however he criticizes his accommodationism. While he doesn't dismiss Washington's ideas on education he disagrees with his dismissal of traditional education: "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." He argued that vocational schools would provide African Americans with skills that would be useful for employment, but that it would hinder the more talented Negroes from achieving their full potential. If black men were to gain theoretical and classical education, they would be able to be real

men. Thus, in order to achieve actual adulthood, money was not the only necessity, an independence of the mind was, as well. In his proposal of education, Washington failed to realize that African Americans don't have civil equality, i.e. equality under the law that is necessary for attaining education and success in any aspect of life. Although slavery had been abolished, the criminal justice system kept finding ways to oppress African Americans by often punishing them for crimes, even if they were innocent. If, or rather, when found guilty, African Americans would have to pay off debt by working on plantations. foreshadowed the condition of African-Americans in the 21st Century. While civil rights were granted in 1964, the United States perpetuated racism in other forms. Despite making progress, the criminal justice system continues to imprison African-Americans at higher rates than it does white groups.<sup>10</sup>

In Du Bois view, Washington, despite all his efforts, fits the role of antagonist better than that of protagonist. Instead of giving thoughtful insight on the oppression African Americans have suffered at the hands of White America, Washington's speech implies that Blacks are to take the blame for their current position in society. While he does make one explicit criticism, threat to white leaders: "Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward" it gets lost in the overall apologetic and complacent tone of the speech.

Washington's speech at the Atlanta Exposition echoes the revisionist aspect that engulfs his written works. For Du Bois, the speech is unacceptable as it calls for submission and acceptance of segregation and political inequality for the sake of economic prospect. While Washington's intended message that "It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top" was meant to empower African Americans, Du

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<sup>10</sup>According to <http://www.gradesaver.com>, [www.gradesaver.com/the-souls-of-black-folk](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-souls-of-black-folk)

Bois felt that “after a confused murmur of protest, it silenced if it did not convert the Negroes themselves”.

His biggest criticism of Washington’s speech revolves around the complacency and acceptance of segregation summed up in the sentiment that “In all things purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” This adds to the conflicting tone of the speech as Washington believes that economic independence is the first step to achieving social and political progress yet he defines economy as “all things essential to mutual progress” and in doing so he inadvertently gives his blessing to African Americans role as second class citizens in their own country.

Washington and Du Bois disagreed on many race related issues, one of the main ones being the oppression of the Black woman, a figure in American society he deemed to be the most endangered. As Malcolm X famously said on 22 May 1962: “The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.”The position of the Black woman was of great importance to Du Bois, as he says in his essay *The Damnation of Women*: “The uplift of women is, next to the problem of the color line and the peace movement, our greatest modern cause.”<sup>11</sup>

According to Du Bois, being a black woman in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century was like winning the bad luck lottery. Women in general were in an unfavorable position at the time and the issue of women’s rights was becoming more and more prominent, escalating with the Suffrage Movement (footnote on the def of Suffrage Movement) that began in the 1840’s but really hit its stride towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Du Bois covered the issue of women’s suffrage struggle in his magazine *The Crisis* from

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<sup>11</sup>Found on <https://genius.com>, [://genius.com/Malcolm-x-who-taught-you-to-hate-yourself-annotated](https://genius.com/Malcolm-x-who-taught-you-to-hate-yourself-annotated)

1910 until 1934 with special issues dedicated specifically to African American women and racism (the 1915 cover featured Sojourner Truth and Abraham Lincoln), a problem he recognized as very specific for American society.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout his written works Du Bois leaves the impression that the position of the Black woman in society was an issue he took most umbrage with. He writes in *The Damnation of Women*: “I shall forgive the white South much in its final judgment day: I shall forgive its slavery, for slavery is a world-old habit; I shall forgive its fighting for a well-lost cause, and for remembering that struggle with tender tears; I shall forgive its so-called “pride of race,” the passion of its hot blood and even its dear, old, laughable strutting and posing; but one thing I shall never forgive, neither in this world nor the world to come: its wanton and continued and persistent insulting of the black womanhood which it sought and seeks to prostitute to its lust. I cannot forget that it is such Southern gentlemen into whose hands smug Northern hypocrites of today are seeking to place our women’s eternal destiny,— men who insist upon withholding from my mother and wife and daughter those signs and appellations of courtesy and respect which elsewhere he withholds only bawds and courtesans.”

Washington on the other hand, roots his stance on the rights of black women in their education, more specifically the type of education they receive. At Tuskegee, female students spent their time between the academic and industrial division. The industrial division is where female students learned trades like dressmaking, housekeeping, horticulture, upholstery, millinery and laundry work, i.e. all trades considered traditionally female.

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<sup>12</sup> According to <http://www.socialstudies.org>, <http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/5905/590503.html>

Although women have played a crucial role in his life, Washington was not an open proponent of women's suffrage, not in the true sense. With the increased public presence of the suffrage movement, Washington couldn't openly oppose the movement or use it to promote other causes he deemed more important. Unlike Du Bois who has written openly on the subject of suffrage and its importance, Washington's stance on the issue is recorded mainly through his correspondence with many a journalists and activists.

When it came to women's suffrage, Washington kept his support uncharacteristically short in his public addresses and correspondences. A perfect example of his brevity on the subject matter is his response to chairman of the press committee of the Equal Franchise Federation of Pittsburgh, Mary L. Hay:

*[Tuskegee, Ala.]*

*March 6, 1915*

*Dear Madame: I write to say that I am altogether in favor of woman suffrage and am perfectly willing to have you quote me in the forthcoming suffrage edition of the Pittsburgh Sun which is to appear under the auspices of the Equal Franchise Federation of Pittsburgh.*

*With kindest regards, I am, Yours very truly*

*Booker T. Washington*

Ever the strategist, Washington has managed to position himself as a supporter of women's suffrage but in a way that gave him as neutral a stance as possible, while also advocating what he deemed most important – knowledge of trade: “How often has my heart been made to sink as I have gone through the South and into the homes of the people, and have found women who could converse intelligently on Grecian

history, who had studied geometry, ... yet could not analyze the poorly cooked and still more poorly served corn bread and fat meat which they and their families were eating.”

Like Washington, Du Bois also spoke about women’s suffrage in magazines, though not in interviews but rather in his own articles. His stance on the suffrage movement, like everything else, was much more vocal and politically charged than that of Washington. However, both men viewed this issue as part of a greater picture and not as its own separate issue.

As is the case with everything else, their perspectives on what ought to be given to African Americans as essential human rights, goes back to their childhood and education, as well as their paths in life, i.e. the ways in which they, especially Washington, found freedom, regardless of being born a slave or a freedman. Du Bois demanded equality across the board, while Washington felt the best way to get to true equality, the kind Du Bois advocated, was to start from the bottom with economic equality and then slowly build from there. In a sense, though not completely the same, they could be considered predecessors to Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, two other contemporaries almost synonymous with each other, in the sense that both pairs of these historical figures presented two different paths to achieving the same goal: one more conservative, the other more radical; one more rational, the other more emotional.

With Du Bois and Washington, there is no correct answer as to who was right in their approach. Arguments can be made that Du Bois was too radical, too unrealistic and too ambitious for the time period, while it can be said that Washington was too passive, too afraid and too willing to compromise with the White man.

The two men were almost synonymous with each other. They existed as a yin and yang of the pre-civil rights movement era. They have in equal measure left huge marks on each other's lives as they have on betterment of the lives of African-Americans. As Du Bois himself said: *Washington (...) died in 1915. A lot of people think I died at the same time.*

### **9. The issue of the veil and double-consciousness**

*Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like [them perhaps] in heart and life longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows.*

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois recalls the first time he realized he was Black and what that meant in American society. He tells the story of being denied entrance to a ball by a White girl because of the color of his skin. He describes this realization of separation as a veil. The veil refers to three concepts. First, he uses the veil to describe the literal darkness of his skin, a physical difference and separation from the skin of Whites. He then uses the veil as a metaphorical barrier that stands in the way of African-Americans in their quest for equality, i.e. as something that doesn't allow Whites to see Blacks as true Americans and he uses it as something that makes it impossible for Blacks to see themselves outside the way they are described by White



America. One of the main things that people tend to forget that is that the veil is two-fold, i.e. it doesn't only make it impossible for White Americans to see Blacks as true Americans and real human beings, it also stops African-Americans from seeing White Americans as anything but oppressors. The issue of the veil is that it blurs everyone's vision and if neither side can see the other clearly, true progress cannot be made.

Coinciding with the use of the veil is the double-consciousness, i.e. the awareness that Blacks live in two Americas – White America and Black America. This double-consciousness refers to the awareness of “two-ness”, the fact that Blacks spend their lives as both Americans and African-Americans, the former referring to living their lives as dictated by White America: *It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.*

This “two-ness” allows Blacks to see Whites more clearly than vice versa, because Whites only have to live as Americans in America according to their own rules. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, double-consciousness is identified as a “sensation that falls short of “true” self-consciousness, but is still a consciousness of one's self, nonetheless. It's part of a more complex feeling of “two-ness”, of separate and competing “thoughts”, “strivings”, and “ideals”, of something that isn't occasional, but is rather a fixed form of consciousness. It's a socio-cultural construct, one particularly ascribed to African Americans.

Du Bois also writes about the phenomenon in the tenth chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, although not as explicitly as in the first chapter *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*: “From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century,—from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality, and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.”

Unlike Du Bois, Washington, didn't address the issue of double consciousness in his writing nor in his public speeches, but double consciousness is very much a part of Washington's (postmortem) identity, except in terms of the public's perception of him. Assessments of Washington by his contemporaries and, later, by historians have been wide-ranging and contentious, revealing, if nothing else, his complexity and many-sidedness. In the 1960s his secret life emerged as scholars began to plumb the one million documents in his collected papers. They reveal a much more complex, manipulative, secretive, vain, and at times deceptive individual than the inspiring and benign image that Washington himself so assiduously cultivated in his own lifetime. Indeed, he likely enjoyed leading this "double life."

## Conclusion

What's interesting about Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois is that their relationship is perfectly documented in their literary works. It isn't very often that we have the opportunity to follow the development of a relationship between two historical figures by reading about said relationship from the figures themselves. Although Du Bois has written about Washington explicitly more than vice versa, their works can be read as a dialogue between the two men. When looking at their written works, it's as if we are reading diary entries that cover the rise and fall of their relationship. From their joint effort *The Negro in the South*, to Du Bois initial praise of Washington Atlanta Exposition speech and the later critique of said speech in *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others*, to their public correspondence and final fall out with the publication of *Debit and Credit* in *The Voice of the Negro*, we can see how their relationship grew and eventually fell apart. We are given insight into the events that caused this trajectory of their relationship and their respective perspectives on these events. Although it makes for a fascinating and thought-provoking read, one can't help but feel a bit of sadness for the way their relationship played out. Both wanted rights for Negroes, both wanted prosperity for Negroes and both wanted justice for Negroes. They offered interesting perspectives on the issue and it's clear that they had respect for each other. If it hadn't been for the unfortunate series of events that happened at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they probably would have continued working together and perhaps they could have created something greater than either did on their own.

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