

agreed with Washington about advocating self-help as a means for advancement, but he did not believe this effort would succeed without a proper education and equal voting rights. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois argued that African Americans needed a liberal arts education, in the tradition of Fisk and Harvard, rather than the manual training and industrial arts curriculum at Tuskegee. Du Bois contended that a classical, humanistic education would produce a cadre of leaders, the “Talented Tenth,” who would guide African Americans to the next stage of their development. Rather than

forgoing immediate political rights, as Washington advocated, African American leaders should demand the universal right to vote. Only then, Du Bois contended, would African Americans gain equality, self-respect, and dignity as a race.

Explore

See Documents 19.3 and 19.4 for Washington’s and Du Bois’s responses to inequality.

Du Bois was an intellectual who put his ideas into action. In 1905 he spearheaded the creation of the Niagara

Explore

19.4 W. E. B. Du Bois | Response to Washington, 1903

It has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things—

First, political power,

Second, insistence on civil rights,

Third, higher education of Negro youth—

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

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.
3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

These movements are not, to be sure, direct results of Mr. Washington’s teachings; but his propaganda has, without a shadow of doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment. The question then

comes: Is it possible, and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meagre chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic No. And Mr. Washington thus faces the triple paradox of his career:

1. He is striving nobly to make Negro artisans, business men, and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for workingmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage.
2. He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run.
3. He advocates common-school and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning; but neither the Negro common-schools, nor Tuskegee itself, could remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in Negro colleges, or trained by their graduates.

Source: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1907), 51–52.

Interpret the Evidence

- Why does Washington believe that economic development is the key to racial progress?
- How does Du Bois challenge Washington’s agenda? Why does he insist that political and social reforms are essential to black economic progress?

Put It in Context

How do Washington and Du Bois reflect in different ways the status of African Americans in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century?