

Document A: Booker T. Washington (Modified)

This is an excerpt from a speech Booker T. Washington delivered in 1895 at the opening of the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia. The exposition promoted the American South and touted its agricultural and technological achievements. Almost 800,000 visitors attended from around the world, and the invitation to speak at its opening was a great honor. Washington's speech was widely applauded at the time and helped to make him the most powerful African American leader in the United States. His critics would later call his address the "Atlanta Compromise" speech because he appealed, in part, to white Southerners who were oppressing African Americans in the Jim Crow Era.

- 1 To those of my race who want to move to a foreign land or who underestimate the
2 importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their
3 next-door neighbor, I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are"—cast it down
4 in making friends of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.
- 5 Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the
6 professions. Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we
7 may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands,
8 and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper if we learn to dignify and glorify common
9 labor. . . . No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field
10 as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor
11 should we permit our **grievances** to overshadow our opportunities.
- 12 To those of the white race who look to immigrants for the prosperity of the South, were I
13 permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket where you
14 are." Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know. . . . Cast
15 down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labor wars, tilled
16 your fields, cleared your forests, and built your railroads and cities. . . . While doing this,
17 you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be
18 surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the
19 world has seen. As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your
20 children, watching by the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them
21 with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future, in our humble way, we shall
22 stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our
23 lives, if need be, in defense of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and
24 religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. In all
25 things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand
26 in all things essential to mutual progress.

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

Source: *Excerpt from Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Address, 1895.*

Vocabulary

grievances: complaints of unfair treatment or injustice

agitation: concern

ostracized: excluded, ignored

Document B: W.E.B. Du Bois (Modified)

The most influential critique of Booker T. Washington's ideas came in 1903 when W.E.B. Du Bois published The Souls of Black Folk. The following is an excerpt from the book.

Mr. Washington 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. . . . What has been the return? . . .

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 . . . direct results of Mr. Washington's teachings; but his propaganda has, without a shadow of doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment. Is it possible . . . that [African Americans] can make economic progress if they are deprived of political rights and allowed only the most meager chance for developing their exceptional men? . . . [The] answer. . . is an emphatic *No*. . . .

So far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, . . . does not value the privilege and duty of voting, . . . and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds, we must firmly oppose them. . . . We must strive for the rights . . . which the sons of the Fathers would **fain** forget: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Source: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, 1903).

Vocabulary

conciliation: appeasement, an act to keep peace

disfranchisement: being kept from the right to vote

fain: gladly

Guiding Questions: Washington and Du Bois

Document A: Booker T. Washington

1. (Close reading) Read lines 1-5. What is Washington encouraging African Americans to do when he tells them to “cast down their bucket” in making friends?
2. (Close reading) Read lines 7-11. What sort of work is Washington encouraging African Americans to do? And why?
3. (Close reading) Read lines 12-26. What is Washington encouraging white Southerners to do? And why?
4. (Close reading, corroboration) Louis Harlan, a historian who wrote extensively about Booker T. Washington’s life and career, has argued that Washington was willing to ignore evils of racial segregation in the South if it brought financial and professional gains to African Americans. What passages from lines 27-34 of this speech could be used to support Harlan’s conclusion? (Cite the line numbers of specific sentences or passages.)
5. (Close reading, corroboration) Raymond Smock, a historian who wrote a book about Washington’s career in 2009, has argued that Washington was willing to appease white Southerners’ demands for racial inequality in exchange for their support for his plans. What passages from this speech could be used to support Smock’s conclusion? (Cite the line numbers of specific sentences or passages.)
6. (Contextualization) Given the context of the time, why might Washington have chosen to look the other way on segregation and to appease white Southerners?

Questions 7-8

Historian Louis Harlan, who has been highly critical of Washington’s approach to civil rights, acknowledges that Washington privately financed lawsuits that challenged Jim Crow laws.

7. (Contextualization) Why might Washington have fought inequality privately instead of openly calling for an end to legal discrimination?

8. Does the fact that he chose to fight Jim Crow laws privately change your understanding of Washington's philosophy?

Document B: W.E.B. Du Bois

1. (Close reading) Read lines 1-9. Based on this passage, what is Du Bois's main critique of Washington's approach to civil rights and education?
2. (Close reading) Read lines 9-12. What is Du Bois saying about Washington's emphasis on pursuing economic advancement for African Americans before pushing for political or social equality?
3. (Contextualization) How might have Du Bois's background and experiences influenced his perspective on Washington's philosophy?
4. (Close reading, corroboration) Du Bois advocated a different approach to education for African Americans than did Washington. Where does this document provide evidence of these differences? (Cite relevant line numbers.)

Questions 5-6

(Contextualization) Du Bois wrote a letter to Washington after the Atlanta speech in 1895, saying "Let me congratulate you heartily upon your phenomenal success at Atlanta—it was a word fitly spoken."

5. How do Du Bois's sentiments in the letter differ from what he wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* eight years later?
6. (Contextualization) What might explain the differences between what he wrote in this letter and what he wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*?