

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

Who was a stronger advocate for African Americans, Booker T. Washington or W.E.B. DuBois?

Materials:

- Copies of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois Documents
- Transparency of Booker T. Washington Document
- Copies of Washington and DuBois Graphic Organizer
- United Streaming Video Clip: African Americans in the Progressive Era (From Just the Facts: The Emergence of Modern America: The Progressive Era)
<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=33070658-2CB2-454E-8BE8-6B2929FE88F1&blnFromSearch=1&productcode=US>

Plan of Instruction:

1. Do Now: What was life like for African Americans in the South after Reconstruction ended in 1877?
2. Mini-lecture: Review with kids:
 - Civil War 1861-1865.
 - Reconstruction 1865-1877: many legal advances for African Americans (i.e., 13, 14, 15 Amendments; African Americans elected to office in South).
 - But in 1876, North pulls its troops out and white-supremacist Democrats take over.
 - Result:
 - Most African Americans became sharecroppers.
 - Laws put in place to prevent African Americans from voting (e.g., poll tax, literacy).
 - KKK had support of local officials and terrorized anyone who voted Republican.
 - Lynching became a widespread form of terrorism against African Americans, especially those who gained an economic/ social foothold.
 - Jim Crow segregation: separate=equal upheld in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).
 - Against this historical context, two leaders emerged: Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois.
3. Play United Streaming video: (From Just the Facts: The Emergence of Modern America: The Progressive Era):

(Approx. 5 minutes: Stop after “willfully allowing those rights to be stripped away”).

<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=33070658-2CB2-454E-8BE8-6B2929FE88F1&blnFromSearch=1&productcode=US>

4. Hand out Washington and DuBois Documents and Graphic Organizer.

Put Booker T. Washington transparency on overhead projector.

Model Booker T. Washington document. Students should fill out worksheet as you read out loud.

- *Comments in italics are what you say out loud.*
- Comments that are underlined are what students actually write on the worksheet.

Begin with sourcing and first context question

The first thing I do when I read a document is look for who wrote it. I see here it says at the bottom: Source: Excerpt from Booker T. Washington's 'Atlanta Compromise' speech, 1895.

Write this on your worksheet under what type of document is this and when was it written: This was a speech written in 1895.

I'm going to continue reading the headnote at the top here:

Booker T. Washington was born a slave in 1856 and was nine years old when slavery ended. He became the principal of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a school designed to teach blacks industrial skills. Washington was a skillful politician and speaker, and he won the support of whites in the North and South who donated money to the school. On September 18, 1895, Booker T. Washington spoke before a mostly white audience in Atlanta.

Based upon this information, I can make some tentative claims:

Write this on your worksheet under what Booker T. Washington probably believes: Booker T. Washington probably believes that Southern blacks should learn useful skills so that they could get jobs. He also probably believes that it's important to have support from whites.

Write this on your worksheet under I think the audience is: I think the audience is mostly white audience in Atlanta, Georgia.

Write this on your worksheet under I predict Booker T. Washington will: Based on the sourcing information, I predict Booker T. Washington will try to say stuff that white people want to hear. He might say stuff that convinces white people to donate

to his school.

Write this on your worksheet under I already know that at this time: I already know that at this time that Reconstruction is over and that life for African Americans in the South was rough. There was legal segregation, the KKK had power, and most African Americans were sharecroppers. All of this was a step backward from the advances gained during Reconstruction.

Now I'm going to read the whole document through and practice close reading. You can put the worksheet aside and just listen. If you want to you can take notes in the margins of the document.

"Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our freedom we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more attractive than starting a dairy farm or garden."

Who is he calling "ignorant and inexperienced?" He says "ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our freedom WE began at the top."

Washington is saying that African Americans were "ignorant and inexperienced." Maybe he thinks that's what white people want to hear.

*"A ship lost at sea for many days passed a friendly ship and sent out a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly ship at once came back, "Cast down your bucket where you are." A second time the signal, "Water, water; send us water!" ran up from the distressed ship, and was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are" . . . The captain of the distressed vessel (ship), at last **heeding** (listening to) the **injunction** (order), cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water.*

"To those of my race I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are"— cast it down in making friends with the Southern white man, who is your next-door neighbor. Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service. . . . 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."

In this second paragraph he tells this story about a ship that was in trouble and then realized all it needed to do was dip its bucket in the water below. But then Washington says that that's what African Americans should do. They need to cast down their bucket where they ARE—meaning, cast down their bucket in the SOUTH. He's telling African Americans to stay in the South and make do with what they have.

When he says that the “Southern white man” is his next-door neighbor, he makes it sound like the Southern white man has been really friendly and helpful.

When he says “there is as much dignity in tilling a field” he seems to be telling black people not aim high and strive for education, but just work hard, even if it’s manual labor.

*“To those of the white race who look to foreign immigrants for the prosperity of the South, I would repeat what I say to my own race, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes, whose **fidelity** (loyalty) and love you have tested. . . . As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past . . . so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach. . . . 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.”*

It’s clear here that he’s talking to white people because he says ‘you.’ He’s saying African Americans were loyal servants.

It’s weird to hear a black man say this. If I were a former slave at the time, I think it would be hard to hear this because it sounds like he’s kissing up.

When he says “in all things social we can be as separate as the fingers” he seems to be saying that he’s okay with segregation and Jim Crow.

So now that we read the document carefully, I’m going to continue answering the worksheet contextualization questions and close reading questions.

Write this on your worksheet: From this document I would guess that WHITE PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH at this time were feeling nervous that African Americans would demand equal rights. White people in the south probably thought Reconstruction was a disaster and they wanted black people to stay “in their place.”

Write this on your worksheet: Given what was happening at the time, this was a good/ bad speech because . . .(students could answer this anyway they choose).

Write this on your worksheet: I think Washington chose these words because they probably made WHITE PEOPLE feel good that black people were not going to demand equal rights; they were just going to work hard for “mutual progress.”

Write this on your worksheet: The author is trying to convince the audience that African Americans were not going to cause trouble and that white people should recognize that African Americans were good workers who would help develop the south.

Write this on your worksheet: The most powerful line in this speech is . . . (explain) (students can answer this anyway they choose).

5. Students read W.E.B DuBois Document and complete Graphic Organizer.

Some of the trickier questions:

I think the audience is African-American intellectuals, probably people who live in the North. Though maybe white Northerners read this too.

From this document I would guess that AFRICAN AMERICANS at this time were feeling frustrated with what was happening in the South; annoyed that Washington was kissing up to white people.

6. Whole class discussion:

- Washington has been a very controversial figure. Some historians say that he was a sell-out who kissed up to white people; others say he was realistic about the situation in the South, and tried to avoid inciting white hostility. What do you think?
- What was DuBois's critique of Washington? Do you think he makes a good point? Why or why not?
- Why might some of Washington's supporters say that DuBois didn't understand what life was like in the South? Based on what he wrote, do you think DuBois was clueless about what was happening in the South?
- Based on these documents, who do you think was a stronger advocate for the rights of African Americans: Booker T. Washington or W.E.B. DuBois?

Citations:

Booker T. Washington, 'Atlanta Compromise' Speech, 1895.
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/>

W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Chicago, 1903).
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>

© Copyright 2009, Avishag Reisman and Bradley Fogo.

Document A: Booker T. Washington (Modified)

Booker T. Washington was born a slave in 1856 and was nine years old when slavery ended. He became the principal of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a school designed to teach blacks industrial skills. Washington was a skillful politician and speaker, and he won the support of whites in the North and South who donated money to the school. On September 18, 1895, Booker T. Washington spoke before a mostly white audience in Atlanta.

Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our freedom we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more attractive than starting a dairy farm or garden.

A ship lost at sea for many days passed a friendly ship and sent out a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly ship at once came back, "Cast down your bucket where you are." A second time the signal, "Water, water; send us water!" ran up from the distressed ship, and was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are" . . . The captain of the distressed **vessel** (ship), at last **heeding** (listening to) the **injunction** (order), cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water.

To those of my race I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are"— cast it down in making friends with the Southern white man, who is your next-door neighbor. Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service. . . . 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.

To those of the white race who look to foreign immigrants for the prosperity of the South, I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket where you are." Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes, whose **fidelity** (loyalty) and love you have tested. . . . As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past . . . so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach. . . . 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.

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

Document B: W.E.B. DuBois (Modified)

The most influential public critique of Booker T. Washington came in 1903 when black leader and intellectual W.E.B. DuBois published an essay in his book, The Souls of Black Folk. DuBois rejected Washington's message and instead called for political power, insistence on civil rights, and the higher education of African-American youth. DuBois was born and raised a free man in Massachusetts and was the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard.

The most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the rise of Mr. Booker T. Washington. His leadership began at the time when Civil War memories and ideals were rapidly passing; a day of astonishing commercial development was dawning; a sense of doubt and hesitation overtook the freedmen's sons. Mr. Washington came at the psychological moment when whites were a little ashamed of having paid so much attention to Negroes [during Reconstruction], and were concentrating their energy on dollars.

Mr. Washington practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races. Mr. Washington withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens. He 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 **pacifying** (calming down) of the South. As a result of this tender of the **palm-branch** (peace offering), what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:

1. The **disfranchisement** (taking away the right to vote) 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.

Mr. Washington's doctrine has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical **spectators** (onlookers); when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we do not all work on righting these great wrongs.

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