

A comparison between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)



He was born on a slave plantation in Virginia. As a child he worked down the coal mines in West Virginia.

When he was 16, he left home and walked nearly 500 miles to enroll at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. He planned to become a farmer by trade. To finance his education he worked as a janitor.

In 1881 the state of Alabama passed a law in the legislature to begin a school to train black leaders. Booker T. Washington was one of the few nominated for a position. He managed to borrow enough money to buy an abandoned plantation. His future students began to build their own classrooms, a chapel and dormitories. He was to create the Tuskegee Institute. The school would attract prominent scholars, some graduated and remained as faculty. Perhaps the most famous graduate of the time was George Washington Carver.

Washington continued to raise money for the school and found that many white businessmen would donate money to his cause. He encouraged the development of black-owned businesses.

In 1900, Washington organized the National Negro Business League.

Booker T. Washington became a national spokesperson for the African American community, even advising Presidents Taft and Roosevelt on political appointments.

Washington believed that for an African America to gain the respect of society in America he had to work to achieve this status and that it was not a given right just because of his color.

W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963)



He was born in Massachusetts a few years after the Civil War. He came from a wealthy family but his father left home and never returned, leaving his mother to struggle.

He attended Fisk University and then earned his Ph.D. from Harvard. He became a professor at Atlanta University, focusing on race relations within the United States.

In 1903 he published a collection of his essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In these writings he strongly criticized Booker T. Washington for being too cautious and conservative. Du Bois believed African Americans should automatically receive free education, equal treatment and voting rights.

Du Bois helped form the Niagara Movement, the forerunners of the NAACP. By 1910 he began publishing *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the NAACP.

In his later years, Du Bois became a strong socialist and was active in the peace movement. He became the focus of government investigations and at one point was not allowed to leave the country by the State Department. When this ban was lifted, he left America and moved to Ghana, changed his citizenship and eventually died there.

Key Question:
How did W.E.B. Du Bois's approach to civil rights differ from Booker T. Washington's approach?