

African Americans Progressive Era Assignment

Racial Tensions Packet

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

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.

1. From this document I would guess that WHITE PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH at this time were feeling...
2. Given what was happening at the time, this was a good/ bad speech because . . .
3. I think Washington chose these words because they probably made WHITE PEOPLE feel...
4. The author is trying to convince the audience that...
5. The most powerful line in this speech is . . . (explain)

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

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.

1. From this document I would guess that AFRICAN AMERICANS at this time were feeling...
2. This might not give me the whole picture of Booker T. Washington because. . .
3. DuBois is trying to convince readers that...
4. The most powerful line in this speech is . . . (explain)
5. Corroboration Together, these two documents tell me that at this time . . .