

**Title of Lesson: *Two Different African-American Visions: W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington***  
(Suggested grade level: 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Advanced U.S. History Since 1877)

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**Author Information:** Kathy Paschal, (Cohort I)  
Stanhope Elmore High School  
Elmore County Schools

Adapted for Advanced Placement by:  
Mary Hubbard, Advanced Placement History Teacher  
Consultant, Alabama History Education Initiative

**Background Information:**

The following links provide background on W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington:

- [National Park Service, “Tuskegee Institute”](#)
- [Encyclopedia of Alabama: Tuskegee University](#)
- [“Two Nations of Black America: Booker T. and W.E.B.”](#), a PBS Frontline program first aired in 1998. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a Harvard scholar, hosted the program. The documentary examined the late 20<sup>th</sup> century gap between upper and lower class blacks. It featured interviews with many prominent African Americans. The page entitled “Booker T. and W.E.B.” offers a brief but substantive overview of the debate between those two men.
- [“The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow”](#) was a four-part PBS series that examined segregation from the end of the Civil War until the modern civil rights movement. This website offers a wealth of resources for learning about the evolution of the Jim Crow system as well as particular information regarding Washington and Du Bois.
- [Encyclopedia of Alabama, Booker T. Washington](#)
- [Encyclopedia of Alabama, Tuskegee University](#)

**Overview of lesson:**

This lesson fits within the Progressive Era of late 19th and early 20th century and focuses on two of the most prominent black spokesmen and civil rights activists of the time, Booker T. Washington and W.E. B. Du Bois. Starting with a personal letter from the Alabama Archives that Washington wrote in 1904, students will analyze other brief writings by both men. Students will compare and contrast the two men’s different approaches to the question of how blacks living in the late 19th and early 20th centuries could best achieve racial progress, and also identify the benefits and drawbacks to each man’s overall strategy. Class discussion will culminate in an informal debate centered on the following resolution: “Booker T. Washington’s approach to improving the lives of African Americans in the late 19th and early 20th century was wiser for its time than that of W.E.B. Du Bois.” (The approximate cut-off date for this debate is 1915, the year Washington died.) Working in teams, students must offer factual information as well as logical arguments to support their side of the debate. The lesson ends with an invitation to students to consider which of the two men President Obama might admire most and why.

## Content Standards

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Grades 10 /11: Content Standard 2

- Determining the influence of the Niagara Movement, Booker T. Washington, William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois, and Carter G. Woodson on the Progressive Era.

[National Standards for History](#), 1996

Era 7, Standard 1C: The student understands the limitations of Progressivism and the alternatives offered by various groups. Examine the perspectives of various African Americans on Progressivism and the alternative programs. [Consider multiple perspectives]

[National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies](#), (Bulletin 111, 2010)

Standard 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Standard 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

## Primary Learning Objective(s):

Students will:

- Demonstrate an awareness of the severe limits imposed on blacks in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that developed toward the end of Reconstruction (political, economic, social, and educational limits)
- Identify basic facts about [Booker T. Washington](#) and [W.E.B. Du Bois](#): who they were and a few of their most famous accomplishments
- Analyze brief writings by both men
- Compare and contrast the ideas of the two men in terms of how blacks should strive for greater progress
- Evaluate the benefits but also the drawbacks to each man's approach
- Express and logically support with factual information (in a debate format) an opinion as to which of the two men was the most effective black activist of the late 1800s and early 1900s
- Consider the question: "Which of the two men do you think President Obama would most admire and why?"

## Additional Learning Objective(s):

- Students will practice their thinking and speaking skills by engaging in an informal debate.
- By being reminded that the African American struggle for equality stretches all the way back to the colonial era and composes an essential thread throughout American history, students will have a chance to connect events thematically across time. They should be encouraged to compare leaders from different periods---people like Nat Turner, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, even Martin Luther King---with Washington and Du Bois and tentatively evaluate the impact each had on the development of civil rights for blacks.
- This lesson gives students an opportunity to discuss the moral dimensions and challenges of confronting racism.

**Time allotted:** 120 minutes

## Materials and Equipment:

- [Booker T. Washington's letter to H.W. Laird](#) (attached) – copies could be distributed to each student or displayed on a projector for the whole class
- Guiding questions for students to use in analyzing the letter (attached)

- [Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Exposition Speech](#) (attached)
- [Excerpt from W.E.B. Du Bois’s book, \*The Souls of Black Folk\*](#) (attached)
- Comparison chart (Washington v Du Bois) students should use to prepare for debate (attached)
- Instructions for informal debate (attached)
- Debate rubric (attached) which should be distributed to students before the debate takes place

**Technological Resources:**

- Teacher needs computer with internet access. (A digital projector would be helpful but is not essential.)
- Students need access to computers with internet connections.
- Classroom textbook

**Background/Preparation:**

If needed, students should be re-familiarized with the end-phase of Reconstruction: the ascendancy of the white Democratic Party in the South, the disenfranchisement of blacks, the growth of the Ku Klux Klan, the development of the Jim Crow system, the racial segregation that existed in both North and South, and the common racial prejudices of the time. Without this context, students will be tempted to judge Washington and Du Bois by today’s standards, rather than understanding that the time period in which they lived imposed certain realities and restrictions on them. The debate about which leader had the “wiser” plan for racial progress calls for this kind of historical and situational knowledge.

As the teacher, you’ll also need to give students some background information about the 1895 Atlanta Exposition, which was the setting for Washington’s most famous speech, the one in which he uttered the “cast down your bucket” phrase which is used as a lead-in for this lesson. Students may not know what an exposition was or why Atlanta held several international cotton expositions in the late 1800s. Since they are being asked to analyze the speech, they need to know what sort of an audience Washington was addressing and why Atlanta leaders chose him to be one of the featured speakers on opening day. (See notes under “Step 3.”) This context is essential. Succinct background information on the [1895 Atlanta Exposition](#) is available from the on-line New Georgia Encyclopedia.

If the classroom text doesn’t supply much information about Washington, Tuskegee Institute, or Du Bois, you (and/or your students) might want to research some of the web sites listed at the end of this lesson.

**Procedures/Activities:**

**Engagement/Motivation Activity:**

Tell students to spend five minutes brainstorming with a neighbor on possible meanings for this quote: “Cast down your bucket where you are.” Encourage them to re-phrase the advice or come up with situations where those words might be appropriate. What, in terms of more general life advice, do they think the author of the quote was trying to communicate? Then conduct a brief whole-class discussion. If a student doesn’t volunteer the information, don’t reveal the author’s name (Booker T. Washington) or the context in which he spoke those words (his 1895 Atlanta Compromise speech).

<b>Step 1</b>	Divide students into groups of 3-4 each. Give each student a copy of the brief letter <a href="#">Booker T. Washington wrote to H.W. Laird</a> (see attachment below) along with the guiding questions (see attachment below). Allow about 15-20 minutes for groups to process the document and answer the questions. Although this is a collective task, everyone should notate his/her own copy of the letter and fill in answers to the questions on his/her own sheet.
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<p><b>Step 2</b></p>	<p>Using what the students say, deconstruct the letter with the whole class and find out what some of them already know about Washington and Tuskegee Institute. (Make certain each group contributes to the discussion and have students locate Tuskegee on a map of Alabama. A map of Alabama from 1901 is available at <a href="http://alabamamaps.ua.edu">alabamamaps.ua.edu</a>.) The most essential thing students should take away from the letter is an awareness of Washington’s aversion to any sort of controversy. Ask them to speculate about why he believed it was necessary to keep a low profile.</p> <p>If it hasn’t already been established, inform students that Washington was the author of the quote they were given at the start of the lesson and that he uttered those words in 1895, when he was asked to be one of the opening-day speakers at an international cotton exposition being held in Atlanta.</p>
<p><b>Step 3</b></p>	<p>This is the point at which you should provide a brief mini-lecture on who Washington was, why both he and Tuskegee Institute were well known, and a little about what was officially called “The Cotton States and International Exposition.” Students may or may not even know what an exposition was. A few essential facts to point out to students about the exposition in Atlanta in 1895 include: 1) it was an attempt by white business leaders to sell the region to northern investors, 2) one of the major messages they hoped to convey was that the South had solved its racial problems (one of the reasons they called it the “New South”), and 3) Washington’s immediate target audience was predominantly white, a factor which had great effect on the content and style of his speech. (Historical note: the day that Washington delivered this speech is the same day Frederick Douglass, one of Washington’s personal heroes, died.)</p>
<p><b>Step 4</b></p>	<p>Provide each student with a copy of Washington’s speech (see attachments below). As homework, instruct them to analyze the speech using the following questions as a guide: 1) What goal do you think Washington had in mind? 2) What elements within the speech seemed to aid in that purpose? (Try to identify 3-4 very specific attributes.) 3) Why do you think organizers of the Exposition believed Booker T. Washington was the right person to deliver this particular speech, in this particular place, and at this particular time? Students should notate their copy of the speech and answer the questions in writing.</p>
<p><b>Step 5</b></p>	<p>Check that students tried to answer the questions and help them analyze the speech by going over their responses to the three questions. Point out that although Washington’s primary audience was composed of white men, he was indirectly speaking to a black audience as well.</p>
<p><b>Step 6</b></p>	<p>Tell students that they’ll read one more document, an excerpt from a collection of essays written by W.E.B. Du Bois, another well known black activist of the time whose overall approach to racism was quite different from Washington’s. Inform students that as a culminating activity, they’ll be debating which man’s approach might have been the “wisest” for its time period (a question with no one right answer). Hand out the chart (see attachment below). Students can use</p>

	<p>it to organize information about the two men’s positions. Provide either a photocopy of the excerpt from Du Bois’s book (see attachment below), or, if students have access to computers, provide the Alabama Archives website connection which has the excerpt. Encourage students to do some additional research on both men, using their text books and, if time allows, some of the websites listed below. But make it clear that their debate must draw mostly on these men’s own words (as reflected in the primary documents they’ve read) as well as their knowledge of racial realities of the time period. <b>DO NOT ASSIGN DEBATE POSITIONS JUST YET.</b> Students should prepare to argue either side.</p>
<b>Step 7</b>	<p>Once students have had time to read the Du Bois excerpt and fill in the chart (and you’ve checked to see that they’ve done that), place them in groups of 3-4 to compare notes. Encourage them to list general points they might make in support of both Washington and Du Bois as having the “wisest” plan for blacks to advance themselves in the early 1900s. Urge them to articulate the benefits and drawbacks to each position.</p>
<b>Step 8</b>	<p>Write the debate resolution on the board. “Resolved: That Booker T. Washington’s approach to improving race relations was wiser for its time period than that of W.E.B. Du Bois.” Assign debate sides, along with instructions for how this informal debate will be conducted (see attachment below) and a copy of the rubric that will be used to evaluate students’ participation (see attachment listed under “Assessment Strategies”). Give students time to prepare. Flip a coin to determine which side goes first. Depending on the size of the class, you might require each student to speak during the debate.</p>
<b>Step 9</b>	<p>Conduct the debate (about 40 minutes), using the simple format found under “Lesson Materials.” De-brief afterwards. You can declare the winning side of the debate, or you could ask another teacher to be the judge. In either event, it would be helpful to provide an overall critique. Evaluate students’ individual performances and participation using the form provided (see attachments below.) If you want an additional and/or more formal evaluation, require students to write their final opinion in a five paragraph essay (introduction with thesis, three support paragraphs, and a conclusion).</p>
<b>Step 10 (optional)</b>	<p>If you think the students would be interested and class time allows, ask them which of the two men (Washington and Du Bois) they believe President Obama would most admire and why. The discussion could take as little or as much time as you like.</p>

**Assessment Strategies:**

- Check that students have notated their readings and written out answers to all the assigned questions and possibly award points.
- Observe student participation in class discussions and possibly award points.
- Evaluate individual student participation in the debate, using the attached rubric.

### Guiding Questions for Washington's Letter to Laird

1. Who wrote this letter? Have you heard of this person before? Jot down any facts you know about him.
2. Where and when did this person write this letter? Is it a business letter? (Look carefully at the document and you'll be able to answer that question.) Why would someone want or need to differentiate between various kinds of correspondence?
3. What does this document reveal about the purpose of the institution this person worked for and the formal title he held? How can you tell? (Refer to specifics on the page.) Have you heard of this institution before? If so, jot down any facts you know about it.
4. When the author uses the phrase "our work" in the second paragraph, what kind of work do you think he is referring to? (Support your conclusion with something specific in the document.)
5. Although some references are unclear, what do you believe was the basic message the author of this letter wanted to communicate to the recipient? Summarize that message in your own words (at least two sentences) and underline brief portions of the letter that logically support your conclusions.
6. What do you make out of the following portion of the letter: "I am quite sure you did not mention Mr. (last name either omitted or deleted) and am equally sure I did not use your name in any manner." What might account for the need for secrecy? (Feel free to speculate in a reasonable manner since there isn't a definitive answer to that question.) How does the element of secrecy fit with the rest of the letter?

CHART: WASHINGTON & DU BOIS

NAME	OCCUPATION	KEY TEXT/SPEECH	POSITION ON CIVIL RIGHTS NOTED IN WORK	MAIN ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF POSITION	POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

## DEBATE FORMAT

Group # 1 has 10 minutes to present its case. They should identify major components of Washington/Du Bois's approach to improving the life of African Americans, quote from primary documents to support those assertions, relate to realities of time period, and state (as well as explain) why that approach was the "wisest."

Group # 2 has 2 minutes to process what Group # 1 said and prepare to cross-examine Group #1.

Group # 2 has 3 minutes to cross-examine Group # 1. (Cross-examination involves asking questions to get group # 1 to clarify some point it made or ask questions in order to set up an argument Group # 2 plans to make in the next step. Group # 2 shouldn't use these 3 minutes to present its major arguments.)

Group # 2 has 10 minutes to present their case.

Group # 1 has 2 minutes to prepare to cross-examine Group # 2.

Group # 1 has 3 minutes to cross-examine Group # 2. (Same stipulations as applied to Group # 2.)

Group # 1 has 4 minutes for summation.

Group #2 has 4 minutes for summation.

DEBATE RUBRIC

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS \_\_\_\_\_

CRITERIA	POINTS	COMMENTS
Student spoke (at least once) and clearly and loudly enough to be heard		
Student's behavior was respectful toward opponents and cooperative toward team members		
Student used logic skills in making points and demonstrating viewpoints		
All statements and questions made by student were appropriate to the debate topic and indicated engagement		
Student was knowledgeable about the topic and obviously well prepared		