

The Great Divide

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND W. E. B. DU BOIS DEBATE HOW TO PROSPER THE BLACK RACE

Which should come first for black Americans: the economic or the political? Wealth or votes? At century's end, the choice is often presented as one between the assertive black nationalism of Malcolm X and the Christian integrationism of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The incompleteness of this dichotomy is illustrated by the black "conservatives" profiled elsewhere in this issue, who often seem to have a foot in both camps.

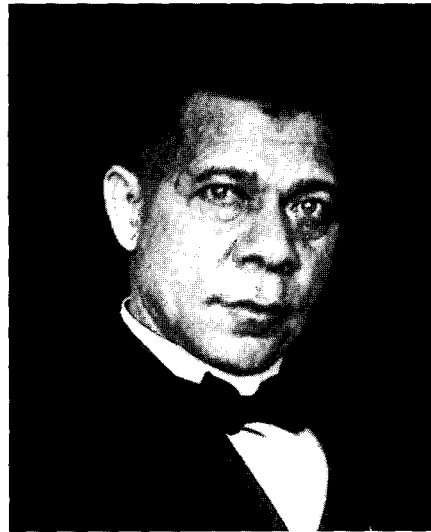
Perhaps no two men have better embodied the choice between the economic and the political than Booker T. Washington—ex-slave, founder of the Tuskegee Institute, and the most visible spokesman for black Americans at our century's dawn—and W. E. B. Du Bois, who was co-founder of the NAACP and editor of its magazine, The Crisis.

Over the years, these two men have sometimes been caricatured: Booker T. Washington as an accommodationist Uncle Tom, meekly accepting segregation and urging blacks to be happy with menial employment; W. E. B. Du Bois as a haughty intellectual who cared only for the educated Negro elite, his "talented tenth," and despised the farming and laboring people for whom Washington spoke.

Their visions of the role of black people in American life were far richer than these cartoons would suggest. Washington was an apostle of black enterprise, which he believed would instill in his people "feelings of self-reliance and self-respect, which are the basis of all real progress, moral or material." Echoes of Washington can be heard in voices as disparate as those of Justice Clarence Thomas and today's black Muslims. Du Bois insisted upon a "renaissance of American Negro literature" and a place for Negroes in American intellectual life—a place that is, at long last, being occupied.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

An adaptation from *Up From Slavery*, 1901.



Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in our first years as free Negroes we began at the top instead of at the bottom. A seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill. I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are."

Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. 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. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.

To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue for prosperity, 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 habits you

know, whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your firesides. Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, built your railroads and cities. We shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. 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.

There is no defense or security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all. One-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. We shall constitute one-third and more of the ignorance and crime, or one-third of the business and industrial prosperity.

Agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly. Enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges.

How I wish we could burn it into the hearts and heads of all that usefulness, service to our brother, is the supreme end of education. The ignorant race is tempted to jump, at one bound, to the position that it has required years of hard struggle for others to reach. Unfortunately for us as a race, our education was begun, just after the Civil War, too nearly

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where New England education ended. Boys have been taken from the farms and educated in law, theology, Hebrew, and Greek—everything but the very subject they should know the most about. Since self-support and industrial independence are the first conditions for lifting up any race, education in theoretical and particular agriculture, horticulture, dairying, and stock-raising should have occupied the first place in our system.

A short time ago, in one of our Southern cities, a colored man died who had received training as a skilled mechanic during the days of slavery. By his skill and industry he had built up a great business as a house contractor and builder. In this same city there are 35,000 colored people who have been well educated in languages and literature, but not a single one could be found who had been trained in architectural and mechanical drawing that could carry on the business which this ex-slave had built up, and so it was soon scattered to the wind.

Not long ago a black mother, who lived in one of the Northern states, had her boy thoroughly taught the machinist's trade. A job was secured in a neighboring shop. With dinner bucket in hand and spurred on by the prayers of the now

happy mother, the boy entered the shop to begin his first day's work. What happened? Every one of the 20 white men threw down his tools and deliberately walked out, swearing that he would not give a black man an opportunity to earn an honest living. Another shop was tried, with the same results, and still another and the same. Today this promising and ambitious black man is a wreck—a confirmed drunkard, with no hope, no ambition. My friends, we are one in this country. No race can wrong another race simply because it has the power to do so without being permanently injured in morals. If a white man steals a Negro's ballot it is the white man who is permanently injured. Physical death comes to the one Negro lynched in a county, but death of the morals—death of the soul—come to the thousands responsible for the lynching.

Manifestly some of the great races of today—particularly the Negro race—have not as yet given to civilization the full spiritual message which they are capable of giving. The question is, then: How shall this message be delivered? The answer is plain: By the development of these race groups as races. For the development of Negro genius, of Negro literature and art, of Negro spirit, only Negroes bound together and inspired by one vast ideal can work out in its fullness the great message we have for humanity.

We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther than that, we are Negroes, members of a vast historic race. It is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals; as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development.

For the accomplishment of these ends we need race organizations: Negro colleges, Negro newspapers, Negro business organizations, a Negro school of literature and art. No people that laughs at itself, and ridicules itself, and wishes to

God it was anything but itself ever wrote its name in history. We *must* be inspired with the Divine faith of our black mothers, that out of the blood and dust of battle will march a victorious host, a mighty nation, a peculiar people. And such a people must be united; united to keep black boys from loafing, gambling and crime; united to guard the purity of black women and to reduce that vast army of black prostitutes that is today marching to hell; and united in serious organizations to determine by careful conference and thoughtful interchange of opinion the broad lines of policy and action for the American Negro.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

An adaptation from *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903.



UPI Corbis/Getty

Easily the most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington. To gain the sympathy and cooperation of the various elements comprising the white South was Mr. Washington's first task; and this, at the time, seemed, for a black man, well-nigh impossible. And yet ten years later it was done in the word spoken at Atlanta: "In all things purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." This "Atlanta Compromise" is by all odds the most notable thing in Mr.

Washington's career. The South interpreted it in different ways: The radicals received it as a complete surrender of the demand for civil and political equality; the conservatives, as a generously conceived working basis for the mutual understanding. So both approved it, and today its author is certainly the most distinguished Southerner since Jefferson Davis, and the one with the largest personal following.

Next to this achievement comes Mr. Washington's work in gaining place and consideration in the North. So thoroughly did he learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity, that the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities. One wonders what Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi would say to this.

This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington's program naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as to almost completely overshadow the higher aims of life. Moreover, this is an age when the more advanced races are coming in closer contact with the less developed races, and Mr. Washington's program practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things—political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education of Negro youth—and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South.

Is it possible, and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meager chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic *No*. And Mr. Washington thus faces the triple paradox of his career:

1. He is striving nobly to make Negro artisans business men and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, un-

der modern competitive methods, for workingmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage.

2. He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run.

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3. He advocates common-school and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning; but the Negro common-schools could not remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in colleges.

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the mass away from the contamination and death of the worst. If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men.

The blind worshippers of the average look at Negro leaders and cry out in alarm: "These are exceptions, look here at death, disease and crime—these are the happy rule." Of course they are the rule, because a silly nation made them the rule. But a saving remnant continually survives and persists. Do Americans

ever stop to reflect that there are in this land a million men of Negro blood, well-educated, owners of homes, against the honor of whose womanhood no breath was ever raised, whose men occupy positions of trust and usefulness, and who, judged by any standard, have reached the full measure of the best type of modern European culture?

Can the masses of the Negro people be in any possible way more quickly raised than by the effort and example of this aristocracy of talent and character? Was there ever a nation of God's fair earth civilized from the bottom upward? Never; it is, ever was and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters.

How then shall leaders of a struggling people be trained and the hands of the risen few strengthened? There can be but one answer: The best and most capable of their youth must be schooled in the colleges and universities of the land. Every isolated group or nation must have its yeast, must have for the talented few centers of training where men are not so befuddled by the hard toil of earning a living as to have no aims higher than their bellies, and no God greater than Gold.

Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work—it must teach life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men.

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In Real Life

FIRST-PERSON AMERICA

CASPER CONFSSIONAL

By Dale Anema

LITTLETON, COLORADO—Seven years ago I happened to sit down in a Casper, Wyoming hotel bar at about 6:30 for complimentary hors d'oeuvres and a drink. A guy nearby loudly told a pretty good joke, which reminded the person next to me of other jokes. By ten o'clock six of us were huddled at the end of the bar: a truck driver, an independent oilman, a financial analyst, a traveling salesman, the hotel's lady manager, and I.

Jokes reminded us of life situations, and vice versa, and eventually we were truly baring our souls, describing successes and failures, hopes and disappointments, sins and nobility, delights and regrets. In one of those rare moments when personal façades drop, nothing was sacred—infidelities, lies, prejudices, ugly pride, fears, righteousness, relationships with God were all matter-of-factly laid upon the bar. Jokes made the horror of some of the stories more chilling. Every word was carefully listened to; no praise or condemnation was forthcoming. Stories were told in near third person, with no apparent ego or humility.

The truck driver grew up in rural Georgia. When he was in high school, he and his friends cruised around looking for black men with white women or in white neighborhoods. They would jump out of the car and beat the hapless young men within an inch of their lives. He said they almost considered it a religious crusade. He now counted his dispatcher, a fellow driver, and two dock workers who regularly load his truck—all blacks—among his best friends. He solemnly described the self-loathing he felt over these brutal, senseless acts of his youth.

The oilman quietly told us that when he was a wildcatter in his mid-twenties,

his neighbor informally invested in a three-well drilling-pool. The first two were dusters, the third came in a marginal well. Our oil companion had retained a quarter interest in the wells and after paying the bills his share would barely cover his living expenses, not

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enough for him to keep his company afloat. So he told his neighbor that because of cost overruns the first two wells had depleted the drilling fund and he'd raised the money for the third well from additional investors. His neighbor never questioned the story, just said it was a long shot anyway and thanks for the opportunity. Six months later the neighbor lost his job and was having a difficult time. The oilman wanted to help him out but wasn't yet doing that well himself. A couple of years later the neighbor was killed in an auto accident. Our drinking buddy helped with the funeral expenses and over the next several years occasionally gave money to the widow and her kids, but never had the heart to tell them of his cheating. He blubbered as he related his haunted feelings—some nights he didn't sleep at all.

The salesman said his sales territory used to include Sacramento, California. He'd become quite friendly with a buyer and after seeing her professionally once a month for about a year they began an affair. She became pregnant, and they split the cost of the abortion. Shortly thereafter he was assigned a new territory so he no longer had to deal with that untoward situation. His wife of five years didn't find out. A few years later he was in the room when their first child was delivered. He felt some remorse for the abortion, but in his euphoria put it out of his mind.

As his daughter grew, his guilt began to overwhelm him. He spent almost every night in bars, even when he was in town. When he did see his wife and daughter, he was angry and distant. After several months of this, his wife suggested a trial separation. He broke down and told her all. She said she suspected something like that, but still loved him and wanted to stay married and provide a stable home for their daughter. He found another sales job that required less travel and spent every minute he could with his wife and daughter. He felt unworthy of his family's love and devotion.

I recounted a situation I'd had 15 years before. I was having an affair with a divorced co-worker who had two children. She became pregnant twice, intentionally I thought; both times I said I wouldn't marry her. I didn't encourage or discourage abortions, but she had two. We later split up on nasty terms, and I had no contact with her or her kids from that day.

Later, when I had begun to become a different person, I wanted to have a family with a lady I'd met. Then the agony I'd caused began to torment me. Not only was I responsible for snuffing out the lives of my own babies, but also for adding incredible misery to two other children. I prayed for forgiveness daily,