

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Viewpoints

During the late 1800s, many state and local governments enacted laws rolling back the rights obtained by African Americans following the Civil War. States enacted laws that restricted African Americans' abilities to live, work, travel, and eat in certain places; to vote; and to practice other constitutional freedoms. Two African American leaders, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, disagreed about the best way to achieve full citizenship rights for African Americans. The excerpts below present the opposing viewpoints of these two men. ♦ *As you read, try to identify the fundamental difference between the viewpoints of Washington and Du Bois. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Washington and Du Bois**Speech to the Cotton States and International Exposition, 1895, by Booker T. Washington**

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful. 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.

Source: *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan et al., vol. 3 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

"Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," 1903, by W.E.B. Du Bois

Is it possible, and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political right, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meager chance for developing their exceptional men? [Washington] is striving nobly to make Negro artisans business men and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for workmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage. 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.

Source: W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, 1903).

Questions to Think About

1. According to Washington, what is the greatest danger facing African Americans?
2. In his criticism of Washington, what three things does Du Bois imply that African Americans must do?
3. **Contrast** What is the fundamental difference between Washington's approach and Du Bois' approach to gaining respect for African Americans and recognition of their rights?