

Free booker t. washington and frederick douglass' conflicting negro thoughts rese...

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



African-Americans have lived a miserable destiny under the harsh institution of slavery. They have long endured the cruelty of racial discrimination and social segregation within a country where liberty, democracy and freedom are considered as national ideals. The name “Negros” is not just a simple term, but it is a humiliating adjective that are applied to black Americans to ridicule their race. The blacks have to bear the cruelty of a nation whose economy depended on their labor, yet refuses to recognize their potential as a person. The society upholds to their principle that color of the African-Americans defines the entirety of their being- no matter how outstanding their character and skills are.

Leaders of the African-American community who are endowed with literary prowess, radical thought, oratorical brilliance and a brave heart have stand to defend their fellow blacks against the peculiar institution. They give powerful speeches that resonated across the world and make every civilization aware of their endless cry for freedom and equality. Although, African-American abolitionists share the same vision of attaining a just reform for the black race, they have different philosophies on how to achieve such goal. Two examples of equally brilliant blacks who advocated freedom and equality are Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass.

Washington’s “The Awakening of the Negro” and Douglass “Reconstruction” are both centered on the ideal that blacks should be free. But their speeches have different content, tone, rhetorical devices and embody different philosophical perspectives about equality, liberty and education. Additionally, Douglass and Booker have different inspiration and motivation for writing their individual speeches. Their essays also cover

different advocacies-Booker focused on the black's access to education, while Douglass was more concerned about the blacks' voting rights and the governance of President Johnson.

Frederick Douglass is among the most important figures in African-American history. At the age of twenty, Douglass escaped from his master in one of the plantations in the antebellum South. He lived in Massachusetts and New York for fifty four years as a free man and moved to Washington D. C during 1872. After escaping from slavery, he became a famous orator where the message of his every speech is the disheartening status of the blacks and the immediate need of putting an end to slavery. After the American Civil War, he delivered a significant speech which ignited hope among the African slaves. " Reconstruction" is a speech of positive thought and faith that wonderful changes would come to the black community who patiently waited and hoped that someday they will be recognized as citizens of America who deserve equal rights and opportunities.

The bloody war between the North and the Old South have left the Southern region in ruins as several roads, railways, commercial establishments and public institutions and facilities were either damaged or totally destroyed. Lincoln admitted that the road to Reconstruction is a painful journey. But for the African-Americans, the reconstruction of the South is a promising journey. Douglass expressed this hope in the national stage. At the beginning of his speech, he employs an appeal to emotion in order to lead the Congress and the government as a whole towards making positive changes that would benefit the African-American people. He says; " Whether the tremendous war so heroically fought and so victoriously ended shall pass

into history a miserable failure, barren of permanent results,—a scandalous and shocking waste of blood and treasure.” (Douglass) The great orator appeals to the officials’ feeling of pride to make them agree with his argument that the Civil War is useless if it will not have value on the people’s liberty. The assassination of Lincoln made a Southerner his successor who overturned the Civil Rights Act and gave back the acres of land to the original owners. This unfortunate event have triggered Douglass to compose a speech expressing his worries about the current standing of the blacks in the white nation. On the other hand, he expresses his faith in the Congress who are unified to overturn Johnson’s orders. “ Reconstruction” is a bold and courageous condemnation of Johnson’s governance and political ideals. He states that “ it would be a cowardly deference to a defeated and treacherous President, if any account were made of the illegitimate, one-sided, sham governments hurried into existence for a malign purpose in the absence of Congress.” (Douglass) This is perhaps the bravest line in his speech where he uses powerful adjectives such “ defeated,” “ treacherous,” illegitimate,” “ one-sided” and “ sham” to describe the highest ranking official of the United States. Douglass calls Johnson a treacherous President who is trying to establish a kind of government that the North have fought to eradicate for long and bloody years. Aside from the criticism against Johnson, another major content of Douglass’ speech is the right of African-Americans to vote. “ Douglass infused the suffrage with all pervasive significance.” (Blight, p. 195) He explains that having the right to elect the officials of their choice is the only means to have themselves protected against candidates who have no hearts for their interests. He asks the government to “ give to every loyal

citizen the elective franchise,—a right and power which will be ever present, and will form a wall of fire for his protection.” (Douglass) “ Reconstruction” carries a mixed tone of dread and hope. Douglass fears that the Civil War will not change the destiny of the blacks and they may remain as the “ unimportant other” in the American society. However, he is hopeful that the Congress will do their part in granting the right to suffrage of African-Americans which will be a major catalyst of change.

While Douglass courageously employs harsh words to ridicule the President and officials with the same political interests, Booker uses modesty of language in expressing his ideals. Like Douglass, Booker was a former slave, but his state of slavery was short-lived as he was freed in 1865. Yet, unlike Douglass who had never known his father, Booker is much fortunate to know his white father and his mother who is a slave in a small farm in central Virginia. Booker represents the last generation of African-American leaders and acts as a spokesperson for the blacks after their emancipation from slavery. The different realities and circumstances that Douglass and Booker have experienced have shaped their conflicting perspectives and Negro thoughts.

Booker’s “ The Awakening of the Negro” carries two key messages- need for industrial education and personal economic advancement. Booker proclaims “ that black labor remains the lifeblood of the South.’ (Rusert, p. 161) His arguments represent the larger movement of the New South where he advocates that the Tuskegee Institute would be the answer to reconstruct the economy of the South whose dependence on slave labor was severed after the Civil War. By writing his essay, Booker wants to emphasize that the

blacks have been the instrument of the Southern progress and even after the war they will continue to be an economic instrument. His essay is a representation of his vision of a South that are aided by the graduates of Tuskegee Institute on its way back to economic progress. Booker uses the first person point of voice to establish a closer connection with his audience. Like Douglass, he employs the appeal to emotion and uses the phrase " I wish" repeatedly to utter his non-directive recommendation of the Tuskegee Institute as the true catalyst of reform.

While most of the messages contained in Douglass' " Reconstruction" are the low status of blacks after Civil War and limitless plead for reform, Booker's speech highlights the improvements and positive changes in the the black community. He says that, " I wish they could see the two or three room cottages that have taken the place of the usual one-room cabin, the well-cultivated farms, and the religious life of the people that now means something more than the name." (Booker) This passage speaks of delight and Booker's optimistic take on the status of the black community after the revolution. He describes the Tuskegee Institute as the remedy for the health and moral problems of the blacks living in the South. Booker takes the readers to the New South where abandoned plantations were converted to college campus whose practices are far different from the plantation life of the antebellum South. Aside from the practical works, personal hygiene, sanitation and health care are key pedagogies of the Tuskegee system. Tuskegee trains young blacks so that they can help the lower-class African-American work force on a more productive, but less tiring cultivation. He states that, " Having been fortified at Tuskegee by education of mind, skill of

hand, Christian character, ideas of thrift, economy, and push, and a spirit of independence, the student is sent out to become a centre of influence and light in showing the masses of our people in the Black Belt of the South how to lift themselves up. (Booker) Though the Institute trains and educates black students, the pedagogy is designed for the graduates to influence the tenant farmer communities.

Booker's essay demonstrates the reasonable need for industrial training and education. He starts his arguments by recognizing the arguments of those who oppose the idea that industrial education is a means to uplift the newly freed blacks and deliver them economic progress. He states that " One of the objections sometimes urged against industrial education for the negro is that it aims merely to teach him to work on the same plan that he was made to follow when in slavery." (Booker) Booker challenges this objection by describing the features of the Tuskegee Institute. He cites that the Institute has excellent instructors who will not only teach the blacks of how to cultivate land, but teach them about the modern and scientific techniques of cultivation. These include chemistry of the soil, the best methods of drainage, proper cultivation of fruit, proper care of livestock, dairying, and other significant lessons that are required for people who depends on agriculture as a way of living.

Booker sheds light on another question that challenges his advocacy for Industrial education. He says, " Some one may be tempted to ask, Has not the negro boy or girl as good a right to study a French grammar and instrumental music as the white youth? I answer, Yes, but in the present condition of the negro race in this country there is need of something more."

(Booker) To justify his answer, he narrates his own plight as a former slave who was able to succeed because of the industrial life training that he got from Hampton Institute- a public school in Richmond, Virginia that accepts black students. Hampton Institute works like the Tuskegee system where students are taught of industrial arts. Booker is excellent in using ethos in order to show the listeners that he is a credible authority to talk about the positive effects of the Tuskegee Institute on young blacks.

Booker is not only brilliant in providing logical arguments, but he is also excellent in appealing to the emotions of his listeners. In justifying the benefits of the Tuskegee Institute, he tells them that by enrolling in a school like Tuskegee he “ was surrounded by an atmosphere of business, Christian influence, and a spirit of self-help that seemed to have awakened every faculty in me, and caused me for the first time to realize what it meant to be a man instead of a piece of property.” (Booker) This is one of the most persuading lines of his speech where he makes the blacks revisit their previous experience as a slave and ignite their desire to experience a more humane reality.

Douglass’ speech challenges the US government while Booker’s essay encourages blacks to render their submission to the policies of the New World. While he recognizes the fact that blacks have the equal rights as the whites to study any course, they needed to accomplish a more important mission-to strive for personal development through the Tuskegee Institute. This ideal raises several objections among other militants of the black community. Du Bois in his essay “ Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” comments that “ Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old

attitude of adjustment and submission.” (Du Bois) Dubois denies the advantages of the Tuskegee Institute and argues that Washington asks the blacks to give up the things that are most important to a race who suffered decades of cruelty, discrimination, injustice and maltreatment. Dubois mentions that Washington advises the African-Americans to give up their;

First, political power,

Second, insistence on civil rights,

Third, higher education of Negro youth,— (Du Bois)

Dubois suggests that no black can attain economic progress if he is deprived of political rights and is confined in the theoretical system of Tuskegee. He adds that Washington’s aspiring thoughts about Tuskegee is a fragment of illusion and gives meager chance for exceptional blacks to succeed.

“ Reconstruction” and “ The Awakening of the Negro” both mirror the prowess and high ideals of two African-American leaders. To the end, Douglass’ psychic response to the South was intense, creatively metamorphosing with the never-ceasing demands of growth. (Ramsey, p. 36) Booker, on the other hand, takes a positive stance and suggests the healthful rejuvenation of the South and the moral and economic uplifting of the blacks through Industrial education offered by the Tuskegee Institute.

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