

Atlanta compromise analysis essay sample



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The Cotton States and International Exposition was held in Atlanta, Georgia beginning in September of 1895. Booker T. Washington was invited to give the opening address. The subject for this address was racial cooperation and has come to be known as the Atlanta Compromise Address. Booker T. Washington was born into slavery and with hard work and determination became a nationally known scholar and orator, as well as an influential leader of the black community. At the time of the speech, lynching and overt violent acts of racism were rampant in the South. Mr. Washington's position regarding economic cooperation between races as well as a call for long-term efforts for education and the economic advancement of the black communities was considered controversial. Mr. Washington used this platform to raise awareness of many issues and, by any standard, helped to improve the life of black Americans in the South.

In 1895 there was discrimination everywhere. In America people of African descent had a miserable existence. Less than 40 years earlier, they were either "owned" property, known as slaves, or lived a very humble, poverty stricken life. Booker T. Washington was among a number of very few blacks that were articulate, well educated, and well informed. He was aware that his life stood as an example to both blacks and whites that his race was capable of much more. His purpose was to bring the United States together and show how everyone could benefit. In this speech, Booker T. Washington uses many rhetorical devices to promote changes in the combined community of the nation. In his opening statements he was clear that the audience as a participating element in society should recognize the "American Negro".

Throughout this speech Mr. Washington praised the purpose of the meeting. He wished to make these white leaders more receptive to the concept of mutual cooperation. This would result in an economic advantage for both races. His purpose compliments his meaning by trying to bring the nation together as one. He uses strong diction to appear powerful and influential to the audience. His chosen subject was the segregation of races that currently existed in America. In this context he reveals the need for equality. His strong belief that people of African descent should be treated fairly and not treated, as chattel was foremost on his mind.

In this effort Mr. Washington made several appeals, often using logos in his presentation. He supplied many statistics such as “ One -third of the population of the South is of the Negro race.” He uses logos with this statistic in mind, “ No enterprise seeking the material, civil, or moral welfare of this section can disregard this element of our population and reach the highest success.” His implication is that of if we treat all people as equals, all will benefit economically. He contributes to his meaning by using pathos in the form of a story. “ Cast down your bucket where you are.” He recognized the need for all to be aware of their neighbor and to form relationships with those close geographically instead of just in skin color. “...Cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.” His use of figurative language in this story is particularly powerful at getting his point across.

Mr. Washington was really calling on his white neighbors, as represented by this respected body, to cast down their buckets in “ agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service and in the professions.” One of his

greatest strengths in this speech to a panel of all whites was to speak as a representative of the Negro race. This perspective allowed the speech to be non-threatening since it came as an explanation of advice given to his fellow blacks. By making statements like “ no race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem” he was able to put a concept across to all in a non -accusatory way.

We should all be aware that Mr. Washington was an accomplished orator, but even so he was limited by the facts of racial life in our country at this time. We should acknowledge his courage for presenting an address on the subject of equality and still be amazed at his ability and skill to deliver this form of controversial and even dangerous subject in a non-threatening manner.