

Essay on arguments between booker t washington and web dubois on civil rights

[Politics](#), [Civil Rights](#)



Booker T. Washington was willing to accommodate to social and political inequality for blacks in favor of a policy of gradualism and improvement through education and economic status, while W. E. B. DuBois insisted on full civil, political and economic equality for blacks. As Washington informed the white audience at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895, blacks should be willing to forgo opposition to segregation or demands for civil rights and voting rights in favor of education, training and advancement in the commercial world. His own Tuskegee Institute was the model for his version of industrial and agricultural training for blacks, and despite the fact that most of them were still sharecroppers and tenant farmers, denied work in industry, the professions and government, that the South offered more commercial opportunities than any other region of the country. He went on to reassure his listeners that blacks had no desire for social and political equality and “you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen.”¹ Washington was therefore quite willing to abandon any further attempts at Reconstruction in the South, which had already been replaced by a system of Jim Crow segregation and loss of voting rights. In the end, DuBois was correct in his views because blacks made relatively little progress in educational and economic opportunity during the decades of segregation and disenfranchisement. These issues were simply not separable any more than they had been during the First Reconstruction.

DuBois argued that Washington’s accommodation to the racist system of the South was morally and politically wrong, and asserted that the Radical

Reconstruction period from 1867-77 had been the greatest period of black progress in American history up to that time. Blacks could hardly vote anywhere in the U. S. before the First Reconstruction, but over 2, 000 held public office in 1867-77. This would have been impossible in the past and would not happen again until after the Second Reconstruction of 1954-65. The 14th and 15th Amendments initiated a “ constitutional revolution” in the South, but it only endured for ten years due to intense opposition from the former Confederates. 2 At least 10% of black officeholders during the First Reconstruction were actually victims of physical violence, intimidation or even murder by the KKK, and in the presidential elections of 1868 and 1876, Klan violence was so extreme in some states that blacks and their allies could hardly campaign at all. This type of extreme violence continued into the 1890s, when more blacks were lynched every year than there were legal executions in the United States. 3 Indeed, the real reason that the election of 1876 was in dispute and ended up being decided in the House of Representatives was that violence by the KKK in South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana made it impossible for many blacks to vote or have their ballots counted, which meant that the electoral votes of those states were in dispute. Once the last of the federal troops were removed after the Compromise of 1877, blacks lost their civil and voting rights and were “ firmly relegated to the lower rungs of the economic ladder.” 4 Had this not occurred after 1877, there would have been no need for a Second Reconstruction in the 1950s and 1960s.

DuBois strongly and publicly opposed the system of segregation and denial of black voting rights that was upheld by Supreme Court decisions like

Plessey v. Ferguson (1896) and Williams v. Mississippi (1897). Within two years after Washington's Atlanta Exposition address, the highest court in the land had upheld state and local laws that segregated blacks, denied them equal education and access to public facilities, and eliminated their right to vote. Separate but equal was the law of the land in many parts of the country until 1964, and while the separation by race was real, equality never existed. For this reason, DuBois became one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 and edited its newspaper *The Crisis* for many years. Progress toward civil rights and full equality was slow, but over time the NAACP won a number of important victories for civil rights in Supreme Court cases. By far the most important of these was *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) which reversed the 1896 Plessey v. Ferguson decision and declared that segregated schools were inherently unequal. Although the Court ordered desegregation and abolition of dual school systems in the South with all deliberate speed, a campaign of ' massive resistance against integration continued until the early-1970s. 5

DuBois was correct that a segregated system of education over which blacks had no real control would not provide equal educational opportunities, nor was it ever intended to. Whatever the state of psychological knowledge may have been at the time of Plessey v. Ferguson in *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954, the Supreme Court rejected any contradictory findings of the 1896 precedent and concluded that in the field of public education the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. The importance of education in American society and the

psychological damage and other intangible effects resulting from school segregation, including citation to several psychological studies supporting the Court's finding that segregation hindered educational development. Throughout his career, DuBois understood what Washington did not, that blacks simply would not have equal economic and educational opportunities in a society where they lacked basic civil rights and voting rights. As early as 1941, he had joined with Philip Randolph, the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union, in threatening Franklin Roosevelt with a march on Washington if he did not agree to establish a Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to protect minority workers in war industries. Unlike the First Reconstruction of 1867-77, the Second in the 1950s and 1960s was never completely repealed by the reactionary and racist forces in the U. S., although they have certainly tried. Although violence against civil rights workers by the Ku Klux Klan continued, especially in Alabama and Mississippi, this type of federal intervention soon undermined the institutions and organizations in the South that had kept blacks as second-class citizens since the end of the First Reconstruction in 1877. Therefore the civil rights revolution was very successful as far as it went, but by no means a complete revolution, especially in social and economic life. Martin Luther King recognized fully this at the time, and even Barack Obama is well aware that structural and institutional racism is still a fact in American society.

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