How to Prepare Leaders

We should send out teachers who will live among the colored people and show them how to lift themselves up. My own work began at Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1881, in a small church.

Frances Benjamin Johnston. Tuskegee History Class. 1902. Library of Congress LC-USZ62-64712 (6-3).

I began with thirty students meeting in that small church. Eventually Tuskegee became an institution of 800 students from nineteen states with 79 instructors, and property valued at $280,000.

The Tuskegee Institute prepares leaders by teaching knowledge and skills. It has emphasized industrial training as a means of finding the way out of present conditions. Students go out into the world conscious of their power to build a house or a wagon and have a certain confidence that they would not possess without such training. Tuskegee students also do farming at our school. In addition to the practical farm work, they learn the chemistry of the soil, the best methods of drainage, dairying, the cultivation of fruit, the care of livestock and tools, and scores of other lessons needed by a people whose main dependence is on agriculture. Our young women learn to make, mend, and launder the clothing of the young men, and thus are taught important industries.

Tuskegee Institute has been criticized for teaching the negro the same work he did during slavery. This is not our goal. Each department at Tuskegee has an intelligent and competent teacher, just as we have in our history classes. Students learn how to lay bricks but also the mathematics of brick-laying, and mechanical and architectural drawing. In farming, our students are taught how to master nature so that, instead of cultivating corn in the old way, they can use a corn cultivator that lays off the furrows, drops the corn into them, and covers it. In this way, they can do more work than three men by the old process of corn-planting. The constant aim is to show the student how to put brains into every process of labor; how to bring his knowledge of mathematics and the sciences into farming, carpentry, forging, foundry work; how to dispense as soon as possible with the old form of slave labor.

Conflict between the races will pass away in proportion as the black man, because of his skill, intelligence, and character, can produce something that the white man wants or respects in the commercial world.

The South is still undeveloped. We need ordinary people to love the value of hard work. Learning technical skills increases trade, -- trade between the races, -- and in this new relationship both the colored man and the white man will forget the past.

Fold here

The Awakening of the Negro

an excerpt of the article first published by Booker T. Washington in Atlantic Monthly, 1896.

Booker T. Washington. Library of Congress LC-USZ62-119897.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Fold here

My Observances of the Negro Way of Life

WHEN I was a mere boy, I saw a young colored man, who had spent several years in school. He was sitting in a cabin in the South. The terrible poverty and dirt of this cabin was sad, even though this young man had a knowledge of the French language and other academic subjects.

Gulbransen player installed in Lester silent piano. Library of Congress LC-USZ62-66336.

Another time, when riding on the outer edges of a town, I heard the sound of a piano coming from the same kind of cabin. The young colored woman who was playing had recently returned from a school where she had been studying music among other things. Her parents were living in a rented cabin, eating poorly cooked food, surrounded with poverty, and had almost none of the conveniences of life. Still, she had persuaded them to spend what little money they had to rent a piano.

Experiences like these impressed upon me the importance of making a study of our needs as a race, and applying the remedies for our poverty.

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.

My Own Life

I grew up in a small, one-room hut on a large slave plantation in Virginia. I was working as a coal-miner after the Civil War when I heard of the Hampton Institute. At Hampton I was trained to work hard, to learn thrift, economy, and push. Learning to support myself caused me to understand for the first time what it meant to be a man instead of a piece of property.

Harmony Community, Putnam County, Georgia . . . Corn is not a commercial crop in Putnam County, but it is a very important one, nonetheless and is used as food and feed; very few of the operators in the region ever have to buy corn over and above what they raise. These Negro tenants are running single-bladed cultivators down the rows of young corn. National Archives at College Park, NWDNS-83-G-41027.

Needs of the Negro People

African American woman seated on steps. Library of Congress LC-USZ62-67765.

We have a specific set of needs. It is of the utmost importance that our energy be given to meeting the living conditions that exist right now.

What are the vital needs among the seven millions of colored people in the South, most of whom are to be found on the plantations?

Roughly, these needs may be stated as food, clothing, shelter, education, proper habits, and a settlement of race relations.

"Son, darned if that nigger ain't made us late for prayer mettin'!" ca. 1935.
Library of Congress LC-USZ62-11633.

among the Negro people are gradually finding a higher meaning in the unifying ideal of race.

Some day, on American soil, two world races may give each to other those characteristics which both so sadly lack. Already there is to-day no truer American music but the sweet wild melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales are Indian and Africa.

The Negro problem is a test of the underlying principles of this great country. The souls who struggle in this test bear a burden. They bear this burden in the name of an historic race, in the name of this land of their father's fathers, and in the name of human opportunity.

Fold here

Personal History

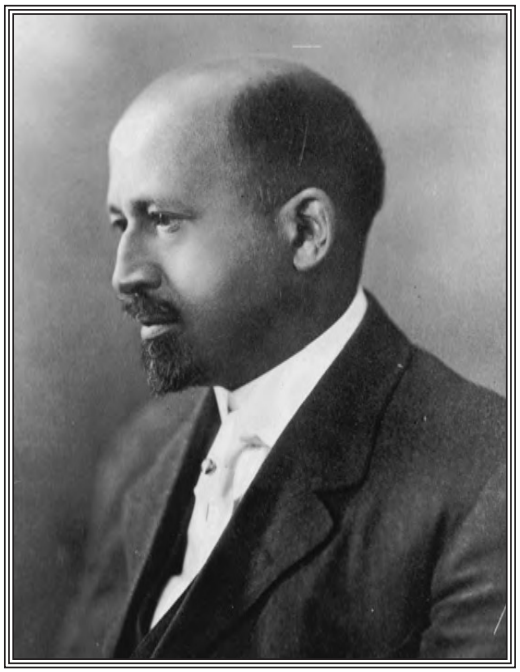
William Edward Burghardt DuBois was born in Massachusetts into a family of free African Americans. His family escaped slavery through fighting in the American Revolutionary War.

He was the first African American to graduate from Harvard University, graduating in 1895 with a Ph.D.

DuBois argued that African Americans could achieve social equality only if they embraced their African cultural heritage and spoke out against prejudice.

Fold here

W.E.B. DuBois



W.E.B. DuBois. Library of Congress LC-USZ62-36176.

Strivings of the Negro People

Excerpts adapted from the article originally published by W.E.B. DuBois in Atlantic Monthly, 1897.

BEING A PROBLEM: BEING A NEGRO AND AN AMERICAN

BETWEEN me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

And yet, being a problem is a strange experience, -- peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England in a wooden schoolhouse. The boys and girls were exchanging cards. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like the others in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had no desire to tear down that veil; I lived above it in a region of blue sky. That sky was bluest when I could beat my schoolmates in examinations, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads.

Alas, over the years, all this contempt began to fade; for the world I longed for, and all its dazzling opportunities, was theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes; some, all I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head.

With other black boys the strife was not so sunny with their silent hatred of the pale world about them and distrust of everything white. They asked, Why did God make me a stranger in my own house? The "prison house" closed round about us all.

In this American world, the Negro is only allowed to see himself through the eyes of others. It is a peculiar sensation of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this struggle to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world. Nor does he wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes that Negro blood has a message for the world.

He simply wishes for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon, without losing the opportunity of self-development. This is the end of his striving: to use his best powers.

Years have passed away since the Civil War, ten, twenty, thirty. Thirty years of national life, yet the freedman has not yet found freedom in his promised land.

Ten years after the Civil War ended, amongst lies, disorganization, and terrors of the Ku Klux Klan, the Negro was left with nothing beyond the old cry for freedom. Yet toward the end of those ten years, the Fifteenth Amendment was passed, and he began to grasp a new idea. He looked upon voting as a visible sign of freedom. But that decade fled away, -- a decade containing nothing but suppressed votes, stuffed ballot-boxes, and other outrages that nullified his right to vote.

The years between 1875 and 1885 held another powerful movement, the ideal of "book learning." Schools at last developed permanent foundations. How faithfully, how piteously, this people strove to learn. It was weary work, but the journey allowed for reflection and self-examination, and slowly self-consciousness, self-realization, and self-respect. He began to have a feeling that he must be himself, and not another.

A people thus handicapped ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems. But alas! They still press on, they still nurse the dogged hope, --not a hope of reception into charmed social circles, but the hope of true progress.

In this third decade after the Civil War, we realize that the ideals of political power, of schooling to be incomplete and over-simple. The training of schools we need to-day more than ever. The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defense, and as a guarantee of good faith. Freedom, too, we still seek. Work, culture, and liberty,--all these we need, not singly, but together; for to-day these ideals