



# The Black Intellectual Tradition and the Great Conversation

with Dr. Angel Parham

## Lesson 6: W.E.B. Du Bois, Part I

### Outline:

#### Du Bois' Focus on Liberal Education and an Education in the Classics

- There was a debate between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.
  - Washington is born into slavery in 1856 in the Virginia countryside.
  - Even though emancipation comes when he was fairly young, he recounts in *Up From Slavery*, the difficulty of enslavement, and hard work following emancipation.
  - He works his way through Hampton Institute, and he is recruited to establish Tuskegee. The goal is to use the Hampton Institute model to establish Tuskegee. He helped build Tuskegee brick by brick.
  - He has been dedicated to hard work his whole life.
  - This is very different from Du Bois' hyper-intellectual experience.

#### Booker T. Washington's Famous Atlanta Exposition Speech

- Booker refers to the immediate post-emancipation period. He notes that people want to start at the top, rather than a manual pursuit.
- He then turns in the speech to speaking to black people and encouraging them to consider a different path.
- Washington was one who worked closely with white philanthropists. He became the gatekeeper of funds and support for the black community. He was on friendly terms with many white men and women.
- He calls on black Americans not to separate themselves from white Americans but to work together with them. Build where you are.
- When Washington turns his attention to his white neighbors, telling them to cast down your buckets where you are. He is saying to not look to immigrant labor, but look to black Americans for labor. You be faithful to us, and we'll be faithful to you.
- Washington's recommendation for how whites and blacks should live together is controversial.
  - The last concluding sentence becomes controversial: Racial segregation is fine, for me and for my black community. We will remain as separate as the fingers on a hand, but when we need to come



together we can come together like the hand. Most of the time we are going to be separate.

- He is very clearly embracing the idea of social segregation.
- He is clearly making a linkage between a time of enslavement and the present time.

## **W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk***

- In the third chapter, Du Bois critiques Washington's program.
- Du Bois reaches back into black history and he admonishes Washington. There has been a whole history of prominent black leaders who have pushed things forward for their people.
- We have a precedent for a different model of leadership than what you are giving us, where there has been success and they haven't compromised with the status quo.
- For Du Bois, what is at stake is the very humanity of black people. The three things he argues, that Washington calls black people to give up are:
  - Political power
  - Civil rights
  - Higher education
- He talks about a **triple paradox** that he sees in Washington's position.
  - Working men and property owners cannot defend their rights without the right to vote.
  - How do you have and maintain self-respect while suggesting that you are alright with silent submission and an inferior position in society?
  - Common schools for the young and industrial training for those leaving primary schools can't occur without teachers being trained in higher education institutions (a liberal education).
- Du Bois argues that we need:
  - The right to vote
  - Civic equality
  - Education of the young according to their ability
- Du Bois makes this argument in *The Talented Tenth*.
  - **Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools.**
  - **Young people are being educated not just to make a living, but to build a life.**
  - **We want to train them to make a living, but we also want to train them in the ability to live a good life.**