

**FROM THE EDITOR:** *Prior to his passing, Nevin Frantz submitted this manuscript for publication consideration in the "Comments" section of the Journal. Due to his illness, he was unable to respond to suggested changes and complete the manuscript. Following his death, Dr. Michael Scott, of The Ohio State University, graciously agreed to assume responsibility for revising the manuscript. The editor wishes to thank both of these individuals for their professionalism and willingness to serve the profession.*

**The Contributions of Booker T. Washington and  
W. E. B. DuBois in the Development of  
Vocational Education**

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The development of vocational education in this nation can be attributed to many individuals. These individuals include leaders from the past such as David Sneden and Charles Prosser to more contemporary individuals such as Carl Perkins. Many of these leaders shared common viewpoints; however, others, such as Rickover, were outspoken critics of any form of practical education in the public schools of America.

In the debate over what should be the best system of education for our children, two prominent leaders have been largely excluded from the story documenting the development of vocational education in the United States. These two individuals were outstanding spokespersons for the African-American community in the United States. Their names were Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. This article attempts to tell the story of their debate and differences over the role of vocational education in the nation's schools around the turn of the century.

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### **Individual Backgrounds of the Two Leaders**

The story begins with Booker T. Washington. Washington was born in 1856 into a slave family in Franklin County Virginia. After emancipation, the family moved to Malden, West Virginia, where Washington was given some instruction in reading and writing by the wife of a mine owner for whom his father worked. In late adolescence, Washington walked to Hampton, Virginia, where he was admitted to the newly-opened Hampton Institute. During his time there, he came under the tutelage of Samuel Armstrong, the president of the institution. Armstrong had established Hampton Institute after the Civil War to educate the freed slaves with a stated purpose of "The instruction of youth in the various common school, academic and collegiate branches, the best methods of teaching them, and the best mode of practical industry in its application to agriculture and the mechanic arts" (Struck, 1930). Washington studied academic subjects as well as the industrial trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, bricklaying, and agriculture. Following graduation, Washington was invited by Armstrong to become a member of the faculty where he served for two years. In 1881, he was invited to establish a new school in Alabama—the famed Tuskegee Institute. The curriculum that Washington developed at Tuskegee was structured according to the pragmatic philosophy that he received at Hampton Institute (Anderson, 1988). Academic classes were coordinated closely with occupational training. Washington believed that all training derived its meaning and purpose from real problems and could be used to elevate the conditions of the individual students as well as the entire community when they graduated from Tuskegee. Industrial education courses were offered including such trades as foundry, printing, shoemaking, and sawmilling.

W. E. B. DuBois was born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, son of well-to-do parents. Great Barrington was a town of middle-class people. There DuBois attended elementary and high school and received a very formal but good education. According to DuBois, he grew up in a town where "the contrast between the well-to-do was not great" (DuBois, 1968, p. 79). At the age of 17 he enrolled in Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. There he studied subjects such as Latin, Greek, English, chemistry, and physics. In the fall of 1888 he entered Harvard University where he graduated with

a Ph.D. in 1890. He then studied at the University of Berlin for two years. DuBois was then invited to become a member of the faculty to teach Latin, Greek, German, English, and sociology at Wilberforce University in Ohio. In 1896, he went to the University of Pennsylvania as an assistant instructor in sociology. His major assignment was to investigate the social conditions of the “colored people” in the seventh ward of Philadelphia. From there, until the Spring of 1916, he taught at Atlanta University as professor of economics and history. The program at Atlanta University was designed to open a field of usefulness for African American city dwellers, comparable to what Hampton and Tuskegee had done for rural districts in agriculture and industry.

After assuming their respective positions at Atlanta and Tuskegee Universities, DuBois and Washington began to provide leadership for the educational and economic success of the African Americans in the South. During the process, they developed positions that were used in shaping the direction for the immediate future but remain as influences for educators and social reformers down to the present day. Their backgrounds, while quite different, profoundly impacted their thinking. The well-to-do background and classical education that DuBois received led to a far different path than did the life of Washington, a freed slave and recipient of a very practical education.

In DuBois' case, he came to believe that the only salvation for the “Negro” (as African Americans were then characterized) was to obtain social and economic equality through the education of an elite few who could hold their own in the social and political maneuverings of the day. He was opposed to the Hampton/Tuskegee model and wanted African American youth to “hitch their wagons to a star” rather than “to a mule” (Lewis, 1993, p. 353). DuBois believed that Southern African Americans “must have trained and educated leadership if civilized was to survive...The object of education was not to make men carpenters but to make carpenters out of men” (Aptheker, 1973, p. 64). DuBois believed that a “higher education of the Talented Tenth who through their knowledge of modern culture would guide the American Negro into a higher civilization” (DuBois, 1968).

### **Contributions of Booker T. Washington**

The most visible contribution of Booker T. Washington was the establishment and development of the Tuskegee Institute for the education of African Americans. It served as a laboratory school for

Washington's philosophy of education. His contributions, however, extended well beyond his work with formal educational institutions. When Washington went to Tuskegee, he readily recognized the deteriorating condition of agriculture in the area. While attempting to address the problem, he realized that the farmers would need specific forms of assistance. To address this need, he developed two forms of education that exist and thrive today. These two concepts are adult and extension education. In serving the adults of the area, Washington developed programs that addressed the needs of the local farmer, increasing the production of food and fiber. He procured a wagon, outfitted it with tools and information, and delivered information to farmers at their home locations. Through this system of extending on-campus programs to adults, he extended the Tuskegee idea and helped make the farmers self-sufficient and productive contributors to society. Washington's efforts at accommodating the needs of the African Americans into the white power structure and society were criticized severely by other black leaders such as DuBois. Washington's notion of accommodating and developing the practical skills of African American men and women is his most lasting legacy and contribution in the growth and development of vocational and technical education in the nation.

### **Contributions of W. E. B. Dubois**

The contributions of DuBois, although not as direct, were nevertheless important in the development of education and vocational and technical education in particular. He sought to strike a balance between liberal and practical education for African Americans. His thought and efforts were instrumental in giving the higher education institutions of the South a more balanced approach to the education of freed slaves and their children. Although his education of the Talented Tenth is considered now, by some, to be an elitist approach, he nevertheless advocated the preparation of youth for work as a worthwhile outcome for the masses. The leadership he provided in the formation of the NAACP was, in later years, a major factor contributing to the Supreme Court's decision ruling against the segregation of the schools. This decision provided the foundation for vocational educators to integrate programs and youth organizations. This placed the field in a solid position to expedite the

preparation of a diverse workforce with the occupational and the social skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The lives of these two great African American leaders are important and inspirational. Although their backgrounds were quite different, they shared a common dream of delivering African Americans from a life of economic servitude and social backwardness. They shared a common vision and many of their ideas contributed significantly to the progress of their people. The contrasting approaches of the two leaders fueled debate among the two for years. Essentially the same debate was conducted in the white community between John Dewey and Charles Prosser. The debate continues and is reflected in the legislation passed by Congress, originally in the form of the Smith-Hughes Act, and is reflected today in the provisions of the Carl D. Perkins Act for Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990. Washington and Dubois were instrumental in shaping the debate which will continue and enrich the discussion of which type of education is of most value for generations to come.

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