

**The Progressive Spirit of Reform****Biography****W. E. B. Du Bois**

1868–1963



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** W. E. B. Du Bois was a writer, critic, and scholar who studied and spoke out about racial discrimination in America.



*As you read the biography below, think about how the racial climate of America inspired W. E. B. Du Bois to speak out about African American issues.*



The Art Archive/Culver Pictures

**W.**E. B., or William Edward Burghardt, Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. He grew up with more advantages than most African Americans had at the time. Du Bois had not seen much racial discrimination, nor had he suffered from poverty.

In 1885 he left Massachusetts to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. During the time he lived in Tennessee, Du Bois faced strict Jim Crow laws and the inability to vote. He had not experienced these problems in his hometown.

Du Bois graduated from Fisk in 1888 and went on to Harvard, where he was the first African American to earn a PhD. His degree was in history, but he was very interested in sociology. Du Bois studied the living conditions of African Americans in the United States. He wrote about the economic and social problems they faced.

Du Bois became one of the most important African American leaders in the United States. He used his studies and his own experiences to focus attention on civil injustices and problems created by segregation. Du Bois believed that African Americans should fight against racial injustice and

**VOCABULARY**

**discrimination** treating people unfairly because of prejudice

prejudice. He wanted African Americans to protest and agitate to end **discriminatory** practices.

These views were not shared by Booker T. Washington, another famous African American leader. Washington believed that blacks should work hard and accept the social conditions of the time. In this way, blacks would eventually gain respect from whites and prosper economically.

In one of his most famous books, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois described what it was like to be an African American living in the United States. He also argued that Booker Washington's plans would never free blacks from racism. Du Bois believed that Washington's plans would continue racial discrimination, poor education, and injustice.

In 1905 Du Bois helped found the Niagara Movement. This group began to demand economic equality, equal educational opportunities, and an end to segregation. Four years later Du Bois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP. He became editor of the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, a position he held for 24 years. Du Bois reported on the evils of segregation, and he became a powerful voice for civil rights.

"The Negro Race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men," Du Bois once said.

During his career with the NAACP and as a teacher, Du Bois felt that very little progress had been made in improving race relations in the United States. In 1961 he joined the Communist Party and move to Ghana, where he died in 1963.

### **WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. What were some of W. E. B. Du Bois's accomplishments?

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**2. Contrast** How did the ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois differ from the ideas of Booker T. Washington?

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