



# **African American Civil Rights Movements to End Slavery, Racism and Oppression in the Post Slavery Era: A Critique of Booker T. Washington's Integration Ideology**

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**Abstract:** *The Transatlantic Slave trade began during the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Portugal and subsequently other European kingdoms were able to expand overseas and reach Africa. The Portuguese first began to kidnap people from the West Coast of Africa and took those that they enslaved to Europe. This saw a lot of African men and women transported to Europe and America to work on the huge plantations that the Whites owned. The transportation of these Africans exposed them to inhumane treatments which they faced even upon the arrival at their various destinations. The emancipation Proclamation signed on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1863 by the United States President Abraham Lincoln saw a legal stop to slave trade. However, the African Americans that had been taken to the United States and settled especially in the Southern region faced discrimination, segregation, violence and were denied civil rights through segregation laws such as the Jim Crow laws and lynching, based on the color of their skin. This forced them especially those that had acquired an education to rise up and speak against this treatment. They formed Civil Rights Movements to advocate for Black rights and equal treatment. These protracted movements, despite continued violence on Blacks, Culminated in Barack Obama being elected the first African American President of the United States of America. To cement the victory, he won a second term, which Donald Trump failed to obtain. This paper sought to critic the philosophies of Booker T. Washington in his civil rights movement, particularly his ideologies of integration, self-help, racial solidarity and accommodation as expressed in his speech, "the Atlanta Compromise," and the impact this had on the political and civil rights arena for African Americans.*

**Keywords:** Transatlantic, Emancipation, Advocate, Segregation, Philosophies, Civil rights, Slave Trade, Colonialism

## **Introduction**

The abolition of slavery in the United States of America did not simultaneously ensure the smooth integration of former slaves into the mainstream society with equal rights to the rest of the population (WaThiongo, 1981). The newly freed slaves faced the dilemma of integrating into a society that had regarded them as property and inferior to the Whites. The treatment they received as slaves continued even after its abolishment (Lewis, 2009). This led to educated and enlightened African Americans to voice out against the injustices that Blacks continued to experience after the abolishment. These included Booker T. Washington of Virginia and William Edward Burghardt DuBois of Massachusetts. Although they differed in philosophies and ideologies, they led a mass

movement against racial discrimination and advocated for racial equality. This paper discussed Booker T Washington's ideas and philosophies in fighting for Black rights after slavery (Ballard, 1950).

## **History of Slavery**

Between 1500 and 1900, many African men and women were forcibly transported from West Africa and some parts of Central Africa across the Atlantic Ocean into Europe and America in ships to work on White owned plantations under very harsh conditions (Rudwick, 2021). They were shipped to Europe tied together and compacted in cabins with no access to sanitary conditions. Therefore, they relieved themselves right where they were tied and this caused a lot of diseases that led to many of them dying on the journey (Clark, 2013). In Europe, they were sold to American slave traders who in

turn exchanged them for cotton, rice and tobacco with White plantation owners (Faust, 1991).

In America, life of a slave varied considerably due to many factors. Those that worked in the plantations worked from sunrise to sunset and they lived in small houses with a dirt floor and with little or no furniture. These slaves had an overseer who made sure that the work was being done and that no slave was absconding from work (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The overseer was paid according to the production that the slaves made and hence he resorted to any means possible in order to get as much production as possible (Lewis, 2009). In the absence of an overseer, the Slave master employed a slave driver who was sometimes picked from among the slaves and was promised better incentives compared to what his fellow slaves were receiving. This driver would supervise his fellow slaves. This led to violence and eventually introduced a class system among the slaves (Clark, 2013).

With the increase in slave trade especially in Southern America, where there were huge white owned plantations, many states began to pass laws for slaves and these came to be known as, "Slave Codes or Black Codes." These Slave Codes outlined the rights of slaves, as well as acceptable treatment and rules regarding slaves (Karim, 2020). The Codes varied from state to state, although they had a lot in common (Cole, 2016). Some of the common themes in these codes were that no one was allowed to engage in business with any slave unless with prior consent from the slave owner. Thus, slaves were considered as property of the slave master who could give away a slave as a gift or a prize for winning a gambling game, or offer as surety for a loan that is borrowed. Blacks were considered to be incompetent even to appear as witnesses to white cases in the courts of law (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). According to Du Bois (1965), anyone operating a school or teaching reading and writing to any African American in Missouri could be punished by a fine of not less than \$500 and up to six months in jail. Slaves were not allowed to own a gun and if found with one it was forfeited. Intermarriages between White Americans and slaves was prohibited while marriages between slaves was not considered to be legally binding and hence slave families could be split up by the slave master through sale of slaves.

Slaves were viewed to be barbaric and violent, hence a slave found guilty of arson, rape of a white

woman or conspiracy to rebel against a white master was sentenced to death. However, slave women were viewed as property of the white master. A White man who raped a slave woman was only considered guilty of trespass on the master's property and this did not deter the slave masters from raping their slave women on plantations (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019).

In 1775, a conflict arose between 13 British owned colonies in North America and the Royal crown that colonized them, the 13 colonies seeking to gain political independence through a civil war which is known as the *American Revolutionary War* or the *United States War of Independence* (McCullough, 2005). What started as a civil war ended up becoming an international war whereby France joined allies with the British. Despite the help from France, the American colonies managed to defeat the British and won their political independence to join the American Union.

According to Library Guides (2021), at the end of the American Revolution, slavery became largely unprofitable in the North and it was slowly diminishing. Even in the South, slavery was slowly proving to be not useful especially to tobacco farmers who experienced a fluctuation in the price of tobacco which largely began to drop (Ogene, 2013). From 1760 to 1770, the prices of tobacco dropped significantly which forced the farmers to switch from producing tobacco to wheat which was less labor intensive and profitable (McCullough, 2005). This led to a surplus of slaves in the South that had to be let go by their White masters.

Following the American Revolution, many colonists especially those in the North, where slavery was not important to their agricultural economy began to link the oppression of enslaved Africans to their own oppression by the British, and they began to call for the abolition of slavery (Baillie, 2003). It was noticed that during the *Revolutionary War*, Black soldiers fought on the American side against the British. Allison (2006) asserts that during the Boston Massacre one of the first black martyrs to die as a result of American patriotism was a former black enslaved man named *Crispus Attucks*, who was killed by British soldiers (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The Whites in the North began to help the slaves from the south to migrate to the North where slavery was reducing significantly. They helped the black slaves from the South to build an underground

rail road so that they could escape to the North for their freedom.

Another sanguinary war called the *American Civil War* broke out in 1861 (Rosenblatt, 2014). This war was mainly between the Northern states and Southern states and the cause of the war was Slavery, states' rights and westward expansion. The northern states had expanded their industries and their economies were booming. They did not depend on farming like the southerners and hence had no use for slave labor (Cole, 2016). The northern states began to advocate for the abolishment of slave trade and this angered the Southern states who relied on slave labor in their plantations (McCullough, 2005).

Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in 1860 and his elections caused some Southern States to break away from the American Union to form an eleven member *Confederate States of America* which declared a Civil war on the Union States (Vambe, 2016). This war led to President Abraham Lincoln signing a proclamation called the *Emancipation Proclamation*, in order to end slavery and ultimately end the Civil War. The Emancipation Proclamation declared that, "all persons held as slaves within the rebellious states are and henceforward shall be free" (Harris, 2006). This declaration meant that slaves were no longer property of their White masters but were free citizens. However even after the proclamation, some states in the South continued to illegally deal in Slave trade (Harris, 2006).

Although slavery was over, the brutalities of the White race prejudice persisted. After slavery, state governments across the South instituted laws known as *Black Codes* (Harlan, 2006). These laws granted certain legal rights to Blacks, including the right to marry, own property and sue in court, but the Codes made it illegal for Blacks to serve on juries, testify against Whites or serve in state militias (Ogene, 2013). The Black Codes also required Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers to sign annual labor contracts with White landowners which were still a form of slavery. If they refused they could be arrested and hired out for work (Samuel, 2019).

Most Southern Black Americans, though free, lived in a desperate rural poverty (Du Bois, in Lewis, 2009). Having been denied education and wages under slavery, ex-slaves were often forced by the necessity of their economic circumstances to rent land from former white slave owners (Lewis, 2009).

These sharecroppers paid rent on the land by giving a portion of their crop to the landowner. The years after the war saw Black and White teachers from the North and the South, missionary organizations, churches and schools working tirelessly to give the emancipated Black population the opportunity to acquire literacy skills or get an education. Former slaves of all ages took advantage of this opportunity to learn how to read and write (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). This period saw grandfathers and grandsons sit together in classrooms seeking to obtain tools of freedom. This was the beginning of the black revolution through the educated blacks that then spoke out against the injustices that the African Americans were suffering under the Whites (Cole, 2016). The educated blacks began to write about their personal experiences as slaves and also the experiences of others such as Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington (Ballard, 1950).

### **Booker T. Washington and the Civil Rights Movement**

Booker T. Washington was born into slavery but still managed to put himself into schools and even became a teacher after the Civil War. In 1881, he founded the Tuskegee Normal and industrial Institute in Alabama which is now called the Tuskegee University (WaThiongo, 1981). This institution expanded with a lot of African Americans enrolling as it focused on training African Americans in skills. Booker T. Washington was a political advisor to Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft whose ideologies on racial equality were criticized by some of his contemporaries such as W. E.B. Du Bois. He was also a writer who authored a book titled "*Up from Slavery*," which was based on his experiences as a slave and a Mulatto (Pildes, 2000).

Booker T. Washington was a Mulatto slave born of an unknown White father and an African slave mother who was owned by a small scale tobacco farmer called James Burroughs in Virginia. He was born on April 5<sup>th</sup> 1856 (Washington, 1995). Later, his mother married a fellow slave called Washington Ferguson. Booker T. opted to use his step father's name as his last name when he first enrolled into school (Samuel, 2019).

While working in the coal mine, Booker T first heard of the Hampton Institute in the southeast part of Virginia. The Hampton institute had been founded by an African American former army General

Armstrong, who had taken part in the Civil war (Harlan, 2006). He later became so fond of Booker T. and became his mentor in strengthening his values of hard work and strong moral character (Cole, 2016). Armstrong established the institutes with the view of giving African Americans practical educational opportunities since most of them were not educated and illiterate before the Civil War and Emancipation. These opportunities were in form of training in industrial education, which combined traditional subjects such reading and geography with training in various Manual skills such as carpentry, sewing, bricklaying as well as teacher training (Cooper, 2021). Booker T. noticed that the Hampton Institute was providing more opportunities for the African American than the school that he initially attended and this attracted him to try and enroll into the institution. This made him to travel to the Hampton on foot with the little money he had saved.

Later that year, the government of Alabama approved for a colored school to be established to teach Black students normal lessons combined with skills training and Army General. Armstrong was asked to recommend a White Principal for the school but instead he recommended Booker T. because of his astounding performance (Harlan, 2006.) The school came to be called the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Classes for this institute were first held in an old Church while the principal travelled around the country to source for funds and encourage more Black people to enroll at the institution. That is why at the time of his death, the institution had expanded tremendously and owned a number of buildings (Lewis, 2009). In his administration at the institution, Booker T assured the government and White population that the Tuskegee program would not threaten White supremacy or economic competition, and to the Black people he taught them that economic success for them would take time and that they needed to be subordinate to the White people if they were to succeed and be accepted by the Whites (Leslie, 2006). He advocated for Black subordination in order for the Blacks to be accepted by the Whites in society and this was a message that he sent everywhere he went to recruit students for the Tuskegee institute (Washington, 1995).

### **Booker T. Washington and His Philosophy of Compromise**

In his travels around the country to expand and solicit for funding for Tuskegee institute, Booker T.

was invited by President Roosevelt who considered him as an advisor on racial matters because he had accepted a subservient position of Black people among the White people (Leslie, 2006). He was asked to speak at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia and this was the first time that an African American was asked to speak at an important national function on the same platform as other Southern White men and women speakers (Hine, 2013).

It was in this speech at this exposition that Booker T. publicly put forward his philosophy on race relations. His philosophy was spelt out to an audience that had a majority of White Southerners. His speech known as the "*Atlanta Compromise*" became very famous as it was published even in the newspapers (Cole, 2016). In his speech he stated that African Americans needed to accept disenfranchisement and social segregation status as long as the White people allowed them economic progress and gave educational opportunities and justice in the courts. According to Thomas (2021), his speech represented Black economic opportunity as a potential success story. It reinforced images of Black Americans as faithful servants during slavery when he stated that, "in our humble way, we shall stand by you...ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours" (Washington, 1995). He emphasized that the only thing that put the races apart was social construction but other than that they all had the same objective of developing the Nation. To show this, Booker T. used the metaphor of the hand to explain his ideals on race relations. He stated that human beings were purely social beings; Black and White can be separate just like fingers on one hand, yet still one as they were part of the same hand (Wells, 2021). What he promised in his speech was that he and the entire African Americans would pursue economic opportunities as long as they were given skills that they could use to work. This in turn would enable them be submissive to the Whites. This speech was followed by a Supreme Court ruling which asserted constitutionally the doctrine of "separate but equal," in the case of Plessy versus Ferguson (Cooper, 2021). In its ruling the court legalized racial segregation (WaThiongo, 1981).

### **A Criticism of the Atlanta Exposition**

Booker T.'s racial relations ideologies of adjustment through acquisition of skills and Black submission to the Whites came under heavy scrutiny and criticism

especially by the African American civil rights movements and liberal leaders, including some members of the Black community (Leslie, 2006). One of the most vocal civil rights leaders that criticized his speech and philosophy is W.E.B. Du Bois who together with Ida Wells established the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Baillie, 2003). Its aim was to promote the equality of rights and eradicate the racial hierarchy status that classified black Americans at the bottom of the hierarchy through the advancement of education (Britannica, 2021). The general majority of the Black population dubbed the speech a sell out by one of their own. From that time to the present, two groups emerged among Blacks: those who believed in compromise under Washington and those who believed in total equality under Du Boise.

Critics of the “*Atlanta Compromise*” stated that it did not advocate for racial equality and this meant that the African American would still be at the bottom of the hierarchy (WaThiongo, 1981). In his speech, Booker T. encouraged the black Americans to enroll for skills training as they did not need academic qualifications at the moment so as not to provide economic competition with the Whites and this way they would be accepted by the whites and then be given their social and political rights eventually (Washington, 1995). Other civil rights leaders like Du Bois argued against this theory, stating that African Americans needed to get educated academically just like the Whites were and this in turn would help Blacks secure better jobs, understanding of the law which would lead to them obtaining social and political rights (Du Bois, 1963). Du Bois did not believe in racial segregation as explained in Booker T’s metaphor of the hand but he believed that Abraham Lincoln’s *Emancipation Proclamation* declared all people free and equal. Therefore racial adjustment and submission of Booker T. went against the proclamation and promoted black injustice, which meant that he sided with the white people (Harlan, 2006). The same philosophy of peaceful integration was also adopted by famous civil movement leaders like Martin Luther King Jr, and this has led to the Obama election (Rosenblatt, 2014). It was also noted that Booker T’s “*Atlanta Compromise*,” was followed by a number of racist laws that further disadvantaged the African American laws such as Black Codes and the Jim Crow laws which did not give rights to the Blacks to vote or take part in politics in any way. These

promoted racial segregation throughout South America which kept Black Americans discriminated against, as opposed to the equality that the civil rights movements were advocating for at the time (Clark, 2013).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The study came up with a number of conclusions. First, Booker T. Washington’s integration Ideology was popular with the Whites and very unacceptable with the Blacks as it promoted Black servitude and second class citizenry for the Black population.

Secondly, Just as Booker T. and DuBois differed in their philosophy for Black people. African Americans today fall largely under these two thinkers. This includes the various civil rights movement groups that advocate for rights of the Black Americans. They differ on the philosophies of integration and desegregation strategies. The modern Civil rights movements are working to address the less visible but very important inequities in the American society so as to give every American an opportunity to achieve their full potential regardless of race or color of skin as was stipulated in the *Emancipation proclamation*.

Thirdly, many great leaders in the United States were born from the Civil Rights Movements. These leaders include Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Junior, President John Kennedy and President Lyndon Johnson. Robert Kennedy, the brother of President John Kennedy, ran for president in 1968 and he advocated for civil rights. Before his assassination, he said, “The United States would have a Negro president in 40 years.” His predication came true when Barack Obama was elected president in 2008. This gave hope to not only the African Americans but also indigenous Africans who identified themselves with President Obama in terms of his skin color and also his father’s African country of origin, Kenya.

Lastly, it can also be said without argument that Black treatment in The US gave overture to Black freedom and overall treatment in post-colonial Africa. Lastly, it can also be said without argument that Black treatment in The US gave overture to Black freedom and overall treatment in post-colonial Africa. The two great divides of philosophies compromise or integration and political action can clearly be seen in the socio-political and economic arena in Africa.

Based on the conclusions above, the researchers recommend that replication of the same study may be done by analyzing a variety of ideologies by a variety of Black thinkers and what they achieved towards Black emancipation and whether they achieved the goal in today's American society.

Secondly, further research can be conducted into the modern Civil Rights Movements, most of which developed from the earlier Civil Rights Movements, whose strategies are to address the inequities in the American Society.

Thirdly, an assessment can be conducted to assess the impact of electing an African American President of the United States on the success of the Civil Rights Movements that advocated for Black equality. The assessment should establish if their strategies and objectives have been achieved. Furthermore, a study can be carried out to analyze the social and economic situation of Blacks in both The USA and on the African continent.

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