

W.E.B. DuBois

DIRECTIONS: Read the article.
Answer the questions.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was a prominent civil rights activist during the nineteen twenties and nineteen thirties. He was not only responsible for many changes in the conditions for black people in America, he was also responsible for changing the way they thought about themselves.

Neither Du Bois' parents nor his grandparents had ever been slaves, and he was born a free man in Massachusetts. He was smart and well educated, eventually attending Harvard and the University of Berlin in Germany. He earned a doctorate from Harvard in 1895. He was first confronted with racial prejudice when he decided to attend college in the south. He saw that poor, uneducated white people thought that they were better than he was, just because he was black. Du Bois opposed racial prejudice in all of its varieties and took every opportunity to speak out against it.

William Du Bois went to excellent colleges, Harvard University in Massachusetts and the University of Berlin in Germany. He received his doctorate degree in history from Harvard in 1885.

Though DuBois believed that education and knowledge could help solve the race problem, racial prejudice in the United States was regularly expressed in violence. Laws kept blacks and whites separated, and race riots were common. Because of this DuBois came to believe that protest was essential to social change.

Another prominent black leader at the time, Booker T. Washington, believed that the conditions for black people could be improved by hard work and economic



Name _____ **Drawing Inferences**

gain, and he urged them not to fight back, but to concentrate their efforts on themselves. In his famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, DuBois attacked Washington’s philosophy. The two remained at odds for some years, with Washington representing the “conservative” point of view on race relations, and DuBois representing the “radical” view.

DuBois established an organization to oppose Washington, and though it did not last, it did lead to the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which still exists today.

1. What do you think that black people thought about themselves that W.E.B. Du Bois changed?

2. How do you think the fact that Du Bois had no immediate relatives that were slaves affect his way of thinking about the world and what was possible?
