

## ISSUES OF THE GILDED AGE

**Biography**

W.E.B. Du Bois was a highly educated man who became the first African American to earn a doctoral degree from Harvard University. His research into and writing about the experiences of African Americans helped fuel the growth of the civil rights movement in the United States. ♦ *As you read this biography, think about the importance of education in the African American struggle for equality. Refer to the subsection entitled "African Americans Oppose Injustices" in Section 1 of your textbook to compare Du Bois's ideas with those of Booker T. Washington. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963)**

Born and raised in Massachusetts, W.E.B. Du Bois did not experience the racism and violence rampant in the South during the late 1800s. He did well in school and graduated from high school at the age of 16. Du Bois won a scholarship to Fisk University in Tennessee. There, he learned firsthand about the poverty and oppression experienced by southern African Americans. What he saw shocked and upset him.

When Du Bois graduated from Fisk, he won another scholarship to Harvard University, where he studied the political, economic, and social conditions of African Americans. Dismayed by the conditions he observed in the South and opposed to the approach of Booker T. Washington, Du Bois founded the Niagara Movement in 1905 to organize African American scholars, business leaders, and activists to work toward full recognition of their rights as citizens. This movement later led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910.

Du Bois was a founding officer of the NAACP and edited its magazine,



W.E.B. Du Bois  
Library of Congress

*The Crisis*, for almost 25 years, publishing many articles and editorials advancing the cause of civil rights. He worked hard to counter the efforts of Washington. Unlike Washington, Du Bois firmly believed that African Americans must obtain full political rights before they could hope for economic success. He encouraged African Americans to use protest and organization to overturn discriminatory laws.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes, "It is utterly impossible . . . for workingmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage."

In 1934, Du Bois left the NAACP because of a difference in racial philosophy between himself and other members of the group. He went back to Atlanta University in Georgia, where he continued to research and write for many years. Following World War II, Du Bois became involved in the international peace movement and worked for nuclear disarmament. At the end of his life, Du Bois left the United States to live in Ghana in West Africa.

**Questions to Think About**

1. Why did Du Bois not experience the violence and racism of the South during his childhood?
2. What connection did Du Bois have with the NAACP?
3. **Draw Conclusions** In what way did Du Bois disagree with Washington?
4. **Link Past and Present** What work do you think Du Bois would still want to do today?