

The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. DuBois | Discussion Questions

1. Du Bois mentions “The Veil” in his forethought and throughout the text. What is your understanding of the term after reading the text?
2. According to DuBois, “the Emancipation Proclamation seemed but to broaden and intensify the difficulties; and the War Amendments made the Negro problems of today,” and “that the large legacy of the Freedmen’s Bureau, [is] the work it did not do because it could not.” What circumstances could have allowed the Freedman’s Bureau to be more than a stopgap in US social progress?
3. Du Bois and Washington were opposing ideologues of their time.
 - a. Had the freedmen received their promised “forty acres and a mule,” do you think Du Bois would have agreed with Washington’s advocacy for vocational training and self-sufficiency?
 - b. Did you find any overlap in their ideologies? Which of the two, do you think, was more successful in convincing the white and black populations of the time? Do you think either ideology is at the core of today's movements, such as BLM?
 - c. Do you think either would have benefitted from philosophically approaching their assertions/ideas?
4. Du Bois states, “teach workers to work...teach thinkers to think”
 - a. What values and attitudes should characterize the man educated by the Negro college as envisioned by Du Bois?
 - b. What does Du Bois envision to be the role of black leaders? What advantages or limitations might there be to his ideas?
5. Du Bois documents legal, economic, and social hindrances to black economic progress in the South. Do you see any direct correlation between the social hindrances then and now? Do you think society has overcome any of these?
6. The later chapters include individual stories. How do they connect to larger themes and arguments in the book?
 - a. Why do you think Du Bois includes an essay about the loss of his firstborn?
 - b. What do you message is Du Bois trying to convey with the portraits of Crummel and John?