

# W. E. B. Du Bois

## Civil Rights Activist

**William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois** was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, on February 23, 1868. When he was fifteen, he was hired by the *New York Globe* as a local correspondent. Du Bois believed that it was his obligation to further the progress of the African American race, and he used his position in the paper to encourage African Americans to become politically active.

After graduating from high school, Du Bois received a scholarship and aid from friends and family to attend Fisk College (known today as Fisk University) in Nashville, Tennessee. He later fulfilled his lifelong dream to attend Harvard University and obtained a doctoral degree from that school. He taught at several different universities during his academic career, including Wilberforce University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Atlanta University. While he was at the University of Pennsylvania, he wrote the critically acclaimed novel *The Philadelphia Negro*. At Atlanta University, he continued to write and eventually published thirteen studies on African American life and culture.

Du Bois believed passionately that African Americans could only gain respect from and equality with educated and powerful white people through the development of a black elite class. The development of this elite class did not take place as quickly as Du Bois had hoped. He began to

look at other countries for models of his ideal society and promoted the idea of Pan-Africanism. Ultimately, Du Bois gave up his United States citizenship and moved to Ghana in 1961.

Du Bois was a highly influential and respected advocate for full equal rights of African Americans. Among his many accomplishments was his recognition as a founding leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Du Bois died in 1963.



## Activities

1. Define *Pan-Africanism* and tell why W. E. B. Du Bois thought it was so important.
2. Research the NAACP. What is the mission of the organization? What is its role in today's society?
3. Create a poster to encourage people to join the NAACP.