

Response to the Question "What is Americanism?"

Americans in the immediate future should place most stress upon the *abolition of the color line*. Just so long as the majority of men are treated as inhuman, and legitimate objects of commercial exploitation, religious damnation, and social ostracism, just so long will democracy be impossible in the world. Without democracy we must have continual attempts at despotism and oligarchy, with the resultant failure through the ignorance of those who attempt to rule their fellow-men without knowing their fellow-men. America, instead of being the land of the free, has made herself a hot-bed of racial prejudice and of despicable propaganda against the majority of men.

Originally published in "What Is Americanism?" and published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, 20:4 (January 1915): 433-486. Accessed on 12.4.16 at <http://www.webdubois.org/wdb-sources.html#oltww>

An open letter to President Woodrow Wilson

Sir: Your inauguration to the Presidency of the United States is to the colored people, to the white South and to the nation a momentous occasion. [. . .]

[...] We believe that the Negro problem is in many respects the greatest problem facing the nation, and we believe that you have the opportunity of beginning a just and righteous solution of this burning human wrong. This opportunity is yours because, while a Southerner in birth and tradition, you have escaped the provincial training of the South and you have not had burned into your soul desperate hatred and despising of your darker fellow men. [. . .]

[... Y]ou face no insoluble problem. The only time when the Negro problem is insoluble is when men insist on settling it wrong by asking absolutely contradictory things. You cannot make 10,000,000 people at one and the same time servile and dignified, docile and self-reliant, servants and independent leaders, segregated and yet part of the industrial organism, disfranchised and citizens of a democracy, ignorant and intelligent. This is impossible and the impossibility is not factitious; it is in the very nature of things.

Originally published in *The Crisis*, March 1913. Accessed on 12.4.16 at <http://www.webdubois.org/wdb-sources.html#oltww>