

**Booker T. and W.E.B.**

*by Dudley Randall, African American poet,  
editor, and founder of Broadside Press, 1968*

"It seems to me," said Booker T.,  
"It shows a mighty lot of cheek  
To study chemistry and Greek  
When Mister Charlie needs a hand  
To hoe the cotton on his land,  
And when Miss Ann looks for a cook,  
Why stick your nose inside a book?"

"I don't agree," said W.E.B.  
"If I should have the drive to seek  
Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,  
I'll do it. Charles and Miss can look  
Another place for hand or cook,  
Some men rejoice in skill of hand,  
And some in cultivating land,  
But there are others who maintain  
The right to cultivate the brain."

"It seems to me," said Booker T.,  
"That all you folks have missed the boat  
Who shout about the right to vote,  
And spend vain days and sleepless nights  
In uproar over civil rights.  
Just keep your mouths shut, do not grouse,  
But work, and save, and buy a house."

"I don't agree," said W.E.B.  
"For what can property avail  
If dignity and justice fail?  
Unless you help to make the laws,  
They'll steal your house with trumped-up clause.  
A rope's as tight, a fire as hot,  
No matter how much cash you've got.  
Speak soft, and try your little plan,  
But as for me, I'll be a man."

This poem was written in 1968, and was Dudley Randall's attempt to explain the differing viewpoints of the African-American leaders who lived a generation before him.

Questions:

1. According to the 1st stanza, should a person be more interested in learning/studying, or working? How do you know?
2. According to the 2nd stanza, what does W.E.B. believe a person should be doing (learning or working)? How do you know?
3. In the 3rd stanza, how does Booker T. think African Americans should spend their time?
4. Why do you think W.E.B. ends his statement by saying "But as for me, I'll be a man"?
5. Does this poet seem to support the philosophy of Washington or Du Bois? How can you tell?
6. Using your textbook, list 3 major events that took place in 1968.