

Kanye vs. Washington vs. Du Bois essay – As we have explored the challenges facing African Americans at the turn of the 20th century, you have learned about the divergent perspectives of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois as it concerned the educational and citizenship goals for African Americans. Du Bois advocated for liberal arts education for African Americans and insisted on the immediate fulfillment of all their constitutional rights. Washington, on the other hand, eschewed direct confrontation with the white power structure, instead advocated hard work and the accumulation of wealth as the path to inclusion and respectability.

Strains of both Washington's and Du Bois's ideologies show up in the lyrics of *College Dropout*, the debut album of rap artist Kanye West. Released in 2004, the songs on the album challenge the conventional belief that a liberal college education, à la Du Bois, was the only route to financial success, pointing out that a degree did not automatically guarantee economic stability. Kanye West argues for an alternate path to economic empowerment and ultimately ownership that is paramount to achieving the American dream.

In this assignment I am asking you to build on the historical example of the Washington-DuBois debate of the value of education, and to evaluate their own educational experience, as well as their career and financial goals. Using your critical thinking skills, identify and explore parallels between the two thinkers and young rapper, and analyze the historical arguments for both educational achievement on the one hand, and wealth accumulation on the other, bringing those arguments into the 21st century.

Some questions to consider as you write:

- 1) Whose philosophies do you believe that Kanye West more closely identifies, Washington or Du Bois? Explain and justify your answer.
- 2) What are some of the main themes and tensions that West features in *College Dropout*? How do they reflect the historic disagreement between Washington and Du Bois?
- 3) What pressures did West face from his family when it came to his education? How did he contend with those expectations?
- 4) In the context of the examples presented in this example –the triangulation of West's, Washington's, and Du Bois's ideas about education and socio-economic advancement— in your opinion, what is the value of a college education in today's society?

Your essays must be at least 300 words in length and adhere to the general guidelines of college-level writing. Avoid the use of quotes, unless absolutely necessary to make your point.