Discussion Question Answers
Historical Detective: Edward Bouchet

1. **How do you think the personal lives of Washington and Du Bois influenced their position on the debate over African-American education?**

   Du Bois was born in the North, where he was able to receive an education, though it might have been challenging. He became a peer of the white men of the time, and through education was able to accomplish a great deal in terms of how he fared against the rest of the black population as well as being comparable to the expected feats of well-to-do white men. In a direct contrast to Du Bois, Washington was born a slave and got his education while a slave. Unlike Du Bois, he had known what slavery was like first-hand, and knew that having the money to buy yourself out of slavery was almost priceless. For him, economic rights were more important because they allowed a black person to make a nice life for themselves right off the bat instead of waiting for the slow march of social change to come before monetary gain could be accomplished. With money comes power.

2. **What was Du Bois’ critique of Washington’s theory of education?**

   He believed that Washington’s theory pushed time backwards, and that the wars that had been fought were being undone. He believed that what Washington was advocating was a way for blacks to make really great servants of themselves, and acquiescing to the racial divisions and discrimination would not make them go away, but only further their presence in society.

3. **What were race relations like in the United States and particularly in the South during the time of this debate (late nineteenth and early twentieth century)? How do you think race relations influenced the debate?**

   Race relations were very tense and often violent. Most likely the tensions caused both rebellion and fear in black communities, which would tear apart those who wanted to fight for civil rights and equality and those who were afraid of the consequences rebellion could bring. Thus, not only were the American people divided by skin color, the black community was also divided.

4. **Based on Edward Bouchet’s life history, what do you think his position would have been on this debate? Why?**

   Students can argue both ways, though it seems more likely that he was in agreement with Du Bois.

5. **What is an “industrial education”? What is a “classical education”? How would a physics class be different in an industrial vs. a classical curriculum? Do you recognize elements of either style in your own education?**

   An industrial education is essentially trade job training, a job market largely comprised of African Americans. A classical education is an education that covers all of the classical topics such as literature, music, natural science and math. Classical education was originally only for the wealthy in Europe, and only men of a certain social class could fully partake in all it had to offer. A physics class simply wouldn’t exist in industrial education as we think of physics today. Components of physics might be learned for a particular skill, but would not have been taught as its own subject.