

The Era of Self-Help

Self-Help and Philanthropy

Divergent Paths to Racial Equality

Economic and Social Striving

The Woman's Era

Intellectual and Cultural Endeavors



Mother and daughter reading

This scene provides one of the most moving examples of self-help among blacks.

The white South led the way toward imposing Jim Crow, but the larger nation stood complicit in reinforcing the indisputable fact of racial discrimination in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Despite the Supreme Court's "separate but equal" formula in the 1896 Plessy decision, blacks' separate and unequal status eluded no one in America. Rather than capitulate to a sense of powerlessness in the face of this mounting oppression, African Americans clung tenaciously to a race-conscious ideology of self-help. Bombarded with pervasive representations of black inferiority in the white press, the legal system, the consumer economy, science, popular culture, and many other daily reminders of the "Negro's place" in society, black people embraced the ideology of self-help as one way of reaffirming their personal dignity and their hope for a better future for themselves and their children.

Although self-help rhetoric dated back to the antebellum black convention movement, it conveyed a somewhat different message from the 1880s through the 1910s. In these years of segregation and disfranchisement, of lynching and race riots, self-help developed as a practical philosophy born of despair from rights gained and lost after slavery's end and the painful realization that a certain amount of accommodation to the status quo would be necessary for survival.

Yet self-help was also an idealistic philosophy born of faith in the future due to pride in heritage and appreciation of unique cultural traditions, institutions, and creative expression. Self-help served as a postemancipation, forward-looking worldview. At its core lay a relentless confidence in the ability of the present generation to change the future. In their homes, schools, churches, and other contexts, individuals were taught to "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" and to "be of service to the race." As a group endeavor, collective self-help was understood as uplift, which was most often articulated by the black middle class as its duty to reform and educate those of lower status.

The motto of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs—"Lifting as We Climb"—succinctly captures self-help's individual and collective meanings along with its class distinctions. However, the black working poor, and especially black churchwomen, subscribed no less explicitly to race uplift as they sought to transform black home life, raise money for black schools, and spread their religion as missionaries. In making all these self-help efforts, black leaders refused to abandon the eventual goal of racial equality, although they disagreed, often bitterly, over the primacy and merit of specific strategies and the timetable for reaching this goal. The era of self-help, with all its explicit and implicit meanings of racial solidarity, was nonetheless fraught with division.

Self-Help and Philanthropy

During those years that historian Rayford Logan has called the "nadir in race relations," the often repeated words—*rising* and *climbing*, *uplift* and *lasting service*—captured blacks' efforts to redefine the trying times in which they lived through education, economic development, and religious and secular organizational life. Such books and articles as William J. Simmons' *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising* (1887), H. F. Kletzing and H. Crogman's *Progress of a Race; or, The Remarkable Advancement of the Afro-American* (1897), G. F. Richings's *Evidences of Progress among Colored People* (1900), and Booker T. Washington's co-edited volume *A New Negro for a New Century* (which included articles by scholar W. E. B. Du Bois and clubwoman Fannie Barrier Williams) all armed black people with a record of their achievement. They

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were filled with biographical sketches of prominent persons as well as statistical proof of the growing number of black-owned homes, schools and businesses, and college graduates.

Literacy among African Americans had risen dramatically—from a mere 5 percent in 1865 to about 50 percent in 1900 and to 70 percent in 1910. The evidence of black progress, as revealed in books such as these, refuted racist claims of innate black intellectual inferiority and moral depravity. Such evidence, black leaders agreed, was crucial to winning whites' sympathy and diminishing racial prejudice.

The self-help books ascribed the improved status of blacks largely to education—to the many primary and secondary schools in urban and rural areas, as well as to the colleges and institutes that had been founded in the aftermath of the Civil War by freedmen's aid societies, especially those of white northern Protestant denominations. Blacks—as individuals, as families, and as members of community organizations—gave of their own financial resources to support these same white-run schools, many of which were still flourishing. Nor was it uncommon for black students to play an active role in relieving the financial burdens of their schools. This type of self-help was not limited to the industrial schools.

The Jubilee Singers of Fisk University set a unique example that would later be followed by other schools. George L. White, the college's treasurer, conceived the idea of reaching the hearts (and hence the pockets) of northern white citizens through the singing of a group of young African Americans. Therefore, with money borrowed from the teachers and the citizens of Nashville, in 1875 White took a group of students to Oberlin, Ohio, where the National Council of Congregational Churches was meeting. The council was captivated by



The Jubilee Singers

This student group traveled throughout the North and Europe to raise funds for Fisk University.

the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I, several large educational foundations advanced black education in the South: the George Peabody Education Fund, the John F. Slater Fund, the General Education Board (founded by John D. Rockefeller), the Anna T. Jeanes Fund, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund. In 1882, for example, John F. Slater, a textile industrialist from Norwich, Connecticut, started the foundation that bears his name. Slater gave \$1 million "for uplifting the lately emancipated population of the Southern states and their posterity, by conferring on them the blessings of Christian education." The board of trustees, headed by former President Rutherford B. Hayes, undertook immediately to assist twelve schools that were training African American teachers. Between 1882 and 1911, the fund assisted both private and church schools in their teacher-training programs and made donations to public schools.

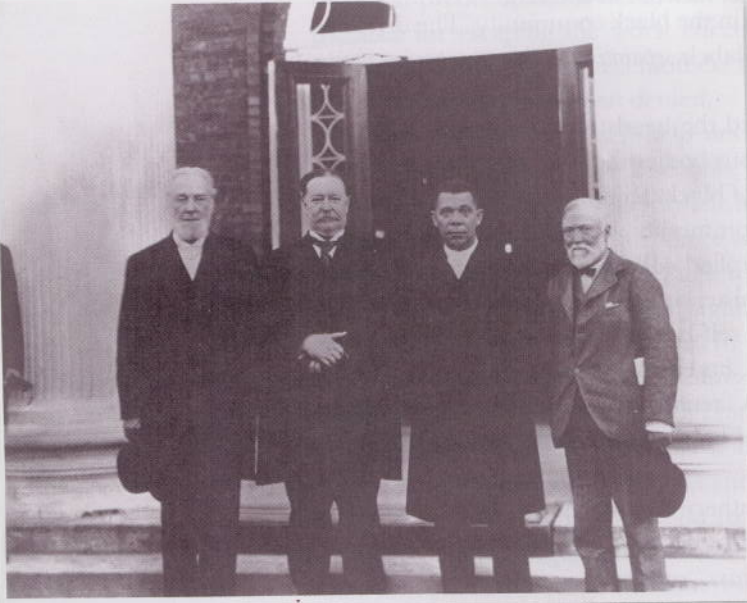
White philanthropy, in general, increased after the arrival on the national stage of Booker T. Washington, preaching industrial and agricultural education, teacher training at the common school level, and accommodation to the racial status quo. In 1911 the Slater Fund began its support of country training schools, and within a decade it assisted more than a hundred such institutions. In 1905 Anna T. Jeanes, the daughter of a wealthy Philadelphia merchant, provided money specifically for black rural schools in the South. Under the guidance of James H. Dillard, the fund sought the appointment of teachers to do industrial work in rural schools, of special teachers to do extension work, and of county agents to

improve rural homes and schools and create public sentiment for better African American schools.

The fund paid the salaries of these special teachers, and county officials gradually assumed part of the responsibility. The work of the fund attracted additional contributions from several other philanthropic agencies. In 1911 Julius Rosenwald visited Tuskegee Institute and the following year accepted a place on its board of trustees. His interest in and active assistance to rural African American schools dates from this time. Beginning as a small donor of amounts of \$5,000, Rosenwald soon became a major contributor to the improvement of educational facilities for southern blacks.

Various philanthropic boards supplemented teachers' salaries, bought equipment, and built schools. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was persistent southern white opposition to outside philanthropy, which one prominent white Methodist bishop described as "dangerous donations and degrading doles." General approval came only when the white citizens of the South judged that white funders showed little or no interest in establishing racial equality or upsetting white supremacy.

The South did little to encourage the equitable distribution of public funds for the education of all southern children. In 1898 Florida's per capita spending to educate



Booker T. Washington

This picture includes some of his friends and benefactors. Left to right: Robert C. Ogden, William H. Taft, Washington, and Andrew Carnegie.

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white children was more than double the amount allocated for educating black children. Mississippi, the poorest of all states, ranked last among the states in regard to financing its schools, and its tiny educational appropriations went overwhelmingly to white schools despite a school-age population that was more than 60 percent black. Historian Neil McMillen has noted of Mississippi that the greater a given county's concentration of blacks relative to whites, the more glaringly unfair was the racial disparity. For example, in majority-black Adams County, Mississippi, in 1900, \$22 was spent to educate each white child and only \$2 to educate each black child.

Educational Inequality in the South

No effort was made to mask blatant inequality in the state. In 1899 A. A. Kincannon, Mississippi's superintendent of education, declared that "our public school system is designed primarily for the welfare of the white children of the state, and incidentally for the negro children." With the right of suffrage no longer a possibility, the black community found it impossible to challenge the use of their tax dollars or to remove from office members of the state's educational board.

Throughout the southern states, the unequal distribution of school funds made clear that the "educational revival," spurred by Progressive movement reformers in the region, was intended for whites. If blacks were to be educated, they would have to bear the burden of the costs themselves. On occasion, southern whites contributed to black fundraising initiatives, and northern foundations gave money toward the support of rural schools. However, these donations were never sufficient, and some northern foundations stipulated local matching funds. In the case of the Rosenwald Fund, according to McMillen, Mississippi blacks were forced to draw from their own personal resources in order to provide the matching funds.

It was common for southern black communities to refer to a "double tax" in regard to their monetary support of black education—first, because of the racist reallocation of their tax dollars and second, because of their own sense of racial self-help, which required that they sacrifice, if need be, to maintain black schools. At the Sixth Atlanta Conference for the Study of Negro Problems in 1901, it was reported that between 1870 and 1899 blacks paid a total of \$25 million in direct school taxes, while also contributing indirect taxes amounting to more than \$45 million. Much of the tax money that blacks paid was diverted to white schools. It was also reported that they had paid more than \$15 million in tuition and fees to private institutions. With a strong assertion that they had done much to help themselves in the generation following Reconstruction, the report concluded: "It is a conservative statement to say . . . that American Negroes have in a generation paid directly forty millions of dollars in hard earned cash for educating their children."

In 1900 thirty-four institutions for African Americans offered collegiate training, and African Americans had begun to enter several universities and colleges in the North. Virginia, Arkansas, Georgia, and Delaware each had a state college for blacks. The only racially integrated college in a southern state was Berea College in Kentucky. In 1904 the state passed a law requiring that schools be segregated, and Berea's status as a private institution led its administration to challenge the law. In 1908, however, the Supreme Court declared illegal the school's policy of racial integration, since the school was incorporated in Kentucky. Berea would serve whites exclusively until the mid-twentieth century, when the Kentucky segregation law was finally struck down.

Higher Education

The number of graduates from institutions of higher learning steadily rose. In the decades leading up to 1900, more than two thousand African Americans received college degrees. In that year alone, more than seven hundred African Americans were enrolled in college. The educational awakening that pervaded the United States in the approaching twentieth century was as clearly manifested among blacks as it was among other Americans. For African Americans, however, the topic of education caused a debate as to the most appropriate type of education. In the South, most white people felt that the "Negro's place" required only rudimentary training in basic skills and that anything more than that created problems. Others held that African Americans should not be regarded as a group earmarked for a specific kind of education (for example, industrial training), but that individuals should be able to choose freely between a liberal arts curriculum and industrial curriculum depending on their interest and ability. Still others contended that at their present stage of development, African Americans could best serve themselves and their country with a specific type of education they believed would most rapidly help them to find an indispensable place in the American social order.

From the early years of freedom after the Civil War, black higher education in the South exemplified two educational types—industrial training and classical liberal arts learning. Founded in the late 1860s, Hampton Institute exemplified industrial education, while Howard University and Fisk University exemplified the liberal arts. Samuel Armstrong, the founder and head of Hampton, taught his students that labor was a "spiritual force, that physical work not only increased wage-earning capacity but promoted fidelity, accuracy, honesty,



Tuskegee laboratory

Booker T. Washington
 Tuskegee Institute
 1881-1882
 Photo: Robert C. Taylor
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persistence, and intelligence.” He emphasized the value of acquiring land and homes, vocations and skills. Armstrong’s teaching deeply influenced Booker T. Washington, who became the most eloquent and influential proponent of industrial education by the mid-1890s.

On the other hand, the concept of the “Talented Tenth,” which began to be used in the 1890s, preceded the clash over black education between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. It was not Du Bois who coined the term but rather the northern white Baptist leader Henry Morehouse. As early as 1896, **The Talented Tenth** perhaps in response to Booker T. Washington’s speech at the Atlanta Exposition, Morehouse referred to the Talented Tenth, partly to marshal continued white Baptist commitment to Atlanta Baptist College (later renamed Morehouse), Spelman College, and other white Baptist-controlled schools for blacks in the South.

In founding these schools, northern Baptist leaders argued for a quality of black education that approximated the finest white schools in the North. Henry Morehouse wrote in the *Independent* in April 1896 that it would be a mistake to fail “to make proper provision for the high education of the talented tenth man of the colored colleges. . . . Industrial education is good for the nine; the common English branches are good for the nine; that tenth man ought to have the best opportunities for making the most of himself for humanity and God.” The debate with Booker T. Washington had begun.

Divergent Paths to Racial Equality

Writing in 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois stated that “easily the most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington.” The ascendancy of this man is one of the most dramatic and significant episodes in the history of American education and of race relations. When in 1881 Washington went to Tuskegee, Alabama, he found none of the equipment with which to develop an educational institution, as well as white townspeople hostile to the idea of a school for blacks. Operating initially in a local black church, Washington set about securing the necessary resources for the establishment of a school and conciliating the neighboring white community.

Olivia Davidson, a teacher and also a Hampton graduate (she would marry Washington in 1885), played a crucial role as a fundraiser in the formative years of the school. Davidson canvassed the Tuskegee community and traveled to New England, where she had also gone to school, winning friends and dollars for Tuskegee Institute. In addition, students cooperated by doing all the work of constructing the buildings, producing and cooking the food, and performing innumerable other tasks. The white community was given assurances in many ways that the students were there to serve and not to antagonize. Washington believed that southern whites had to be convinced that the education of blacks was in the true interest of the South. The students provided many of the services and much of the produce that the white community needed, and hostility to the new school began to diminish.

As the proponent of a form of industrial education that would not antagonize the white South, Washington hoped to encourage black employment and economic self-sufficiency. Washington believed, as he put it in 1895, that “one farm bought, one house built, one home neatly kept, one man the largest tax- **Booker T. Washington** payer and depositor in the local bank, one school or church maintained . . . one patient cured by a Negro doctor, one sermon well preached . . . these will tell more in our favor than all the abstract eloquence that can be summoned to plead our cause.”

His was a practical program of training African Americans to live as comfortably and independently as possible, given southern racial realities. And his plan to produce farmers, mechanics, domestic servants, and teachers in rural schools throughout the state appeared far less threatening to those whites who believed that a liberal arts university education encouraged blacks to seek “social equality.” Washington made no public demand for equality, although he secretly funded court cases that challenged Jim Crow rules in transportation. His public persona was far more conciliatory, and thus he counseled his people to obey the South’s segregation laws and cooperate with white authorities in maintaining the peace.

Washington’s speech at the opening ceremonies of the Atlanta Exposition in 1895 catapulted him to national acclaim. He comforted whites in the audience with the words: “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” He also admonished his own people: “To those of my race who depend upon bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man . . . I would say ‘Cast down your bucket where you are’—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded. Cast it down in agriculture, in mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions.” The speech won praise from both whites and blacks. Indeed, Washington had won the good will of powerful and influential white citizens.

In his widely read autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1900), Washington presented a meditation on his life that fleshed out his philosophy in fuller detail. The autobiography broadened the good will of powerful and influential white citizens because of its accommodating tone, but it also won many black supporters, who recognized in its pages the familiar message of racial self-help. Washington never tired of urging blacks to develop useful economic skills rather than spend their efforts protesting racial discrimination. He preached intelligent management of farms, ownership of land, habits of thrift, patience, and perseverance, cleanliness, and the cultivation of high morals and good manners. Thereby Washington successfully positioned himself as the dominant black leader at the dawn of the new century.

Although Tuskegee produced a large number of male and female teachers for rural elementary schools, many of which were founded by its graduates, the institute also prepared students for specific trades and unskilled labor. Women’s education, for example, offered training for such vocations as teachers, nurses, seamstresses, and domestic servants. Tuskegee’s agricultural department opened in 1896 under the brilliant botanist and scientist George Washington Carver, who taught students to be more effective farmers—to rotate their crops, to fertilize the soil, and to grow peanuts and also to eat them as a protein supplement to their diet. Tuskegee offered outreach programs to black farmers—its mule-drawn “Moveable School” traveled through the countryside dispensing information. Tuskegee’s experimental station (the only all-black station in the United States), farmers’ institutes, farmers’ conferences, and agricultural bulletins, were designed by Carver to offer a broad-ranging program. The school’s agricultural department sought to help black farmers reduce their dependency on cotton production, transcend the cycle of debt, and live healthier lives.

Booker T. Washington did not deprecate the study of such subjects as science, mathematics, and history, but he indicated on many occasions that he regarded such education as impractical for the masses of black people. “For years to come the education of the people of my race should be so directed,” Washington asserted, “that the greatest proportion of the mental strength of the masses will be brought to bear upon the everyday practical things of

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Booker T. Washington at his desk

life, upon something that is needed to be done, and something which they will be permitted to do in the community in which they reside.” His doctrine of industrial education for the great mass of blacks did not contradict the dominant scientific and popular ideas at the time, which doubted the capacity of African Americans to become completely assimilated in a highly complex civilization. Washington’s mix of practical education and political conciliation to the rule of Jim Crow was attractive to southerners, as well as to northerners weary of racial and sectional conflict. Washington’s white supporters praised him as a voice of reason, a leader who did not destabilize what they believed to be a satisfactory economic and social equilibrium between the races.

White southerners particularly admired the tact and diplomacy with which he conciliated all groups, North and South. Twice, however, Washington threatened his position among southern whites. Speaking in Chicago, he lashed out at race prejudice and asserted that it was eating away the vitals of the South. On another occasion, he dined at the White House at the invitation of President Theodore Roosevelt—an incident that most southerners regarded as a serious breach of racial etiquette. Arch-segregationists did not miss the implication or contradiction between Washington’s admonitions against social equality and his own experiences and friendships with whites. The dinner with Roosevelt led southern newspapers to speak of a “damnable outrage.” Exclaimed hyper-racist Ben Tillman, then a member of the United States Senate: “Now that Roosevelt has eaten with that nigger Washington, we shall have to kill a thousand niggers to get them back to their places.”

Although whites tended to support Washington’s immediate goals, few realized that he looked forward to the complete acceptance and integration of blacks into American life. Indeed, Washington quietly financed some of the earliest court cases against segregation. As Washington’s biographer Louis R. Harlan has made clear, “by private action [he] fought

lynching, disfranchisement, peonage, educational discrimination, and segregation.” Subversive acts such as these were kept in the strictest secrecy. Washington viewed the demand for equality as a matter of timing and he perceived the odds of overcoming the mountain of racial prejudice too great. Progress could be made on other fronts—through education, through economic development, through the forward-looking march of a new century.

On one occasion, Washington said: “I would set no limits to the attainments of the Negro in arts, in letters or statesmanship, but I believe the surest way to reach those ends is by laying the foundation in the little things of life that lie immediately about one’s door. I plead for industrial education and development for the Negro not because I want to cramp him, but because I want to free him. I want to see him enter the all-powerful business and commercial world.” He advocated the entrance of African Americans into the professions and other fields, and he played an instrumental role in the founding of black professional organizations for physicians and those with businesses. He’s credited with the establishment of the National Medical Association in 1895 and the National Business League in 1900.

Washington was not the first or only black spokesman for accommodation to the New South’s racial policies. African Americans criticized Isaiah T. Montgomery of Mound Bayou when in 1890, as a Mississippi legislator, he voted for his state’s disfranchisement plan. William H. Council, the president of the Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical Institute (a black industrial school in Huntsville, Alabama) was regarded by many blacks as having a conciliatory attitude toward white conservative political policies—so much so that Booker Washington sought to distance himself from Council. In a letter dated September 23, 1899, Washington described Council as having a “reputation of simply toadying to the Southern white people.”

By far the most conservative and vilified black figure at the turn of the century was William Hannibal Thomas. Self-identified as an Ohio-born mulatto, Thomas publicly demonized black culture and intellect. In his book *The American Negro: What He Was, What He Is, and What He May Become*, which was published by the well-respected Macmillan Press in 1901, Thomas argued that blacks were innately inferior to whites. He blamed them for their subordinate status in southern society and admonished them to rid themselves of “negro idiosyncrasies.” His racist denunciation of his own people was as inflammatory as that of the vilest white supremacists. African Americans, including Booker T. Washington, reacted to Thomas with thorough disgust. In the press, in women’s club meetings, and in correspondence, blacks exposed Thomas’s financial malfeasance and personal improprieties and used such epithets as “race traitor” and “Judas of the race.”

As Washington’s prestige and influence grew, opposition among his own people increased as well, culminating in the dueling perspectives epitomized by Washington and W. E. B. Du

Opposition: T. Thomas Fortune

Bois. Although W. E. B. Du Bois would become Washington’s most noted opponent, he was not the first person to speak openly against Jim Crow or the first to establish a protest organization. The black journalist T. Thomas Fortune wrote extensively against the loss of blacks’ civil and political rights in his position as editor of the widely circulated *New York Age*.

At the time of Washington’s “Atlanta Compromise” speech (Du Bois’s phrase), Fortune was no newcomer to protest politics. In his book *Black and White: Land, Labor and Politics in the South* (1884), he denounced what he called the “great social wrong” of race discrimination in the South and urged black laborers to organize. In *The Negro in Politics* (1885), Fortune attacked the idea that blacks should blindly support the Republican Party and questioned

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In the 1880s and 1890s, Fortune figured significantly as a voice of racial self-help. In forceful language, he admonished his people, especially those in the South, to agitate for their rights, to sue in the courts, and to vote where possible. In 1887, during his editorship of the New York *Freeman*, he proclaimed that "white papers of this country have determined to leave the colored man to fight his own battles. . . . There is no dodging the issue; we have got to take hold of this problem ourselves, and make so much noise that all the world shall know the wrongs we suffer and our determination to right these wrongs."

Fortune's biographer, Emma Lou Thornborough, notes that Booker T. Washington, at the time a relative unknown on the national scene, supported Fortune's call for an Afro-American League. Two months later, in an open letter to Fortune in the *Freeman*, Washington urged: "Push the battle to the gate. Let there be no hold-up until a League shall be found in every village." Leagues organized at the state level initially, and 141 delegates from 23 states met in Chicago in January 1890 to establish an all-black national organization.

Fortune's rousing speech to the group stands in marked contrast to the speech that his friend Booker T. Washington would deliver five years later at the Atlanta Exposition. In 1890 Fortune warned against a temporizing attitude, proclaiming: "We have been patient so long that many believe that we are incapable of resenting insult, outrage and wrong; we have so long accepted uncomplainingly all the injustice and cowardice and insolence heaped upon us, that many imagine that we are compelled to submit and have not the manhood necessary to resent such conduct."

Yet by 1893, the League lacked the funds to mount a test case against railroad discrimination. Facing an avalanche of white supremacist ideas in the South and nation, the League languished from insufficient support. Efforts to revive and transform the League resulted in a meeting in Rochester, New York, in September 1898, at which time Fortune organized the National Afro-American Council. By then, however, Booker T. Washington was recognized by most whites and blacks as the undisputed leader of his people. Washington came increasingly to put his stamp on the Council, Fortune, and his newspaper, the *New York Age*. Fortune himself, unable or unwilling to defy Washington, fell deeper and deeper into alcoholism. Under Washington's watchful eye, the Council no longer subscribed to the protest politics of its past.

Another early voice of protest was Ida B. Wells, who launched a fearless crusade against lynching in 1892 after her friend Thomas Moss and his fellow business associates were lynched for defending their store and themselves from attack. These black men had set out to establish a business, the **Ida B. Wells** People's Store, which sold its products to Memphis blacks at a fair price, thus undercutting the white-owned store that exploited its black customers. Unfortunately, the black storeowners' success proved to be their undoing.

The lynching profoundly hurt and angered Wells. Armed with statistics and contemporary testimony, her column in the *Memphis Free Speech* detailed the lurid events of her friend's death. Wells attacked lynching in general, refuting its various justifications, especially those that excused lynching as the punishment due to black rapists of white women. Wells dared to call into question the honor of white women, positing that rape victims were far more often black women and their assailants white men. Finally, she urged her people to boycott white businesses and to migrate to Oklahoma, then still a territory.

people. Now the source for advice on all matters pertaining to African Americans, Washington had become “a compromiser between the South, the North, and the Negro.” As the most eloquent spokesman for a growing number of blacks, Du Bois expressed the considerable alarm of those who disdained Washington’s growing influence in regard to the funding of black educational institutions and his power over the appointment of blacks to federal and state positions.

Du Bois questioned the type of industrial education that Washington emphasized, since some of the artisan trades Tuskegee sought to produce—that of blacksmiths, for example—were fast becoming obsolete. Neither Tuskegee nor other industrial schools for blacks took cognizance of the problems peculiar to wage earners in modern industry. For example, Washington admonished black workers not to join labor unions, since they represented, according to him, a form of “organization which seems to be founded on a sort of impersonal enmity” to their employers. Washington also counseled blacks to remain in agriculture in the rural South, thus failing to understand changing times and irreversible demographic trends. There were, on the surface at least, innumerable more economic opportunities in the city, as well as more schools and opportunities for cultural and intellectual growth in the urban compared to the rural South. In the late nineteenth century, both whites and blacks had begun what would be a several decades-long migration from countryside to city.

Washington’s various detractors were quick to argue that his refusal to condemn lynching, segregation, and disfranchisement had won his school the financial backing of rich and powerful whites. Washington had the ear of industrial giants such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, department store magnate Robert Ogden, and men in political offices as high as the presidency of the United States. His connections to these men brought millions of dollars to Tuskegee and made possible gifts to other schools that he endorsed.

Washington’s Revenge

Andrew Carnegie, for example, admired Washington and in April 1903 gave \$600,000 to Tuskegee’s capital campaign—then the largest donation to the school. Carnegie’s great esteem for Washington is evident in a letter to William H. Baldwin, Jr., a railroad executive and a trustee of Tuskegee Institute. Writing to Baldwin soon after his generous gift, Carnegie described Booker Washington as a “modern Moses,” continuing: “History is to know two Washingtons, one white, the other black, both Fathers of their People. I am satisfied that the serious race question of the South is to be solved wisely, only by following Booker Washington’s policy. . . .”

Washington’s network of powerful friends had allowed him to reward those loyal to him and punish his enemies. Thus donations to Atlanta University, where Du Bois taught, declined significantly, and the university’s trustees began to urge the incorporation of more industrial arts courses into the university’s traditional liberal arts focus. Washington’s loyal “lieutenants” often acted as spies (with his approval). They discredited those vocal against Washington, attempted to get them fired from their posts, and ruined their chances for political or other appointed positions. One of Washington’s supporters attempted in vain to have George Forbes, co-editor of the *Guardian*, removed from his position at the Boston Public Library. While he retained his job, the unfortunate situation caused Forbes to mute his attacks and cease to co-edit the newspaper. J. Max Barber, editor of the magazine *Voice of the Negro*, lost Washington’s support after he began to travel in Du Bois’s circles. Pressured by Washington, Barber eventually sold his magazine and left journalism altogether. Moving from Atlanta to Chicago and finally to Philadelphia, Barber freed himself from Washington’s revenge only after becoming a dentist with no involvement in race politics.

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It was the realization of Washington's pervasive influence that convinced former Afro-American Council members Monroe Trotter, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others to establish a protest organization. The new organization was formed in 1905, when Du Bois sent out a call to meet in secret at Niagara Falls, a **The Niagara Movement** historic terminus for escaping slaves on the Underground Railroad. Unable to find a hotel on the New York side that would lodge the black attendees, the group convened on the Niagara Falls Canadian side, incorporating their organization as the Niagara Movement. Fifty-five men signed the call, although only twenty-nine were present. As Du Bois reminisced several decades later: "If sufficient men had not come to pay for the hotel, I should certainly have been in bankruptcy and perhaps in jail."

They drew up a platform, demanding freedom of speech and criticism, male suffrage, the abolition of all distinctions based on race, the recognition of the basic principles of human fellowship, and respect for the working person. The Niagara Movement's Declaration of



The Niagara Conference, 1905

African American leaders met at Niagara in 1905 to discuss their grievances and draw up a list of demands.

Principles asserted that “the voice of protest of ten million Americans must never cease to assail the ears of their fellows, so long as America is unjust.” Theirs was an unpopular, even dangerous stand against influential and highly respected persons in both the African American and white communities. The periodicals edited by the movement’s leaders—Du Bois’s *The Moon* and later *The Horizon*, Barber’s *Voice of the Negro*, and Trotter’s *Guardian*—constitute a bold and eloquent body of protest writings against the ideas and practices of white supremacy.

Du Bois admitted that many blacks would not perceive the need for another organization, referring probably to such predecessors as the Constitution League, the Afro-American Council, and the National Negro Business League. He did not doubt the possibility of skepticism, writing: “The first exclamation of anyone hearing of this movement will naturally be: ‘Another!’ . . . Why, should men attempt another organization after the failures of the past?” It is curious that Du Bois and the other men (no women were invited to be members) who signed the call envisioned their efforts as a movement—as if already a powerful change agent, laden with the resources and the popular backing needed to be a force for change. It was hardly so, at least not in the sense that social scientists today understand movements as expressing the collective consciousness of a relatively large grouping of persons and issue-oriented activism on a mass scale. Indeed, the fifty-five founders—primarily ministers, lawyers, editors, businessmen, and teachers—solicited what Du Bois called the “seldom sort,” thus meaning the few, not the many.

“The country is too large,” Du Bois wrote, “the race too scattered and the rank and file too unused to organized effort to attempt to impose a vast machine-like organization upon a wavering, uncertain constituency.” Du Bois showed little confidence in the masses but rather confidence in like-mindedness. The organization sought to build its ranks from the men and women of the Talented Tenth. Du Bois waxed eloquent in his many articles, arguing and pleading for a black intelligentsia that would not be gagged by fear of Washington’s influence. In 1905 he wrote in *The Moon*: “We need faith. The temptation today is for Negro-Americans to lose faith. Particularly is this true among the thinking classes.”

In the twenty-first century, with the Booker T. Washington Papers accessible in digital format, there is irrefutable and easily accessible evidence of Washington’s reaction to the Niagara Movement. Washington clearly felt threatened, believing that nothing good could come from an organization of such men as Du Bois and Trotter. He enlisted his assistant Emmett J. Scott to persuade the press not to give the Niagarites any coverage. Writing to an influential white newspaper owner on July 18, 1905, Scott warned: “Our friends think it wisest to in every way ignore absolutely the Niagara Movement. The best of the white newspapers in the North have absolutely ignored it and have taken no account of its meetings or its protestations. I think . . . if we shall consistently refuse to take the slightest notice of them that the whole thing will die aborning.”

The division between the two camps, now called Bookerites and Niagarites, had reached a crisis point, leading Du Bois to resort to the Bible for words against Washington. The use of biblical references was a common rhetorical strategy in the nineteenth century. Just as antebellum slaves and free blacks had invoked Exodus, Du Bois also drew on Old Testament imagery to embolden his readers. Most of them would have known the story of the prophet Elijah, who refused to serve the false god Baal, and thus Du Bois sermonized, using Baal as a metaphor for Booker Washington: “However many the traitors and rascals and weaklings, behold all around the thousands that have not bowed the

Bookerites and Niagarites

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knee to Baal that are standing staunchly for right and justice and good." Look at them, Du Bois continued, "and have faith."

There were hardly "thousands," but when the Niagara Movement held its meeting in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, in August 1906, 150 like-minded people, men and women, met openly in the haunting spirit of John Brown's fearless struggle for black freedom. The Niagara movement had not died aborning. And more than this, it had begun to mobilize its supporters for a strategic, open assault on Jim Crow.

At the second meeting of the Niagara Movement at Harpers Ferry in 1906, it was announced that forty local chapters had been formed, twenty-four of them in the North. In the preceding months, the men of Niagara had debated the merits of women joining their ranks, and women were added as members. However, the addition of women did not pass without some opposition. Monroe Trotter, the inveterate opponent of Booker T. Washington, had to be persuaded that women should be allowed to join. The infrastructure of the Niagara Movement showed signs of development. The Legal Department had already begun to challenge segregation. One of the women present at the Harpers Ferry meeting in 1906 was Barbara Pope, who at that very time was fighting Jim Crow railroad policies in the court. The Niagara Movement had provided a lawyer and financial support to Pope's lawsuit. The Harpers Ferry meeting also reported a Pan-African Department, Women's Department, Youth Department, Art Department, and Department of Ethics and Religion.

Niagarites such as Trotter, Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and others presented a powerful counter-voice to the Bookerites. Theirs was a galvanizing, admittedly divisive strategy, presented as the alternative and principled position in the fight for racial equality. Building mass support entailed exploiting every opportunity—thus the proliferation of writings on both sides—to establish clearly and definitively the two different viewpoints. Each camp demanded that the black community take sides; each camp linked its agenda to the fate of all black Americans. In the years that some historians call the "age of Booker T. Washington," it was a bold and courageous move on the part of the Niagarites to plot the role of controversy in such a public way that African Americans would find the debate increasingly inescapable. Such leaders as Du Bois, Trotter, Barber, the Baptist minister John Milton Waldron of Florida and the District of Columbia, and lawyer J. R. Clifford of West Virginia manipulated every occasion that they could—in lectures, in the press, in the church, and in the courts—to reshape public opinion in explicit defiance of Booker T. Washington and his many respected supporters.

Many took a stand on this debate, but most black people did not think in this dualistic way; rather, they chose and validated specific ideas from both sides. Doubtless many African Americans took pride in Washington's growing renown, while others directly benefitted from his influence. Highly educated black leaders and noted champions of black civil rights held Booker Washington in high esteem. Robert H. Terrell, the first black federal judge and also husband of women's club leader Mary Church Terrell, supported Washington, as did the lawyer and equal rights advocate Archibald Grimké. Richard T. Greener, who was a black Harvard graduate, a lawyer, and a U.S. consul in Russia between 1898 and 1905, attended the Harpers Ferry meeting, but as his letters before and after the meeting reveal he also supported Washington. The young educator and songwriter James Weldon Johnson, who would later become a leader in the NAACP, admired Du Bois and the Niagarites but remained in the Bookerite camp. In 1906 Washington's influence with President Theodore Roosevelt landed Johnson appointments as consul in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, and in 1909 in Corinto, Nicaragua.

Howard University educator Kelly Miller straddled the fence between the Washington and Du Bois factions, while Baptist leader Nannie Helen Burroughs, a staunch advocate for equal rights for both blacks and women, followed Washington's emphasis on industrial training. Her many speeches and writings, which championed the working class as opposed to the Talented Tenth, led her to be dubbed the "Female Booker T. Washington." Similar views were held by Victoria Earle Matthews, a race-conscious journalist and founder of the White Rose settlement house for black girls in New York City.

The competing strategies were effectively delineated and conveyed by the Social Gospel AME minister Rev. Reverdy Ransom in his rousing address to the men and women gathered at Harpers Ferry in 1906. Ransom carried his listeners back and forth across the African American ideological divide, as he described two classes of black people and subsequently divergent paths to equality:

Today two classes of negroes, confronted by a united opposition, are standing at the parting of the ways. The one counsels patient submission to our present humiliations and degradations; it deprecates political action; ignores or condones the usurpation and denial of our political and Constitutional rights, and preaches the doctrine of industrial development and the acquisition of property. . . . The other class believes that it should not submit to being humiliated, degraded and remanded to an inferior place. It believes in money and property but it does not believe in bartering its manhood for the sake of gain. It believes in the gospel of work and industrial efficiency, but it does not believe in artisans being treated as industrial serfs, and in laborers occupying the position of a peasant class. It does not believe that those who toil and accumulate will be free to enjoy the fruits of their industry and frugality if they permit themselves to be short of political power.

The meeting places of the Niagara Movement were carefully selected to revive the same spirit of courage and uncompromising fervor reminiscent of the abolitionist movement of the antebellum era. Thus in 1907, the group met in Boston and in the following year, in Oberlin, Ohio—old abolitionist hubs in the East and Midwest. Yet there were to be no more meetings after 1908. The Niagara Movement would be absorbed by the new, racially integrated organization—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Economic and Social Striving

While controversy continued over the most practical and effective type of education, the vast majority of African Americans faced the difficult task of making a living. With more than 75 percent of African Americans in the United States still living in the former Confederate states in 1880 and engaged primarily in agricultural work, it appeared that most of them would have to make some sort of economic adjustment on the farms. Without the capital to purchase land, they continued to be locked in the various forms of tenancy and sharecropping that had evolved during Reconstruction. Indeed, large numbers were impoverished farm laborers with no greater stake in agricultural production than their own scantily paid labor.

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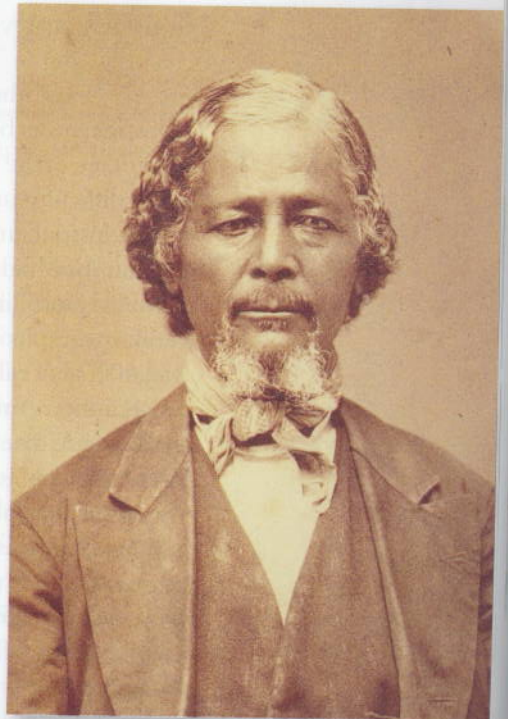
But even if they had the capital it was difficult for African Americans to purchase desirable farmland. With the destruction of the institution of slavery, whites looked on land as their only important capital investment, and they were reluctant to sell land to blacks, whom they did not want to enjoy the autonomy that came from land ownership in the South. The number of black farm owners remained small in the entire period before World War I. In the South, where blacks constituted approximately 50 percent of the population in 1900, they owned 158,479 farms, while whites in the South owned 1,078,635 farms. Before 1890, almost nothing had been done to educate African Americans in the use of modern agricultural methods, and as a result productivity was low, and there was general ignorance of the problems of marketing crops and purchasing supplies.

Booker T. Washington sought to improve this situation in 1892 when he issued the first call for a conference of farmers at Tuskegee. In this and succeeding years, African Americans from the surrounding countryside listened to discussions on “the evils of the mortgage system, the one-room cabin, buying on credit, the importance of owning a home and of putting money in the bank, how to build schoolhouses and prolong the school term, and to improve moral and religious conditions.” Small tracts and circulars containing some essentials of farm improvement were distributed to the farmers at the conference, and from time to time Tuskegee Institute mailed them other information. After 1907 white philanthropists in cooperation with southern boards of education also funded black farm demonstration agents who helped to improve conditions.

Despite the efforts of African American farmers to adjust to the rural economy, the farm ceased to be attractive to many. Racial violence, intermittent agricultural depressions, unfair and often cruel treatment by landlords and merchants, and rumors of opportunities in the cities and in other parts of the country all stimulated an exodus of blacks from the rural South that began as early as 1879. Thousands left Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia and went to the North and West. There was a minor stampede to Kansas, with Henry Adams of Louisiana and “Pap” Singleton of Tennessee assuming the leadership. Adams claimed to have organized 98,000 African Americans to go WEST. Perhaps he at least collected the names of that many who expressed a willingness to go. Singleton distributed a circular entitled “The Advantage of Living in a Free State” and actually caused several thousand to leave. Charles Banks and Isaiah Montgomery in Mississippi, Edward P. McCabe in Kansas and Oklahoma, Allen Allensworth in California, and Oklahomans David Turner, Thomas Haynes, and James E. Thompson were leaders in efforts to establish and promote economically viable and politically independent black towns and agricultural settlements as the solution to the black dilemma. Most of these ventures failed, however.

Some blacks considered the idea of emigration to Africa and sought help from the American Colonization Society, which continued to operate into the 1890s, although much weaker than in the antebellum era. Large numbers of letters from blacks to the ACS sought information about emigration in the two decades following the end of Reconstruction. Emigration fever was especially strong in rural Arkansas, although the lack of financial resources made leaving for Africa impossible. Historian Mary Rolinson notes that the interest in emigration spiked in the

The Black Exodus



Benjamin “Pap” Singleton

rural South after cotton harvests, when sharecroppers and tenant farmers felt more sharply the sting of unfair economic settlements with their white landlords.

In the pages of the various journals of his denomination, AME minister Henry McNeal Turner, a passionate voice for emigration in the late nineteenth century, described Africa as black Americans' true homeland. Turner's stridently black-nationalist statement that "God is a Negro" and the coverage of his missionary journeys on the African continent led to a heated debate between Turner and AME bishops who opposed his African focus.

Black leaders found themselves far more often in debates over whether blacks should leave the South, and specifically the rural areas, instead of whether blacks should leave America for Africa. Staying in the South may have been the only perspective that Frederick Douglass, who died in 1895, shared with Booker T. Washington, although Douglass's reasons differed. Douglass believed that the government should protect citizens wherever they lived, and he also feared that if they migrated out of the region, blacks would become nomads, losing what strength a sedentary existence would give them in the South, where they were concentrated. Richard T. Greener, however, insisted that blacks should migrate in order to put an end to the bad treatment they received at the hands of southern whites. He declared that a black exodus would lead to better economic and educational opportunities and would also benefit those who remained in the South. Perhaps none of these arguments had any telling effect. Forces rather than words decided the fate of African Americans. Most of them had neither the resources nor the initiative to go to new areas. Those who did go were lured just as other rural Americans of the period by the hope of a better livelihood.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the South began to feel the impact of the economic revolution that had already enveloped the North. The iron industry was growing in Tennessee and Alabama, cloth was being manufactured in the Carolinas, and the business of transporting manufactured goods to northern and southern consumers was becoming a major economic activity. Blacks as well as whites sought to take advantage of the new opportunities. For the most part, blacks in southern towns experienced great difficulty in securing some of the benefits of the new economic growth. In 1891 only 196 industrial employers of the South were using 7,395 African Americans. Ten years later, the number had increased substantially, and some were employed in cottonseed-oil mills, sawmills, and furniture factories, as well as in foundries, machine shops, boiler works, and similar workplaces. By 1910 African American factory workers had increased to more than 350,000, generally holding the least attractive jobs.

Southern urban blacks even found it difficult to render their customary personal services to city dwellers. Black barbers were fast losing their monopoly in what had previously been a "black" service to foreign-born competitors, while cooks and caterers were similarly displaced by palatial hotels that frequently refused to hire blacks. Everywhere there was sentiment against giving blacks jobs that had even the slightest semblance of respectability. Moreover, race riots, such as the Atlanta Riot of 1906, caused blacks living in southern cities to find urban life almost as dangerous and frightening as rural life.

At a time of unprecedented industrial innovation, African Americans made some important contributions. Jan E. Matzelliger, who had been an apprenticed cobbler in Philadelphia and in Lynn, Massachusetts, invented the shoe-lasting machine. It was purchased by the United Shoe Machinery Company of Boston and effectively reduced the cost of manufacturing shoes by more than 50 percent. In 1884 John P. Parker

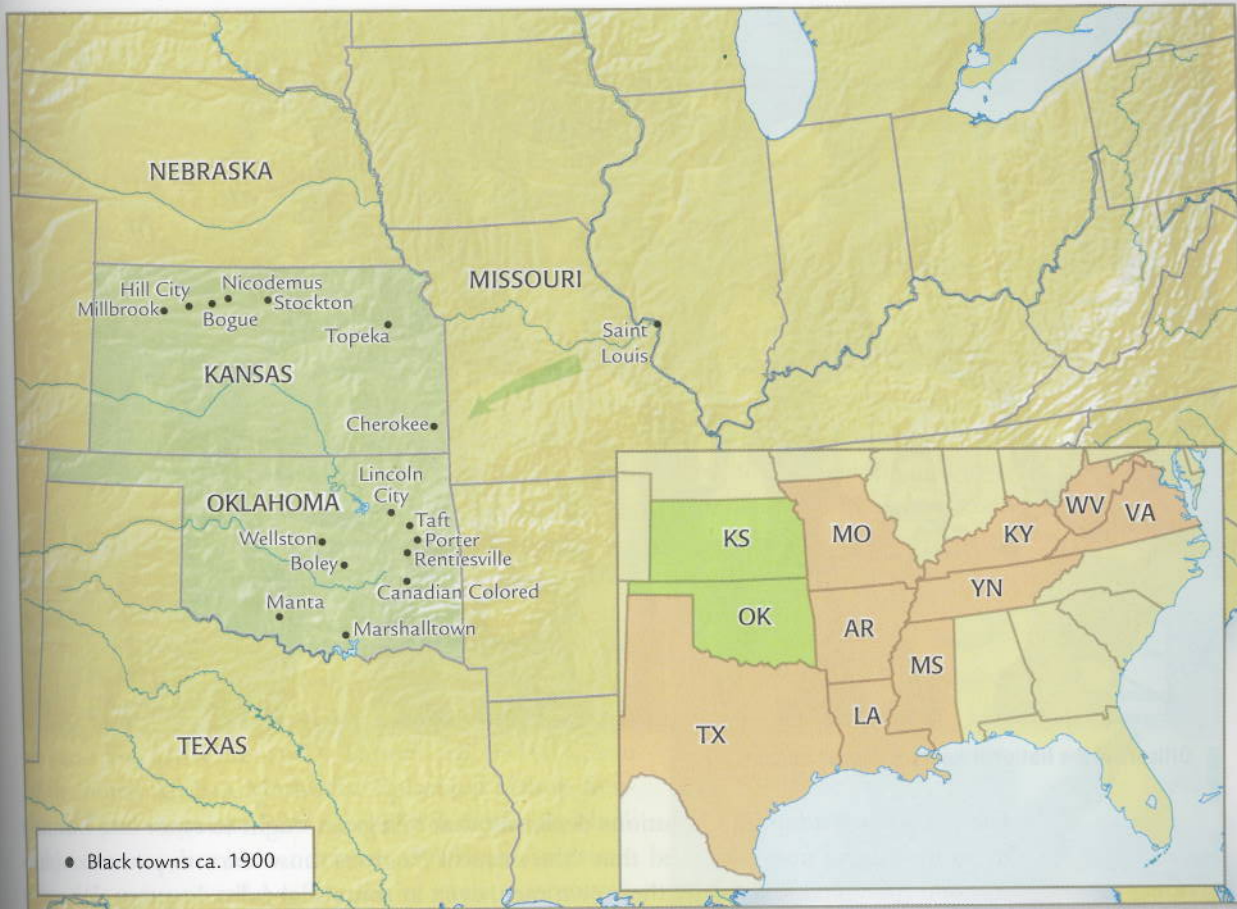
The New South

Innovation and Enterprise



During 1879, many Black towns were established in Kansas and Oklahoma.

invented a "screw" machine for making shoes, a company and made a fortune. He was a relating principal of one of his products. He began inventing in 1870 and automatic air pumps. His company, the Westinghouse, was an African American. He was a segregated market in the South. He had a preneurial spirit: he was poor and achieved success. He was at the Philadelphia Conference in 1894. He was the plight of African Americans. He was at least in part to be blamed. He was before called on black



During 1879, more than 6,000 African-Americans migrated from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas to St. Louis, and then on to Kansas and Oklahoma.

invented a "screw for tobacco presses." He established the Ripley Foundry and Machine Company and made presses for many businesses. Elijah McCoy patented fifty different inventions relating principally to automatic lubricators for machines. It was the claim for the genuineness of one of his products that led to the expression "the real McCoy." Granville T. Woods, who began inventing in 1885, made significant contributions in the fields of electricity, steam boilers, and automatic air brakes. Several of his inventions were assigned to the General Electric Company, the Westinghouse Air Brake Company, and the American Bell Telephone Company.

African Americans embarked on their own program of business enterprise within a segregated market. Taking their cue from the almost hopeless plight of millions of their race in the South, black leaders, including W. E. B. Du Bois, urged adoption of an entrepreneurial spirit: blacks were urged to enter business and manufacturing in order to escape poverty and achieve economic independence. Speaking before the Fourth Atlanta University Conference in 1898, John Hope, then a professor at the university, noted that the plight of African Americans was not due altogether to the lack of education and skills but at least in part to competition between the races for employment in new fields. He therefore called on blacks to escape the wage-earning class and become their own employers.



Officers of the National Negro Business League

The conference adopted resolutions declaring that “Negroes ought to enter into business life in increasing numbers” and that “the mass of Negroes must learn to patronize business enterprises conducted by their own race, even at some slight disadvantage. We must cooperate or we are lost.” The conference also called for the distribution of information concerning the need for African American businesses and the organization of local, state, and national Negro Business Men’s Leagues.

Booker T. Washington appropriated this idea. Washington reserved his highest praise for what he called the “business Negro”—convinced, as he wrote in his autobiography, that the “only sure basis of progress is economic.” Black owners of businesses and property also asserted racial pride, according to Washington. He associated this group with the insistence upon spelling the word Negro with a capital N—a practice Washington heartily endorsed, since, as he argued, “we capitalize the Indian, the Chinaman, the Filipino; shame to withhold so small an honor from the Negro!” In 1901 Washington convened in Boston a group of African American businesspeople, thereby establishing the National Negro Business League. More than four hundred delegates came from thirty-four states and elected Washington as their first president.

Washington, believing that taxpaying African Americans of intelligence and high character almost invariably were treated with respect by whites, urged that the “idle, useless class” of African Americans be transformed into valuable, law-abiding citizens. He also urged that a larger number of blacks enter various business fields. In *The Negro in Business* (1907) he stated that he was gratified by the large number of new business enterprises that had sprung up during the first year of the league’s existence. Many local organizations were formed, and by 1907 the national organization had 320 branches.

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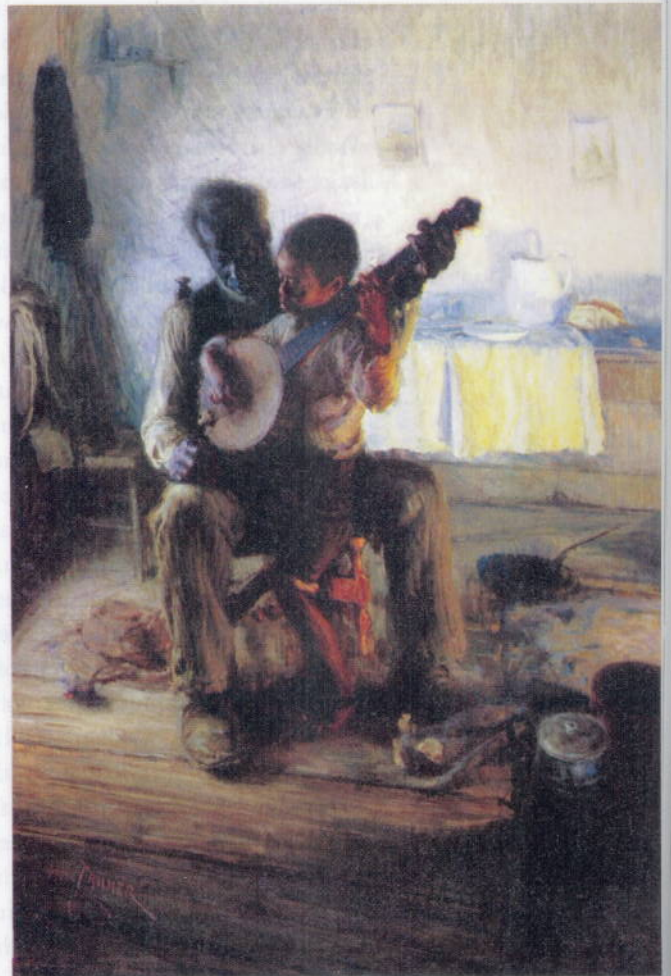
Black entrepreneurs serviced a segregated clientele hungry for consumer products that might not otherwise have been available, such as community news, life insurance, bank loans, and beauty products. Additionally, black-owned products represented the self-help antidote to the sale and advertisement of countless commodities associated with Old South images of mammy, Uncle Mose, and other plantation stock characters that propelled the fast-growing American consumer economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Soap wrappers, postcards, boxes of breakfast cereal and pancake mix, tobacco tins, children's games, and fly swatters are but a few examples of the many items displaying smiling, often caricatured black faces. These inexpensive products of daily use were widely advertised and sold to blacks and whites in stores across America.

Combating Old South Images

By presenting black images in insulting and demeaning ways, such products reinforced ideas of black inferiority and servility. Much like minstrel humor, which remained a tremendously popular form of American entertainment into the twentieth century, the new racialized commodities were intended, indeed literally designed, to elicit happy and jovial responses from their white consumers despite their underlying violent meanings and insensitivity to black life. A drawing on a popular postcard, for example, depicted black children being chased and eaten by an alligator.

African Americans attempted to combat such images by producing their own products, publishing their own literature, and portraying positive visual images. The artist Henry O. Tanner (1859–1937), son of the noted African Methodist Episcopal bishop Benjamin Tanner, painted few works with explicitly black subject matter, but his renderings of African American life serve as a powerful refutation of racist, stereotypical caricatures. For example, the ubiquitous image of foolishly grinning black men with banjos—an iconic symbol in the American popular imagination—is countered by Tanner's *The Banjo Lesson* (1893). In the depths of the nadir in race relations, Tanner painted an intimate, dignified glimpse of African American family life in a humble home, where one generation teaches another.

Tanner, however, would leave the United States, not for Africa but for Europe. He received his artistic training at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1879 and worked under the celebrated American painter Thomas Eakins. After completing his formal training, Tanner initially set up shop in Atlanta, hoping to find patronage among the city's relatively affluent African American residents. In 1891, however, he left the United States to study abroad and remained in France for most of his professional career, cultivating a celebrated international reputation as a painter of religious subjects, landscapes, and portraits.



Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893

At the end of the century, African Americans engaged in businesses of various types and sizes. They operated grocery stores, general merchandise stores, and drugstores, and they were restaurant keepers, caterers, confectioners, bakers, tailors, builders, and contractors. Some operated shirt factories, cotton mills, rubber goods shops, lumber mills, and carpet factories. There were many cooperative businesses, such as the Bay Shore Hotel Company of Hampton, Virginia; the Capital Trust Company of Jacksonville, Florida; the South View Cemetery Association of Atlanta, Georgia; and the Southern Stove Hollow-Ware and Foundry Company of Chattanooga, Tennessee. The success of some black businesspeople, while failing to approach the success of whites during the same period, was nevertheless significant.

Beauty culture proved to be one of the most lucrative sources of economic enterprise, appealing to a gender niche—black women consumers. The demand for beauty products began to grow rapidly in the late nineteenth century among all American women. The demand for hair and skin preparations created opportunities for inventive and resourceful black women to address the unique concerns of black women, while also offering black women employment beyond the limited options available to them. Annie Turbo Malone, founder of the Poro System, and Madame C. J. Walker, founder of the Walker System, became wealthy by perceiving beauty culture as a vehicle for promoting racial self-help. The advertisements for Walker products conveyed this. On the individual level, advertisements sent the message that a black woman's appearance was directly related to her self-esteem and social mobility. A black woman could pull herself up by the appearance of her hair and skin, not merely by her bootstraps. On a collective level, her beauty culture business provided employment, and it linked as well to uplift ideology's attention to hygiene and physical appearance, which was no less important than educational and economic accomplishment.

The products of black beauty culturalists would not go unchallenged by race-proud blacks who decried the hair-lengthening and skin-lightening advertisements, or by those who reduced the promises of such products to sheer falsehoods and dishonest advertising. However, race leader Madame C. J. Walker eventually garnered tremendous respect for her own business, not least of all because of her ability to articulate the self-help ideology through a beauty system that ultimately promised to transform the collective face of the race, what Henry Louis Gates has described as the facelift or racial makeover representative of the New Negro in the first decade of the twentieth century. Walker expressed this sentiment to the National Negro Business League in 1912, stating: "I am in a business that is a credit to the womanhood of our race."

Madam C. J. Walker was born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 to a family of impoverished sharecroppers in the Deep South. Widowed at the age of 20, she resettled in St. Louis and worked as a washerwoman. In the quest to improve the quality of her own hair, she developed what became known as the "Walker System," a treatment that promised healthier and longer hair. After moving to Denver, she began to sell her products from door to door. She became successful enough to hire agent-operators in different states. She would later move to Indianapolis and finally to the banks of the Hudson River in New York. Her business skyrocketed, its success made possible by the hundreds, if not thousands of black women employees and millions of black women consumers of her product. Walker's speeches about

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her rise from a plantation to a mansion were eloquent testimonies to the philosophy of self-help. She fought for recognition, however, within the male-dominated National Negro Business League. She did not initially have the endorsement of Booker T. Washington, as did the other (male) entrepreneurs. Washington and other men in the black business league scoffed at the “business of growing hair,” but she gained his respect as her profits grew. She also committed herself financially to racial advancement and gave generous donations to black organizations. She died on May 25, 1919.

African Americans made a special effort to establish themselves firmly in the field of banking, a difficult task after the failure of the Freedman’s Bank in 1874. In 1888 in Richmond, Rev. W. W. Browne organized the first bank to be administered solely by blacks, the Savings Bank of the Grand Fountain United Order of True Reformers. Later in the same year the Capital Savings Bank of Washington was organized. In 1889 the Mutual Bank and Trust Company of Chattanooga was founded, followed by the establishment of the Alabama Penny Savings Bank of Birmingham. By 1914 approximately fifty-five black banks had been organized. Most of them were closely connected with fraternal insurance organizations or churches or both.

Establishment of Black Banks

One of the most successful and celebrated black bankers in the early twentieth century was a woman—Maggie Lena Walker. She grew to fame initially as a member and leader of the Independent Order of St. Luke, a black mutual aid society in Richmond, Virginia. A civic activist and black women’s club leader, Walker’s outreach efforts targeted poor black women. In 1903 she became the nation’s first female bank president, founding the St. Luke’s Penny Savings Bank. The bank encouraged depositors with little money to “turn pennies into dollars.” Many of her early patrons were washerwomen. Today, the bank continues to operate as the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company.

Racial discrimination in the northern states also required blacks to develop their own strategies for economic progress. In the 1880s, in Philadelphia, Rev. Matthew Anderson, pastor of the Berean Presbyterian Church, championed the need for his church to build a savings and loan association, in order to expand the availability of affordable housing to African Americans. Blacks were confined to specific areas and had difficulty getting loans to purchase houses. This idea that blacks could find no other recourse other than self-help led the Berean Church to establish a building and loan association in 1888 that served as a needed lending agency for the larger black community, not just for the Berean Presbyterian congregation. By 1908 the savings and loan association made possible the purchase of 150 homes, which Anderson described as “inviting, on good streets, in different parts of the city.” To this day the Berean Bank remains in business.

Black churches became an important source of business enterprise in the urban North and South. Because of segregation and the lack of blacks’ access to resources available to whites, churches assumed a broader role than simply religious worship. They became, according to Chicago black clubwoman Fannie Barrier Williams, “multi-service institutions.” Individual black churches often serviced a population larger than their members. In the late nineteenth-century South, many black newspapers were published in churches, or at least began in churches. This was true of Ida Wells’s *Memphis Free Speech*. Many, if not most of the black

The Role of the Churches



Woman of wealth and influence

Madam C. J. Walker and daughter on a sightseeing tour.

schools and colleges in the South opened first in black churches before acquiring a school building.

Black women were primarily responsible for the fundraising and community mobilization that made it possible for individual churches and black denominational organizations at the local, state, and national levels to establish and maintain schools, newspapers, publishing companies, libraries, old people's homes, orphanages, insurance companies and mutual aid societies, and a host of social welfare services. Black church women of all denominations worked within their own separate missionary societies, in secular women's clubs, and in alliance with white (more often northern) church women to develop and administer visionary programs of service to their people. They played a critical role in supporting and even initiating the progressive ministries in urban churches North and South. Such was the case of churches led by a variety of Social Gospel black ministers: Reverdy Ransom, who enjoyed a long life of activism in various parts of the nation; Richard R. Wright, Jr., in Chicago; William DeBerry, in Springfield, Massachusetts; John Milton Waldron, in Jacksonville, Florida, and later in Washington, D.C.; Matthew Anderson, in Philadelphia; Henry Hugh Proctor, in Atlanta; Walter Henderson Brooks, in Washington, D.C.; and Hutchens Bishop and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., in New York. In Harlem alone, numerous churches professed Social Christianity: Abyssinian Baptist, Bethel AME, Mount Tabor Presbyterian, St. Cyprian

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Episcopal Mission, and St. Marks Methodist Episcopal. Black churches in Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and other cities engaged as well in Christian social service.

These are but a few of many examples in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of faith-based initiatives in the form of social settlement work, employment training, banking and insurance, kindergarten, health clinics, youth programs, women's training, and a variety of social services to meet the needs of newly arriving migrants to the cities. This progressive element represented in black communities, as it did in white communities, a small minority within the larger religious landscape. And yet its influence was felt in the improvement of conditions in urban communities. This is borne out in the Atlanta University conference publication that stated in 1898: "Compared with modern civilized groups the organization of action among American Negroes is extremely simple. . . . And yet there are among them 23,000 churches, with unusually wide activities, and spending annually at least \$10,000,000." These figures would grow considerably in the next two decades.

The Social Gospel, associated with the Progressive reform movement of the late nineteenth century, linked the traditional Christian theology of individual salvation to wider ethical concerns for reforming poverty, immigrant adjustment, slums, racism, alcohol, and other perceived problems. The Social Gospel's individual and collective meaning, as well as its call for "practical Christianity," intertwined almost imperceptibly with the ideology of racial self-help voiced by black religious progressives. Some, like Ransom and Waldron, called their churches "institutional" in keeping with many of the white Social Gospel churches at the turn of the century. In like manner, black Baptist leader, educator, and suffragist Nannie Helen Burroughs united her calls for "practical Christianity" and "practical education." Reminiscent of Booker T. Washington, Burroughs referred to her District of Columbia-based National Training School for Women and Girls as the "School of the 3 Bs: the Bible, Bath, and Broom."

The Social Gospel and Black Separatism

In some cases, the race-conscious belief in black self-determination dominated even religious identity to the point that some blacks assumed a posture of separatism from those whites with whom they shared the same denominational affiliation. The formation of the National Baptist Convention in 1895, the largest black denomination, illustrates such a situation. One of the precipitating factors in the desire to form a separate black denominational body (called *convention*) pertained to a breach between black and white Baptists over the exclusion of educated black Baptist contributors to a northern white Baptist publication. In 1896, at the meeting of the newly formed National Baptist Convention, Rev. E. K. Love, pastor of the First African Baptist Church in Savannah, reveled in the formation of the new black convention and its own publishing board. Love proclaimed: "There is not as bright and glorious a future before a Negro in a white institution as there is for him in his own. . . . We can more thoroughly fill our people with race pride, denominational enthusiasm and activity, by presenting to them, for their support, enterprises wholly that are ours."

In the era of self-help, this attitude was held by both church leaders and laity, and every black denomination developed publishing companies and religious presses. Such presses not only published on religious topics, but also offered opportunities for black writers of fiction and nonfiction to present their work. For example, women writers Pauline Hopkins, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Victoria Earle Matthews found a venue for their writings in the periodicals of the AME Church.

Another manifestation of the struggle of African Americans to become socially self-sufficient was the remarkable growth of fraternal orders and benefit associations. Masons

Mutual Benefit Societies

and Odd Fellows maintained large black memberships; in addition, organizations such as the Knights of Pythias and the Knights of Tabor competed for membership among black men. Organizations for black women included the Order of the Eastern Star and Sisters of Calanthe. Other secret orders—the International Order of Good Samaritans, the Ancient Sons of Israel, the Grand United Order of True Reformers, and the Independent Order of St. Luke—offered insurance against sickness and death, aided widows and orphans of deceased members, and gave opportunities for social intercourse. Some were strong only in certain localities; others had memberships that extended over several states and owned the buildings housing their main offices as well as other property that they rented to black businesses.

A variation of the fraternal organization, without the feature of secret rituals, was the beneficial and insurance society. Such organizations grew in number during this era. They usually collected weekly dues ranging from 25 cents to 50 cents from their members. The Young Mutual Society of Augusta, Georgia, organized in 1886, and the Beneficial Association of Petersburg, Virginia, organized in 1893, were typical of local benefit societies. Larger in scope and membership was the Workers Mutual Aid Association of Virginia. By 1898, four years after its founding, it had more than four thousand members. Although these societies imposed relatively exorbitant dues on their members, they served as important training grounds where African Americans could secure business experience and develop habits of self-help that seemed to be more imperative as the new century opened.

A logical outcome of the mutual benefit societies was black insurance companies, which were more economic than social in their functions. In Washington, D.C., S. W. Rutherford severed his connections with the True Reformers and organized a society that finally became the National Benefit Life Insurance Company, which remained the largest African American organization of its kind for more than a generation. In Durham, North Carolina, John Merrick, who had been an extension worker for the True Reformers, was able to interest several influential citizens in organizing an insurance company. He, together with several associates, in 1898 became charter members of the organization that later became known as the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. Its period of substantial growth dates from 1899, when C. C. Spaulding was added to the board and the company was reorganized. In Atlanta, Georgia, A. F. Herndon secured control of the Atlanta Mutual Aid Association and reorganized it into the powerful Atlanta Life Insurance Company. These and similar businesses grew as some white companies became more and more reluctant to insure African Americans, who were learning the value of purchasing various types of insurance.

Among the other organizations that assisted in the adjustment of African Americans to city life were the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The first black YMCA had been organized as early as 1853 in Washington, D.C., but not until after the Civil War was it connected with the white YMCA movement. In 1888 William Alphaeus Hunton was placed on the national staff as its first salaried black officer, and in 1898 Jesse E. Moorland joined him to give special attention to the problems of African Americans in urban areas. Early in the new century several city association branches were organized. Buildings that could be used as headquarters and recreational centers were constructed. With gifts from philanthropists George F. Peabody and Julius Rosenwald, black YMCAs were established in several cities North and South, and

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By 1906 there were small YWCAs for African Americans in Washington, Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore. Gradually, with an awakened social consciousness, city and student work developed. Not until the outbreak of World War I did a strong movement of Y-work develop among African American women. Several substantial buildings were erected in strategic centers, and with the cooperation of such philanthropists as Rosenwald and Rockefeller, the YWCA acquired buildings in which black women were able to carry out a program of social improvement and education for young black women that did much to assist them with the adjustment of recently migrating women to urban communities.

The Woman's Era

Perhaps no movement in the late nineteenth century captures so vividly the complexity of hope and anguish in this era than the struggle of black women for racial and gender equality. Black women writers and black women's organizations blossomed during the decades, which are variously called the era of racial self-help, the Progressive era, and the woman's era. Black women writers—Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Barrier Williams, Hallie Q. Brown, Victoria Earle Matthews, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell, and others—contributed to an outpouring of literature (fiction and nonfiction) that captured the three-pronged spirit of black uplift, societal reform, and women's rights. They were also actively involved in the club movement among black women.

Author, suffragist, and temperance leader Frances Ellen Watkins Harper illustrated the overlapping contexts of race and gender reform in 1893, when she gave the lecture "Woman's Political Future" at the World's Congress of Representative Women, meeting in Chicago during the World's Columbian Exposition. In her speech to this interracial gathering, Harper unmistakably championed the need for racial equality, black education, and the end to lynching, but she also proclaimed boldly: "Through weary, wasting years men have destroyed, dashed in pieces, and overthrown, but to-day we stand on the threshold of woman's era, and woman's work is grandly constructive."

At the time of Harper's speech, black women's organizations and their reform agendas clearly reflected a conflated racial and gender consciousness. Black women confronted a gender-specific form of racial discrimination that began with slavery and continued afterward. For the most part, locked into the identity of servant and menial worker, black women did not enjoy the social status of white women. The larger society did not place any black woman, regardless of her education and accomplishment, on womanhood's pedestal to be supported, protected, or identified by the term "lady." Nor did society value black motherhood.

Gender-Specific Discrimination

Discussing the club movement in 1902, Fannie Barrier Williams, wife of the black lawyer and jurist S. Laing Williams, wrote of the black woman: "By a sort of national common consent, she has had no place in the Republic of free and independent womanhood of America." Even the white women's club movement of the time, specifically the National Federation of Women's Clubs, refused to admit black women's clubs into its membership, although a few black women held membership (often after considerable debate) as individuals in white women's clubs at the local level.

In the courts, in their household employment, in scientific studies, and in the popular media, the prevailing opinion held black women to be the very opposite of white women—the latter being perceived as delicate and chaste. Appearing periodically in the white press was the presumption of the inherent immorality of the black female, even as an adolescent. In 1895, for example, James Jacks, the president of the Missouri Press Association, had demeaned the efforts of black clubwomen to assist Ida B. Wells in her antilynching crusade. Writing in a Missouri newspaper, he described black women as “wholly devoid of morality . . . prostitutes and all natural thieves and liars.” In 1904 a white woman repeated this type of negative stereotyping in a newspaper article that stated: “Negro women evidence more nearly the popular idea of total depravity than the men do. . . . I cannot imagine such a creation as a virtuous black woman.”

Despite the racist limitations that African Americans sought to transcend through their self-help efforts, the thinking of most black men did not transcend the many patriarchal ideas of their day. Thus black women faced sexism within the black community itself. For example, in the 1880s, black Baptist church women, particularly in the southern states, faced male opposition as they endeavored to establish and control their own local missionary societies, in order to raise the necessary economic resources for projects that benefitted black women and girls, as well as for projects that benefitted black institutions generally. Fisk graduate Virginia Broughton of Tennessee, the Louisville, Kentucky, educator Mary Cooke Parrish, and the Washington, D.C., educator Nannie Helen Burroughs often drew on female examples from the Bible as they argued that women were called to work as equals with their men for the uplift of their communities.

In so doing, they adopted an explicitly women’s rights rhetoric, a feminist theology of racial uplift, while establishing denomination-based women’s organizations at the state and national levels. Also, as historian Tera Hunter reveals, black working women banded together for economic uplift, conscious of the unique conditions they faced. Washerwomen in Atlanta in 1881 and in 1891 organized to better their economic situation, calling strikes for higher wages. Other Georgia-based women’s associations—for example, the Cooks’ Union and the Working Women’s Society—served as mutual aid and lending societies for their members during illness and financial crisis.

However, it was the rise of the club movement in the 1890s that gave voice to the gender-conscious civic activism of many middle-class and upper-class black women. By the beginning of 1896, two distinct black women’s federations existed. One began with the formation of the Colored Women’s League in 1892 in Washington, D.C. Black educators Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper of the District helped to found the Colored Women’s League, which quickly developed affiliated leagues in the South and West. Their work focused on establishing kindergartens, holding mother’s meetings, and offering a variety of educational programs. The second federation emerged in 1894, when Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, her daughter Florida Ridley, and Maria Louise Baldwin (who was also the first black principal of a school in Cambridge, Massachusetts) founded the Woman’s Era Club.

Married to the black judge George Lewis Ruffin of Boston, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin had been involved in civil rights work and the women’s suffrage movement since the 1870s. She served as the editor and publisher of the *Woman’s Era*, a monthly magazine devoted to issues concerning black women. When Ruffin extended an invitation to representatives of black clubs in different parts of the country to meet in Boston on July 29–31, 1895, about one hundred black women from twenty-five clubs answered her call. This meeting led to



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 Mrs. Frederick Douglas 47 Mrs. Michaux Mrs. L. H. Hawkins 48 Mrs. Sara Flournoy 53 Miss Grant 57 Mrs. Smith
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The Colored Women's League of Washington, dedicated to "Moral Uplift"

a subsequent meeting—the Congress of Colored Women—in Atlanta in December 1895, which launched the National Federation of Afro-American Women under the leadership of Margaret Murray Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington.

The merger of the two federations of various black women's groups—the Colored Women's League and the National Federation of Afro-American Women—created the National Association of Colored Women. Adopting the motto "Lifting as We Climb," the NACW brought together two hundred clubs, thus functioning as a federation of diverse state and local efforts for racial and gender self-help. The regional breadth of the NACW is reflected in the locations of its subsequent biennial meetings: in 1897 in Nashville, Tennessee; in 1899 in Chicago, Illinois; and in 1901 in Buffalo, New York. Historian Deborah Gray White has noted that this powerful association was "unprecedentedly 'feminist' in that NACW leaders insisted that only black women could save the black race." It rapidly rose to become one of the leading organizations for black social and political activism in the first three decades of the twentieth century. NACW members elected Mary Church Terrell as their first president and Margaret Murray Washington as vice president.

The NACW

As the NACW's first president, a post she held until 1901, Mary Church Terrell noted: "We have become National, because from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Maine to the Gulf, we wish to set in motion influences that shall stop the ravages made by practices that

sap our strength, and preclude the possibility of advancement. . . . We refer to the fact that this is an association of colored women, because our peculiar status in this country seems to demand that we stand by ourselves." Terrell believed that by elevating black women's social status, discrimination against the entire race would ebb—hence, all would be lifted by the act of black women's greater acceptance and visibility within the general culture. Toward that end, Terrell focused on building a solid network of black women across the country. The NACW established a monthly newsletter, *National Notes*, to provide information about the group's goals and programs and held conventions every other year in cities with large black populations to help build membership and offer seminars for women.



Mary Church Terrell

miscuous. Mothers clubs were later broadened to address economic concerns of working black women as well as men.

The clubwomen also focused on the problems of youth and women in cities, leading to the establishment of black settlement houses that provided job training. For example, in 1897 the

Urban Settlement Houses

prolific writer, lecturer, and social reformer Victoria Earle Matthews, who led the Woman's Loyal Union of New York City and Brooklyn, established the White Rose Mission for black women migrants to New York. Matthews endeavored to provide housing, industrial training, and moral teaching to black women, who arrived in the city homeless, impoverished, and vulnerable to exploitation. Indeed, numerous black women's clubs engaged in settlement-house work, and in this regard they were inspired by and considered themselves to be part of the reform-minded Progressive movement in American cities.

The black clubwomen established kindergartens, playgrounds, settlement houses, employment training programs, mother's meetings, health clinics, and a host of other services. They sought laws against lynching, voting rights for both black men and women, and

Terrell's racial uplift strategy adopted W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of a Talented Tenth when it came to her organization's leadership. Born into the black elite in Tennessee, Terrell relied on similarly educated black women, female business owners, and professionals to serve as leaders of local NACW chapters. She also tapped into the strong legacy of black women's church-related organizing efforts, drawing many members from these groups. But while she sought racial advancement, Terrell and many other female reformers believed that the domestic sphere was the source of woman's unique power and her ability to enhance the race's social status. Terrell argued that "one reaches both the source of many race problems and an intelligent solution of the same, through the home, the family life, and the child." Black clubwomen's sense of uplift was often articulated in words that conveyed their elitism. They referred to themselves as "women of culture," "social standing," and the "best women" in their communities. Yet uplift's moral connotation also conveyed the clubwomen's anxiety at being lumped together with their "less fortunate" sisters, thus confirming the need for all black women to gain respectability in white America.

NACW chapters implemented kindergartens and nurseries in their local areas. Through mothers clubs, middle-class black women hoped to educate and thereby uplift their "less favored and more ignorant sisters" with information on hygiene and homemaking techniques. Black clubwomen believed that virtuous mothers could serve, by their very existence, as a refutation of white racist notions of black women as immoral and pro-

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Window in Time

Anna Julia Cooper on the Woman Question, 1892

The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. . . . She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both. While the women of the white race can with calm assurance enter upon the work they feel by nature appointed to do, while their men give loyal support and appreciative countenance to their efforts . . . the colored woman too often finds herself hampered and shamed by a less liberal sentiment and a more conservative attitude on the part of those for whose opinions she cares most. That is not universally true I am glad to admit. There are to be found both intensely conservative white men and exceedingly liberal colored men. But as far as my experience goes the average man of our race is less frequently ready to admit the actual need among the sturdier forces of the world for woman's help or influence. . . . But to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages. In the first place, the race is young and full of the elasticity and hopefulness of youth. It does not look on the masterly triumphs of nineteenth century civilization with that blasé world-weary look which characterizes the old washed out and worn out races which have already, so to speak, seen their best days.

Source: Anna J. Cooper, "The Status of Women in America," in *A Voice from the South*. Xenia, Ohio, 1892.

municipal reform in regard to the lack of services in the black communities. Like other urban reformers, they brought both a moral and social scientific perspective to their understanding of the solutions to urban problems, and they looked to models, such as white reformer Jane Addams's Hull House, which served southern and eastern European immigrants in Chicago.

In the Jim Crow South, black clubwomen in Alabama, led by Margaret Murray Washington, promoted black history through statewide essay contests among African American children, beginning in 1899. The Alabama Federation of Colored Women's Clubs celebrated Frederick Douglass's birthday in February. And according to historian Jacqueline Rouse, these early activities were significant forerunners of "Negro History Week," which would be the brainchild of black historian Carter G. Woodson in the 1920s. Membership in the Tuskegee Women's Club was restricted to the women faculty of Tuskegee Institute and the wives and other female relatives of the school's male faculty. The club focused on a variety of activities, visiting incarcerated black men and boys in the town, as well as founding and maintaining a settlement house.

Lugenia Burns Hope, wife of Morehouse College president John Hope, was the primary force behind black women's social work and reform efforts in Atlanta. In 1908 she founded



and led the Neighborhood Union (NU), a network of clubs that provided numerous services to the city's black community. In its formative years, the Neighborhood Union included both middle-class and working-class women. Like white Progressive reformers, the members of the Neighborhood Union conducted studies of urban conditions in their efforts to persuade white city officials to provide adequate public schools, playgrounds, housing, and health care. When the city refused, the women set about the task of delivering needed services. For example, the Neighborhood Union made possible a children's playground on the Morehouse campus, a community health clinic, and a tuberculosis-prevention campaign.

Fannie Barrier Williams, the first person to write extensively about the club work among black women in the race "progress" books and magazines at the turn of the twentieth century, best captured the movement's central role in the era of racial self-help, when she wrote in 1902: "The Negro woman's club of to-day represents the new Negro with new powers of self-help, with new capacities, and with an intelligent insight into her own condition. It represents new interests, new anxieties and new hopes."

Intellectual and Cultural Endeavors

In 1897 black intellectuals, including Alexander Crummell, W. E. B. Du Bois, John W. Cromwell, and Kelly Miller, established the American Negro Academy—a national organization whose members included some of the best educated and most prominent thinkers of their time. Their self-perceptions were shaped by their elite status and by their understanding of the role of the intellectual in the work of racial help. This role was best explained by the black Episcopal priest and proudly race-conscious Alexander Crummell, who believed it the duty of the "trained and scholarly" to uplift the unlettered and uncultured of their race, thus reforming the "opinions and habits of the crude masses." The black intellectual, according to this viewpoint, should use his knowledge as weaponry in defense of his race. The academy captured, just as Crummell's words had done, the self-help ideology as articulated by advocates of the Talented Tenth. Many of the most accomplished women in the black community supported the establishment of the academy, and at its inaugural meeting the admission to membership of several women was proposed. The suggestion was rejected, however, with the indefensible argument that to include women would make the group a social rather than a learned society.

For thirty-one years, the academy promoted the exchange of ideas among black intellectuals and helped perpetuate the black protest tradition in an age of accommodation and proscription. It pursued its goals through annual meetings, special conferences, the publication of occasional papers, the collection of printed materials on blacks, and lobbying for the creation of research centers devoted to the study of Africa and the African American community. It was at the inaugural meeting of this group in 1897 that Du Bois delivered his now classic essay "The Conservation of Races," in which he introduced the double-consciousness, indeed the "dilemma" of being an American and a Negro. Calling attention to "spiritual" and "psychical" differences between the two races, Du Bois advocated a "Pan-Negroism." His strong race pride and consciousness are typical of black leaders during the era of self-help. Central to the essay is Du Bois's emphasis on the need for "race organizations: Negro colleges, Negro newspapers, Negro business organizations, a Negro school of literature and art, and an intellectual clearing house, for all these products of the Negro mind, which we may call a Negro Academy."

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Another intellectual contribution was the Conference on Negro Problems, held annually at Atlanta University between 1896 and 1914 under the general direction of Du Bois. Not only did African Americans come together to discuss their problems, but each year a study of some phase of African American life was made. Du Bois indicated that the 2,172 pages of the published reports formed a “current encyclopedia on the American Negro problems.” Among the more valuable publications of the conference were *Some Efforts of Negroes for Social Betterment* (1898), *The Negro in Business* (1899), *The College-bred Negro* (1900), and *The Negro Common School* (1901). Several of the conference’s reports were enlarged and updated at later meetings.

A substantial number of scholarly and literary works by blacks appeared during the period. Autobiographical writings were particularly popular in America. Such writings generally portrayed heroic deeds and dramatic successes, and African American authors often wrote within this genre. In *The Colored Cadet at West Point* (1889) Henry Ossian Flipper told of his experiences in becoming the first African American to receive a commission from the United States Military Academy. In 1881 Frederick Douglass brought his colorful career up to date in *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, which he enlarged in 1892. The outstanding autobiography of the period was Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* (1900), which became a classic in American literature. Other African American leaders, such as Bishop Daniel A. Payne and John M. Langston, wrote their autobiographies during the period. Two of the better biographical studies were Sarah Bradford’s work on the life of Harriet Tubman, *Harriet, the Moses of Her People* (1886), and Charles W. Chesnutt’s *Frederick Douglass* (1899).

Although numerous “race history” books were written in the era of self-help, the most able historian was George Washington Williams, a Pennsylvanian who had served as a soldier in the Civil War and had been educated in Massachusetts. In 1882 the well-known white publishing company G. P. Putnam’s Sons published in two volumes his *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880*, the result of years of painstaking and laborious research. It was the first historical study by an African American to be taken seriously by American scholars, and one newspaper hailed him as the “Negro Bancroft.” Five years later another major firm, Harper and Brothers, brought out his *History of the Negro Troops in the Rebellion*. Booker T. Washington’s *Story of the Negro* in two volumes (1909) made no improvement on the earlier work of Williams.

In 1896 W. E. B. Du Bois’s doctoral dissertation was published as *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade, 1638–1870*—the first book in the scholarly series Harvard Historical Studies. This was a landmark achievement in the history of scholarship by African Americans. While serving as an assistant instructor at the University of Pennsylvania, Du Bois gathered the material on the black community of Philadelphia that appeared in 1900 in his book *The Philadelphia Negro*, a work considered to be one of the nation’s pioneering sociological studies. Gertrude Bustill Mossell published *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (1894), a historical account from the American Revolution through the nineteenth century.

Ida B. Wells continued to publish protest pamphlets. One was the antilynching pamphlet *A Red Record, Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* (1895). In another, *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition* (1893), she criticized the organizers of the Exposition for not paying tribute to the accomplishments of African Americans.

In a volume of essays titled *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South* (1892), Anna Julia Cooper wrote with great insight about the challenges and opportunities that

African American women faced as they tried to make their way in a world of racial and gender hierarchy. Booker T. Washington wrote numerous books in the fields of education, race relations, economics, and sociology, among them *The Future of the American Negro* (1899), *The Education of the Negro* (1900), *Tuskegee and its People* (1905), and *The Negro in Business* (1907), all of which largely restated his position regarding the place of blacks in American life.

In fiction, the African American writer who made the greatest impression during the period was Charles W. Chesnutt, whose novels and short stories were widely read and generously praised. Between 1899 and 1905, four of his books were favorably received because of their vivid portrayal of character and their quality as lively narratives: *The Conjure Woman* (1899), *The House behind the Cedars* (1900), *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), and *The Colonel's Dream* (1905). Of *The Conjure Woman* Vernon Loggins has said that such a sincere work of art was "positive evidence that Negro literature was coming of age." The NAACP's bestowal of the Spingarn Medal on Chesnutt toward the end of his career was only the most notable expression of the African American community's appreciation of his work. Women also made important contributions to fiction, most notably Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892) and Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* (1900).

Although during his short life Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote several novels, including *The Uncalled* (1898), *The Love of Landry* (1900), and *Sport of the Gods* (1904), he is best known for his poems. The famous white author and literary critic William Dean Howells described Dunbar as the first African American "to feel the Negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically." Frederick Douglass considered Dunbar to be "the most promising black man of his time," and years later, after Dunbar's death, black author Ralph Ellison described him as the first African American to introduce into American literature the "something else which makes for our [African American] strength, which makes for our endurance and promise." His volumes of poetry *Oak and Ivy* (1893), *Majors and Minors* (1896), and *Lyrics of Lovely Life* (1896) have caused many critics to refer to him as the "poet laureate of the Negro race." His poems went through many editions, and by his death in 1906, Dunbar was one of America's famous men of letters.

African Americans of all classes and in every part of the country thrilled to the triumphs and mourned the defeats of black sports heroes, especially those in the highly visible sports of horse racing, boxing, and baseball. For many blacks, these athletes were racial champions whose physical achievements struck a literal and symbolic blow against the "enemies of the race."

Blacks were participants in horse racing as early as the colonial period, especially in the South where the "sport of kings" was popular. A number of southern white enthusiasts had trained their male slaves to become some of the sport's leading jockeys. These early black jockeys served in a variety of capacities, since they were also responsible for feeding, grooming, and the overall care of the horses. On occasion, they also assumed the role of trainer or stable manager. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, slave jockeys continued to be a significant presence, their prowess and skill often making them winners. In the fifty years after the Civil War, black jockeys continued to be familiar figures on the turf. Oliver Lewis, an African American and the winner of the inaugural Kentucky Derby in 1875, was one of several blacks in that race. Of the first twenty-eight Kentucky Derbies that were run, eleven African American jockeys rode fifteen of the winning horses. Abe Hawkins, a black man, is often ranked as the greatest jockey of the late nineteenth century, winning 44 percent of his races, including three Kentucky Derbies and four American Derbies. As the

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nineteenth century drew to a close, however, changes in the organization of the sport and the era's intensified racism combined to eliminate African American jockeys.

African American boxers were leading contenders from the time the sport became popular in the United States in the late eighteenth century. Slave boxing served as both entertainment and a gambling sport for whites. Among the earliest boxers of distinction were Richmond and Tom Molineaux (or Molyneux). Brought to England in 1777 by a British officer, Richmond, a former slave, was styled "the Black Terror." Richmond was the first American to be recognized as a major prizefighter. Molineaux, born a slave in 1784, made his master rich and gained his own freedom through victorious bouts with slaves of neighboring plantations. Once free, Molineaux moved to England, where under the nickname "the Moor" he became a major contender. By the time of his death in 1818, he had competed twice, both times unsuccessfully, for the British heavyweight championship. Following the Civil War, several blacks in the United States emerged as prominent professional boxers.

In 1890 George Dixon, known as "Little Chocolate," was declared bantamweight champion after an eighteen-round fight. In 1891 Dixon, securing next the featherweight title, became the first person to win a double title in boxing history. Dixon held the featherweight title until 1900. From 1901 to 1903, Baltimore-born Joe Gans held the lightweight title.

Jack Johnson, often described as "one of the greatest fighters of all time," was heavyweight champion from 1910 to 1915. In 1910 the return to the ring of white former heavyweight champion Jim Jeffries was hailed as the "Hope of the White Race," and Jeffries himself was reported at the time to have remarked that he had come out of retirement "for the sole purpose of proving that a white man is better than a negro." For African Americans, Johnson's victory over Jeffries vindicated at the very least racial equality. The black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, declared Johnson "the first negro to be admitted the best man in the world."

Whites' alarm over the defeat of their "white hope" grew to such an extent that race riots broke out in several cities, and the United States Congress passed a bill outlawing fight films in movie theaters. Johnson's victories in the ring and his disregard of segregation in his private life—epitomized by his dating of and marriages to white women—so incensed white supremacists that they persuaded Representative Seaborne Roddenbery of Georgia to propose a constitutional amendment in 1912 banning interracial marriage. (The bill failed to pass.) White boxing fans and sports writers continued to search for a "white hope" to defeat him. Johnson's enemies were pleased and his supporters crushed when he lost his title to Jess Willard, a white boxer, on April 5, 1915. It is likely



Jack Johnson, 1878–1946

Johnson was the first African American to win the world heavyweight boxing championship.

that Johnson allowed Willard to knock him out in the twenty-sixth round; indeed, Johnson himself claimed that he threw the fight in return for help in reducing his legal problems.

John W. "Bud" Fowler (John W. Jackson) is thought to have been the first African American professional baseball player. From 1872 to 1900, he played on teams throughout the United States and in Canada, often as the only black man among white teammates. Eventually Fowler and Frank Grant, an African American who got onto white teams by passing as an Italian, formed a team of African American players. Theirs was not the first "all-Negro" team; several had been formed as early as 1885. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the number of these teams grew, and several leagues were formed. By 1900 the color line had become so rigid in baseball that black ball players, with the exception of those passing as white or Hispanic, had no options except the all-Negro teams.

The election of a Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson, in 1912 ushered in a southern style of Progressive reform that included imposing new forms of segregation on the nation's capital and a new policy of racial discrimination in the awarding of Civil Service jobs. The Wilson administration showed little desire to seek Booker T. Washington's or any other black leader's counsel and advice. Gone was the political power of Washington's Tuskegee Machine along with the patronage that blacks enjoyed under Republican presidents. Nor had Washington's tact and moderation halted the racist mobs in the cities of the North and South. The bright star of Tuskegee grew dimmer as his influence waned, and his reputation teetered in the face of a personal debacle. He was still the great man, but he had little time to live. As the year 1916 dawned, Washington would be dead. The times themselves had prophesied change—in the black community and in America—a new fighting spirit. But who knew the world itself would change? Who saw the great and cataclysmic war ahead?

