

What were conditions like for African Americans in the late 1800's and early 1900's?

Segregation – racial separation was practiced in the South, as well as many parts of the North.

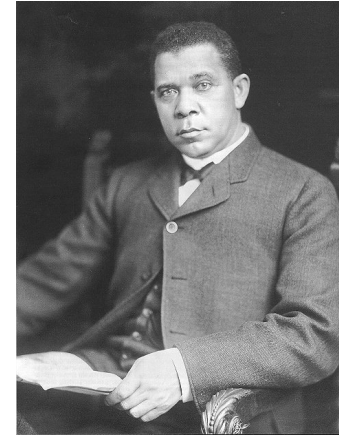
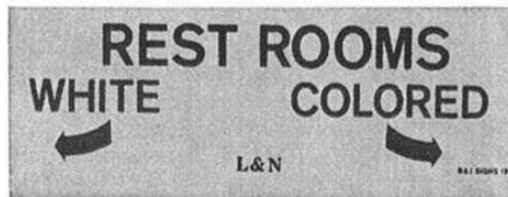
“Jim Crow” laws – starting in 1881, laws were passed in Southern states that enforced racial segregation in public facilities (trains, bathrooms, water fountains, transportation, etc.)

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) – Supreme Court ruled that separate accommodations did not deprive blacks of equal rights if the accommodations were “equal” (they were NOT equal in reality). The decision would later be overturned by the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Williams v. Mississippi (1898) – Court decision that validated literacy tests as a requirement for voting. Many blacks could not read or write or the tests were designed for failure so this disenfranchised most black voters.

Lynching – Terrorism practiced by white supremacist groups like the KKK in both the south and in the north often led to these violent mob hangings. Ida Wells, a black journalist, in an effort to expose the horror of lynching found that an estimated 10,000 Americans were lynched from 1878-1898, many for misdemeanor crimes.

Images Segregation and Racial Terrorism



Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) was born into slavery in Virginia and recalled in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery* (1901) that, "The early years of my life... were not very different from those of other slaves." He attended school (following the Civil War) sporadically throughout his childhood while he worked in salt mines and at age 16, he walked nearly 500 miles to enroll in a new school for black students. He knew that even poor students could get an education at Hampton Institute, paying their way by working. The head teacher was suspicious of his country ways and ragged clothes. She admitted him only after he had cleaned a room to her satisfaction. In one respect he had come full circle, back to earning his living by menial tasks. Yet his entrance to Hampton led him away from a life of forced labor for good. He became an instructor there. Later, as principal and guiding force behind **Tuskegee Institute** in Alabama, which he founded in 1881, he became recognized as the nation's foremost black educator. As one of the most influential black men of his time, Washington was not without his critics. Many charged that his **conservative approach** undermined the quest for racial equality. In part, his methods arose for his need for support from powerful whites, some of them former slave owners. It is now known, however, that Washington secretly funded anti-segregationist activities. He never wavered in his belief in freedom. By the last years of his life, Washington had moved away from many of his accommodationist (tolerant) policies. Speaking out with a new frankness, Washington attacked racism. A man who overcame near-impossible odds himself, Booker T. Washington is best remembered for helping black Americans rise up from the economic slavery that held them down long after they were legally free citizens.

William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) DuBois (1868-1963) was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1868 and never experienced slavery. He was the first African-American to earn a PhD from Harvard. Having grown up in the North, DuBois had never experienced the extreme racism rampant in the South in that era. As a teacher at Atlanta University, he saw racism at its ugliest and most virulent. The cross burning and lynching carried out by such groups as the Ku Klux Klan enraged him. He took on the hate groups the best way he knew how--by using his mind. He taught classes and published papers and books that explored and confronted Southern society, hoping to bring about change through social science. DuBois expressed his sadness, rage and frustration in what many consider his greatest work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). By the turn of the century, DuBois had grown frustrated with trying to fight racism through writing and teaching. He **became an activist**, touring the country and speaking out that racial equality should be immediate, not gradual. He encouraged agitation and protest and **publicly criticized** such black leaders as **Booker T. Washington** for not being radical enough. Many of the protests organized by DuBois turned violent. DuBois neither condoned nor condemned it. In 1905, DuBois founded **The Niagara Movement**, a group of pioneering African-American scholars and leaders that would eventually become **The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP). W.E.B. DuBois' life-long fight for racial equality earned him a lasting and important place in this country's history



Two Viewpoints on African American Advancement during the Progressive Era

Booker T. Washington - 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech

On September 18, 1895, African-American spokesman and leader Booker T. Washington spoke before a predominantly white audience at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. His "Atlanta Compromise" address, as it came to be called, was one of the most important and influential speeches in American history. Washington soothed his listeners' concerns about "uppity" blacks by claiming that his race would content itself with living "by the productions of our hands."

A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, "Cast down your bucket where you are."... *To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, 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, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world, and in nothing is this Exposition more eloquent than in emphasizing this chance. Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life... *No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.*

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing.

In conclusion, ... I pledge that in your effort to work out the great and intricate problem which God has laid at the doors of the South, you shall have at all times the patient, sympathetic help of my race [African-Americans] ... coupled with our [Blacks & Whites] material prosperity, [we] will bring into our beloved South a new heaven and a new earth.

W.E.B. DuBois – 1903 The Souls of Black Folk (excerpts)

The most influential public critique of Booker T. Washington's policy of racial accommodation and gradualism came in 1903 when black leader and intellectual W.E.B. DuBois published an essay in his collection *The Souls of Black Folk* with the title "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others." DuBois rejected Washington's willingness to avoid rocking the racial boat, calling instead for political power, insistence on civil rights, and the higher education of Negro youth.

Honest and earnest criticism... is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society...

Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission... Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic cast, *becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life...* Mr. Washington's programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races... and Mr. Washington withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things, — *First, political power, Second, insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of Negro youth,* — and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South...

The South ought to be led, by candid and honest criticism, to assert her better self and do her full duty to the *race she has cruelly wronged and is still wronging.* The North—her co-partner in guilt—cannot salve her conscience by plastering it with gold...

The black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate,—a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader... But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,—so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them. *By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."*

W.E.B. DuBois – 1903 The Talented Tenth (excerpts)

Men of America, the problem is plain before you. Here is a race transplanted through the criminal foolishness of your fathers. Whether you like it or not millions are here, and here they will remain. If you do not lift them up, they will pull you down. Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work – it must teach Life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. No others can do this and Negro colleges must train men for it. The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men.

Questions:

1. What is Booker T. Washington's advice to blacks to "better their condition"?
2. How does W.E.B. DuBois urge blacks to progress?
3. Which man's opinion do you agree with more? Why?
4. Given the conditions existing in America between 1890 and 1920, which was the more practical solution? Explain.
5. Do you think these men's advice is applicable today? Explain.

