

Migration Hopes and Disappointments

In 1892, immediately following the lynching of her friends in Memphis, Ida B. Wells wrote in the *Free Speech and Headlight*, "There is . . . only one thing left we can do: save money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives or our property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts."²⁷ Many heeded such advice, and shortly she, too, left Memphis, one of some 250,000 southern blacks who left the South between the end of the Civil War and 1910.

Although migration to Kansas subsided after the initial Exoduster movement (see chapter 8), it never stopped, and eventually 25,000 blacks left Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas for Kansas. Black migration to Oklahoma, however, accelerated, and between 1890 and 1910 more than 100,000 blacks settled there, largely in all-black towns. The most famous was Boley, which had more than 1,000 residents in 1907 and some 2,000 black farm families in its vicinity. Like black communities everywhere, Boley featured a range of institutions, including a school, churches, restaurants, fraternal orders, and women's clubs.

Other black men worked in the West as cowboys. The 1890 U.S. census reported 1,600 western cowboys of color. The dangers of the western cattle ranges induced blacks and whites to work together. But for blacks in the U.S. army, discrimination was ever present. When the four black units serving in western forts moved to Florida in preparation for deployment to Cuba in the Spanish-American War, these buffalo soldiers encountered Jim Crow. When racial violence flared in Lakeland and Tampa, Chaplain George Prioleau of the Ninth Cavalry wrote a letter to the editor of the *Cleveland Gazette*, a prominent black newspaper: "Why sir, the Negro of this country is a freeman and yet a slave. Talk about fighting and freeing poor Cuba of Spain's brutality: . . . Is America any better than Spain?"²⁸ The irony of fighting to free Cubans and Filipinos from Spanish oppression was not lost on the soldiers, and Lewis Douglass, son of Frederick Douglass, warned that "injustice to dark races" prevailed wherever the United States took control.²⁹

In 1906, an incident in Brownsville, Texas, where the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment was stationed, captured national attention. When an exchange of fire left one white man injured and another dead, townspeople immediately blamed the black soldiers. There was no evidence against them, and no one was charged or brought to trial, but President Theodore Roosevelt discharged 167 soldiers without honor. Protests by the NACW and the black press, as well as a private message from Booker T. Washington, could not convince Roosevelt to change his mind.

Some southern blacks left the United States altogether, settling in Liberia, the West African colony the American Colonization Society (ACS) had founded in 1821

for the resettlement of free African Americans. In the late nineteenth century, the Back to Africa Movement revived, and roughly 3,800 blacks, or about 238 annually, emigrated to Liberia, mostly under the auspices of the ACS, which still acted as a trustee. The organization's vice president, African Methodist Episcopal bishop Henry McNeal Turner, was the era's most prominent black supporter of black emigration. Believing that blacks would never receive fair treatment in the United States, he also advocated the civilizing and Christianizing mission of African American resettlement and the pride of race a black nation in Africa could bring. But the two groups of emigrants his International Migration Society sponsored in 1895 and 1896 did not fare well. In Liberia, the new settlers suffered from a lack of jobs, high rates of illness and death, and cultural and political clashes with native Liberians. Dissent among them also reduced their enthusiasm, and many returned to the United States.

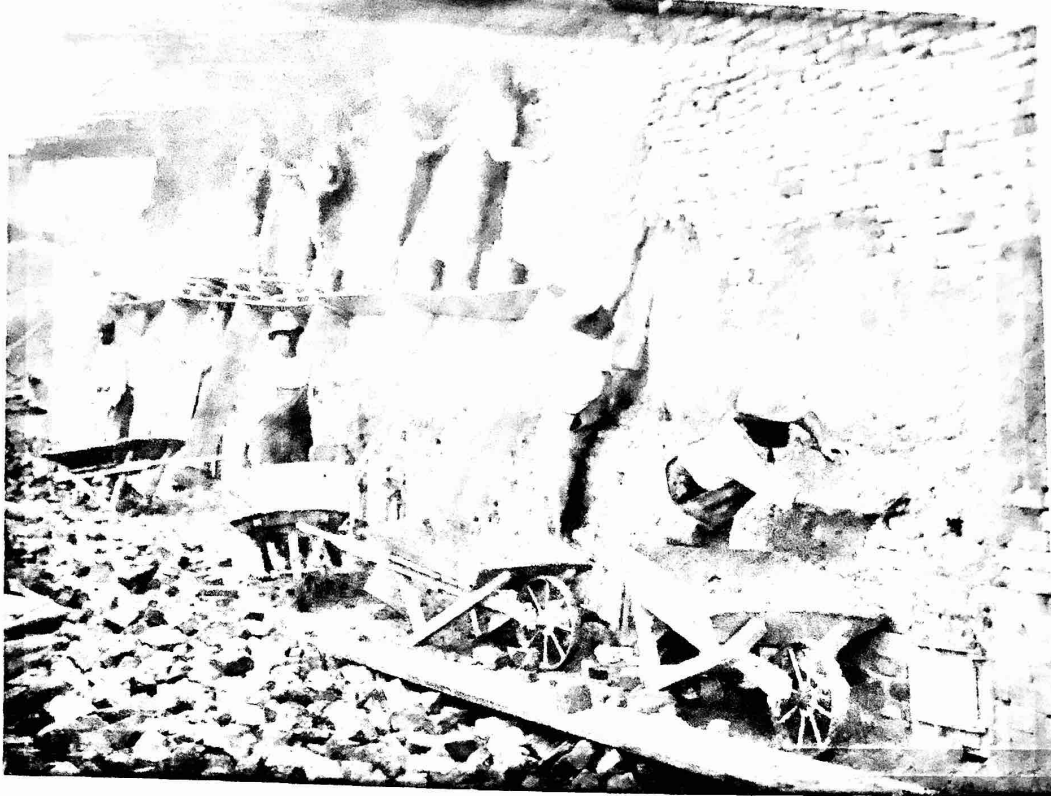
Alexander Crummell, a school companion of Henry Highland Garnet, had fought to be ordained in the Episcopal Church, and under the church's auspices he had gone to Liberia as a missionary. During two decades in Liberia, he and his associate Edward Blyden, who had been born in the West Indies, advanced ideas of black unity and nationalism. But their efforts were unsuccessful, and in 1871 political strife caused Crummell to return to the United States. In addition to leading an Episcopal congregation in Washington, D.C., he wrote and spoke extensively, building an impressive scholarly reputation. In 1897, he founded the American Negro Academy, dedicated to advancing black scholarship and black intellectual life.

West Indian blacks like Blyden also sought relief from oppression by immigrating to the cities of the North, where they contributed significantly to the development of communities such as Harlem. In 1900, there were roughly 5,000 foreign-born blacks in New York City, and by 1910 almost 12,000. Most were from the British Caribbean, notably Jamaica and Barbados, where there was limited economic opportunity. Caribbean immigrant Harold Ellis observed, "You were never able to come out of the class in which you were born down there," while in the United States, "there was prejudice . . . but it was better than having no hope."³⁰

The Age of Booker T. Washington

The preeminent African American spokesman between 1895 and 1915 was Booker T. Washington, head of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, which he helped found. Emphasizing economic nationalism, race pride, racial solidarity, and interracial goodwill, Washington formulated an uplift program that reflected the spirit of the times. He was the era's most powerful race leader because of his ability to voice black people's concerns and to work with influential whites by preaching racial conciliation.

From his slave beginnings, Washington's rise to greatness is a classic American success story, carefully recounted in his 1901 autobiography, *Up from Slavery*. Born in 1856 to a slave cook and unknown white father in Franklin County, Virginia, he was eager to succeed, and his mother supported his desire for an education. The family moved to West Virginia after the Civil War, and there nine-year-old Booker got up early to work in the salt mines so that later in the day he could attend a few hours of school. At age sixteen, he walked five hundred miles to enroll in Hampton Institute, where he worked as a janitor to pay his room and board. He worked hard to impress those in authority, especially whites, with his moral character, work ethic, ambition, and intelligence.



Tuskegee Brickmasonry Students

This photograph is a clear-eyed representation of Booker T. Washington's belief that manual labor offered respectable employment for decent pay and built good character and solid citizens. It also clearly calls forth the related belief that manual labor was a key to black progress, a philosophy that formed the guiding principle at Washington's Tuskegee Institute. *The Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee University.*

At Hampton, Washington came under the influence of Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the school's president and a leading promoter of industrial and agricultural education for blacks. In 1881, after Washington had graduated and returned to Hampton as a teacher, Armstrong arranged for his protégé to head what was being organized as Tuskegee Institute for Negroes in rural southeastern Alabama. Washington first held classes in an AME Zion church. His students, learning bricklaying, literally built the school on the site of an abandoned plantation. Washington's fund-raising and public relations efforts helped achieve not only solvency but fame for the school. By 1915, when he died, Tuskegee was enrolling 1,500 students a year, with a campus of 3,500 acres and some 100 buildings.

Washington worked hard to secure state funding and the support of northern white philanthropists, who were attracted by the Hampton-Tuskegee model of vocational education for black youths because it promoted individual and collective advancement within the confines of Jim Crow. Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, who made fortunes from steel and oil in the new industrial age, were regular contributors to Tuskegee. Julius Rosenwald, part owner of Sears, Roebuck, piloted a program with Washington that ultimately led to the creation of 5,000 rural schools for black children in the South. With Tuskegee as a base of operations, Washington emerged as an increasingly influential

black educator and spokesman. In 1900, he founded the National Negro Business League, a network of black business and professional men that encouraged the development of black-owned and operated enterprises. Washington cultivated loyalists within black business, church, education, and press circles. His stature allowed him to exercise great power, which he used to sustain his friends and supporters and ruthlessly cut off those who crossed him. His network became known as the Tuskegee Machine, and the era he dominated as the Age of Booker T. Washington.

In 1895, Washington delivered a speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta that gave classic expression to themes he had refined for more than a decade. Speaking to a largely white audience, he argued that economic uplift, especially business development and industrial education, was the best course for black advancement. Portraying black southerners as loyal and patient, he encouraged them to begin "at the bottom of life" and not "permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities." "Cast down your bucket where you are," he urged his listeners; black people should not seek to better their condition outside the South, and white employers should hire African Americans rather than foreign laborers. Finally, he called black agitation for social equality "the extremest folly." He concluded, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."³¹ Washington's **Atlanta Compromise speech** was masterful precisely because its multiple messages allowed different audiences to hear what they wanted. Most important for black people were the elements of hope and possibility for a brighter future. The emphasis on self-help, solidarity, economics, and making the most of life within the confines of segregation hit widely popular notes. Most important for whites was **accommodationism**, Washington's urging of an acceptance of the racial status quo, including segregation.

Frederick Douglass had died earlier that year, and whites now looked to Washington as the heir apparent: the lead voice of African Americans. Philanthropists relied on his advice regarding which black institutions and causes to support, and Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft consulted him before dispensing political patronage positions available to blacks. But Roosevelt incurred much criticism in 1901 when he invited Washington to dine at the White House, a breach of custom that offended white leaders in the South. Nevertheless, Washington continued his public efforts to promote interracial harmony by squaring black uplift with white goodwill. Privately, he spent large sums of money to defeat Jim Crow legislation and mount legal challenges, secretly retaining lawyers and working through intermediaries. These efforts were unknown to all but a few highly trusted contemporaries.

The Emergence of W. E. B. Du Bois

Washington's approach to black education and his dictatorial methods drew criticism from black leaders in the North, especially at first William Monroe Trotter, the radical Harvard-educated editor of the *Boston Guardian*, one of the most uncompromising black newspapers of its day. Trotter viewed accommodationism as a betrayal of black people and made it a mission of his paper to challenge Washington. When, in 1903, Washington tried to deliver a speech at a black church in Boston, opponents led by Trotter heckled him. Washington was further incensed when a fight broke out, and he took Trotter to court over what came to be called the Boston Riot. Trotter was fined \$500 and sent to jail for a month for his role in the affair.



Booker T. Washington (left) and W. E. B. Du Bois (right)

Washington and Du Bois, both brilliant and ambitious and both zealously dedicated to their people's elevation, were the preeminent African American leaders of their day. These photographs capture their common seriousness of purpose, unwavering commitment, and laserlike intensity. Despite their differences in philosophy—particularly Washington's accommodationism versus Du Bois's militancy—and the rift that developed between them, they agreed on the ultimate goal for African Americans: full freedom and equality. *Left: Library of Congress, LC-J694-255; right: Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-16767.*

Soon, W. E. B. Du Bois also became a vocal critic of Washington's accommodationism, but the two black leaders were not polar opposites. Du Bois's racial uplift ideology in many ways mirrored that of Washington and mainstream black thought. In light of Du Bois's own emphasis on racial solidarity, economic advancement, and hard work, he initially found much to admire in Washington's program. Also like Washington, Du Bois at times stressed blacks' responsibilities and duties more than their grievances and rights. He even praised Washington's Atlanta Compromise speech as a hopeful and viable program for racial progress.

Yet their lives had been very different. Du Bois had been born in 1868 to a family that had been free for generations. Reared largely by his mother in a small black community within essentially white Great Barrington, Massachusetts, he was a precocious child and brilliant student. He was also enormously ambitious and disciplined. His stellar academic credentials included an undergraduate degree from Fisk in 1889 and undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard, including a Ph.D. in 1895. Trained as a historian, he also did pioneering work in the emerging field of sociology. In the early 1900s, Du Bois taught at Atlanta University, where he conducted a series of path-breaking studies of black life.

Du Bois was always far more outspoken than Washington about black rights and the need for the vote. Their differences grew as Jim Crow laws and black disfranchisement intensified. Du Bois also placed far more emphasis on the need for liberal arts and advanced scientific and technical education for blacks. His vision reflected an elitist, top-down leadership style. Advocating the most advanced college curricula for the academically talented, Du Bois thus hoped to prepare what he called the "talented tenth" for the rigors of race leadership.

The bitter break between Du Bois and Washington owed directly to Washington's use of his Tuskegee Machine and the lengths to which he would go to punish opponents, especially Trotter. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois spelled out his objections to accommodationism: "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, and accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South." Yet this approach, Du Bois pointed out, produced only disfranchisement, "civil inferiority," and a "withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro." Moreover, Washington's approach "has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders . . . when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs."³² The program Du Bois announced in *The Souls of Black Folk* guided his actions for the rest of his life.

Du Bois's race leadership linked national and international developments. He helped assemble an exhibit for the 1900 Paris World's Fair that summarized African American achievements since emancipation. (See Visual Sources: *Exhibit of American Negroes at the Paris World's Fair*, pp. 480–89.) That summer, he also led the African American delegation, which included Anna Julia Cooper, to the first **Pan-African Congress**, in London. The Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams, who called the meeting, promoted the concept of **Pan-Africanism**—the notion, held by those both within and outside the African continent, of a shared global sense of African identity as well as an abiding concern for the welfare of Africans everywhere. Delegates from Great Britain, the United States, the West Indies, and Africa condemned the partition of Africa into European colonies. Previous African American leaders such as Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden, as well as Martin R. Delany and Henry M. Turner, had not protested the European colonization of Africa because they saw in it a civilizing influence. But Du Bois perceived its liabilities. In his address to the congress, he warned, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, the question as to how far differences of race, which show themselves chiefly in the color of the skin and hair, are going to be made, hereafter, the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization."³³

In 1905, Du Bois helped launch the **Niagara movement**, a militant protest organization of black intellectuals and professionals that, in opposition to Washington's program, tried to revitalize a national black civil rights agenda. Local actions by National Equal Rights League auxiliaries, particularly challenges to unequal educational opportunities for blacks (Map 9.2), had continued in northern states into the 1880s. T. Thomas Fortune led two efforts to resurrect a national civil rights movement, but both foundered. The National Afro-American League lasted from 1889 to 1893 and the National Afro-American Council from 1898 to 1908 (Fortune left in 1904).

When Du Bois and Trotter met on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls to write a declaration of principles for the Niagara movement, they expressed goals similar to those of the National Afro-American League and the National Afro-American Council: voting rights, equal educational opportunities, and opposition to segregation. But Fortune, a Washington supporter, was notably absent, as was Washington himself. The energetic "Niagaraites" stressed "persistent manly agitation," not accommodation, as "the way to liberty."³⁴

Ida B. Wells initially maintained connections with both the National Afro-American Council and the Niagara movement. Early on she headed the Council's antilynching bureau and served as convention secretary for three years. In June 1895 she married Ferdinand L. Barnett, founder of the *Conservator*, Chicago's first black newspaper, becoming Ida B. Wells-Barnett. She and her husband were strong supporters of the Niagara movement. But undermined by money woes, infighting, and Washington's powerful opposition, the movement achieved few tangible results.

In September 1906, Du Bois witnessed firsthand a vicious race riot in Atlanta. Five days of lawlessness left ten blacks and one white dead and black areas of the city devastated. Two years later, in 1908, a race riot in Springfield, Illinois, the hometown of Abraham Lincoln, grabbed the nation's attention. A white woman's false rape accusation against a black man led rampaging whites to lynch two innocent black men and wreak havoc on the black community.

The Springfield race riot made it clear that racial tensions were a national, not just a southern, problem. In the wake of this riot, a distinguished roster of black and white progressives issued a call for an interracial organization to end racial discrimination and inequality. Those signing the call and attending the 1909 meeting to establish the National Negro Committee included Du Bois, Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, as well as prominent white reformers such as journalists Mary White Ovington, Oswald Garrison Villard (grandson of William Lloyd Garrison), and Ray Stannard Baker, and social workers Jane Addams and Lillian Wald. At its 1910 meeting, the organization became the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**. (See From the Record: Platform.)

With a home office in New York City and branch offices opening in Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C., the NAACP quickly became the nation's leading civil rights organization, with notable early successes in spite of very limited funds. Filing a brief in *Guinn v. United States* (1915), it

helped overturn Oklahoma's grandfather clause, which enhanced black disfranchisement. Protesting *The Birth of a Nation*, the 1915 film that glorified the role of the Ku Klux Klan in the overthrow of Black Reconstruction, the NAACP shut down showings in some cities and forced offensive scenes to be edited out. From its beginnings, the NAACP was vital to national efforts to end lynching. As director of publicity and research, Du Bois founded and edited the organization's journal, the *Crisis*, in which he published lynching reports and statistics together with wide-ranging news coverage and opinion pieces on issues important to African Americans. Under his direction, the journal's circulation grew from 1,000 for the first issue in November 1910 to 100,000 nine years later. When Washington died in 1915, Du Bois had already emerged as the nation's preeminent black spokesman for a comprehensive civil rights agenda and a well-supported program of organized protest.

CONCLUSION

Uplift

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else." This saying, attributed to Booker T. Washington, exemplifies how black Americans kept hope alive in the decades between 1885 and 1915, which are sometimes described as the nadir of African American history. After Reconstruction, blacks lost ground. Without land, they struggled for economic independence. States imposed segregation laws and permitted Jim Crow practices that relegated blacks to inferior public facilities and branded them as racial inferiors. Disfranchisement, peonage, and lynching structured powerful systems of racial oppression that kept African Americans at the bottom of every hierarchy in American politics, law, and society.

But many blacks and the institutions they built avoided these traps, subverted these realities, and surmounted these obstacles. Turning inward, freedom's first generation intensified their emphasis on racial solidarity, self-help, and economic nationalism. They strengthened their communities, seeing them as the best way to endure and even thrive in the increasingly restrictive world of Jim Crow. A powerful network of black institutions—churches, schools, businesses, mutual aid societies, and newspapers—blossomed. A new culture of freedom unleashed new forms of creativity in music, literature, and the arts. Ultimately, black leaders joined with white progressives to form a new civil rights organization that mobilized against racial injustice. Freedom's first generation thus opened the way for the New Negroes of the twentieth century to forge new and even more productive paths of resistance and achievement.