AP US History
7 - Industrialization and Expansion
Washington and DuBois

Surviving Southern Repression: The Era of Booker T. Washington
In the South and North, the hopes inspired by the Emancipation Proclamation and Radical Reconstruction lay shattered. Blacks faced growing obstacles not only to a decent life but even to basic survival. Against all odds, they tried to forge strategies that might make possible a better life in America.

In the South, black political activity survived for more than two decades after the Redeemers took power. Even during the first decade of the twentieth century, blacks still engaged in political activities such as boycotting newly segregated streetcars, boycotting newspapers that were especially abusive (for example, referring to black children as "coons"), and campaigning against efforts to disfranchise them. But once the ballot was lost, open protest became extremely dangerous. Not until after World War II would the region's blacks be able once again to fight back politically.

As racial oppression grew, one option was simply to leave the South. Immediately after Reconstruction, many blacks became interested in moving westward. Just after Alabama's Democrats won control of the state from the Radical Republicans in 1874, a black convention in Montgomery declared that, like the Israelites, blacks have to "seek new homes … beyond the reign and rule of Pharaoh." Southern crop failures in 1878 sparked further interest, and early in 1879 black conventions in New Orleans, Vicksburg, and Nashville sought to promote westward migration. The movement was led by Benjamin "Pap" Singleton and Henry Adams, both former slaves, who encouraged blacks to resettle in Kansas. By August 1879, some 7,000 had taken their advice (while thousands of others moved elsewhere in the West).

Some black leaders, such as Richard T. Greener, dean of the Howard University Law School, approved of this development. But Frederick Douglass and others saw migration as a surrender to racism; he believed that blacks must fight bigotry wherever they were.

The westward migration collapsed following a hostile welcome from local whites and a harsh winter in 1879–80. In the early 1890s, migration to the Oklahoma Territory began; the migrants established over two dozen all-black towns, beginning with Langston in 1891. Because the settlers separated themselves from whites, their towns were allowed to survive; however, the residents lived in severe poverty.

Some blacks seeking to escape rural poverty went to southern cities to find work. But southern industrial growth was limited, and blacks faced discrimination. Mostly for economic reasons, a small but growing stream of blacks began moving toward northern cities around 1890, but the flow remained limited until World War I.

Booker T. Washington, president of Tuskegee Institute, was the most powerful black man in America from the mid-1890s to his death in 1915. He urged blacks to put aside civil rights issues and concentrate on building up their economic power.

Some black leaders tried to revive separatism. In the late nineteenth century, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal church urged blacks to return to Africa while Bishop Lucius H. Holsey of the Colored Methodist Episcopal church called on the federal government to create a state for blacks in the West. Few blacks found either proposal attractive.

Neither political action, migration within the country, nor emigration out of America offered much hope; therefore, blacks turned increasingly toward self advancement through the development of their own communities. One approach was through education, and educational progress was in fact one of the few bright spots in the lives of southern blacks after Reconstruction. Black illiteracy declined from over 90 percent in 1865 to about 30 percent in 1913 (although in 1917 only 2,132 blacks were in college). In 1900 over 1.5 million black schoolchildren were being taught by 29,000 black teachers. This achievement is especially impressive considering that the Redeemer governments discriminated against black schools. While state legislatures used tax revenues to lengthen the school year, increase teachers' salaries, and reduce class size for white schools, they sharply cut funds for black schools. Florida in 1898 spent $5.92 per white student and $2.27 per black student; South Carolina in 1915 spent $13.98 for each white student and only $2.57 for each black student.

To compensate, the major black religious denominations all worked to establish and improve black schools. By 1900, for example, black Baptist churches were supporting 80 elementary and high schools. The denominations also speeded up the process, begun during Reconstruction, of creating black colleges. The African Methodist Episcopal church founded six colleges between 1870 and 1886, and the Colored Methodist Episcopal church founded four between 1878 and 1902. In 1900 there were 34 such institutions. Blacks could not have established secondary schools and colleges without financial help from the white religious denominations. Assistance came from the American Missionary Association, an arm of the Congregational church. Additional aid came from the Baptists' Home Mission Society and the Methodist Episcopal church's Freedmen's Aid Society.

Also crucial to the development of black schools were wealthy white capitalists who had made their fortunes in the late-nineteenth-century industrial boom, including oil millionaire John D. Rockefeller, railroad magnate Collis F. Huntington, and steel baron Andrew Carnegie. One motive for their financial contributions was certainly humanitarian: they felt an obligation to help the less fortunate. But northern capitalists also hoped to benefit from their generosity. After the Civil War, they became major investors in the South, and they knew that improved education would make their southern workforces more productive. They were especially interested in giving money to industrial schools that taught practical craft and mechanical skills, rather than to liberal arts institutions.

Much of the white funding for industrial education went to Booker T. Washington, the South's foremost black educator. The slave son of a black mother and a white father, he attended Hampton Institute, a Virginia vocational school, in the 1870s. In 1881 Washington organized an industrial school in Tuskegee, Alabama. At Tuskegee Institute men learned to become better farmers as well as carpenters, painters, plumbers, blacksmiths, bricklayers, and other types of skilled workers. Women at Tuskegee learned such "female" skills as nursing, cooking, and sewing. By 1890 Washington had developed a good reputation among southern white leaders, and when he began going North in the early 1890s to raise funds for his school, the educator expanded his circle of powerful white friends.

The Strategy of Self-Development

Then, in 1895, Washington gave a speech that suddenly turned him into one of America's major leaders, regardless of race; it made him a highly influential figure among whites and the dominant figure in black America until his death in 1915. Invited to give an address at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exhibition, he used the opportunity to present his philosophy of race relations and his views on black advancement. Washington stated that blacks should abandon the political struggle against discrimination and assured his mostly white audience that "the wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly." Blacks would carve out their place in American society, he believed, not by political activity but by being thrifty, working hard, and acquiring trade, farming, and business skills—that is, by education and economic self-advancement.

Whites, Washington told his audience, should encourage such efforts at advancement and make blacks partners in building the southern economy. He noted that in the past blacks "have, without strikes and labor wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth." If given the encouragement, Washington continued, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories. While doing this, you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen. He was saying, in other words, that southern blacks had been and could continue to be a source of cheap labor that did not cause trouble.

The sentence that came closest to summing up the address was Washington's assurance that "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." Essentially Washington was offering whites a deal that became known as the Atlanta Compromise: blacks would abandon the political struggle for equality in exchange for a role—and a subordinate one at that—in the economy. This was just what southern whites wanted to hear from a black man. And so to many whites, Washington was a savior who had found a solution to the race problem based essentially on white terms.

The reaction to his address was swift. After he had finished talking, whites walked up to shake his hand, a violation of the southern racial code, which decreed that blacks must never be treated as equals. The next day he was flooded with telegrams praising the speech. Soon after, a speakers' bureau offered Washington $50,000—an enormous amount of money then—to make a series of addresses. President Grover Cleveland thanked him "with great enthusiasm" for making the speech. The Charleston News and Courier praised him, but in a way that insulted blacks in general: "His skin is colored, but his head is sound and his heart is in the right place." The Atlanta Constitution described the speech as "the most remarkable address delivered by a colored man in America." Washington became a man of great power. Wealthy white capitalists in the North sought his advice before contributing to black colleges; he urged them to give to industrial schools that taught trade skills rather than to liberal arts colleges offering a broader education in the arts and humanities. This control over contributions gave him great influence over black educators. When Republicans controlled the White House, they gave low-level federal jobs to blacks. After 1900, Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft turned to Booker T. Washington for advice about which blacks should receive them, and they usually followed his recommendations. Roosevelt even invited Washington to dine at the White House in October 1901, partly to discuss black appointments. His influence over federal patronage was another source of Washington's power within the black community.

Washington's great influence with powerful whites enabled him to develop a huge circle of black allies—known as the Tuskegee Machine—that became the dominant political force throughout black America. Black politicians and educators could not afford to cross him because of his control over political patronage and school aid. Black newspaper editors were afraid of his power to retaliate against them; thus, not much criticism of the Tuskegee president appeared in print.

Some have argued that Washington became the chief black leader in the country only because powerful whites allowed him to. Certainly, this accusation contains a great deal of truth; Washington could not have risen as he did without the support of leading whites. Yet at the same time, most blacks in both the North and the South admired him as their foremost leader. One group in the black community in particular agreed with Washington's philosophy. As we have seen, the growth of housing segregation in both northern and southern cities led to the development of a new, expanding class of black professionals and businesspersons serving mostly black neighborhoods. These blacks owed their success to patience, hard work, thrift, and education rather than to political battles against discrimination. Also, their roots were in the emerging black ghettos that provided them with almost all of their

customers. The preceding generation of black businesspeople had had white customers and aspired to equality with whites. But the new generation had little if any white clientele, rarely associated with whites, and had little interest in doing so. The members of the new black bourgeoisie identified with Booker T. Washington's approach of self-reliance and noninvolvement in politics, and they formed the core of his black support. Washington sought to advance the fortunes of that class—and also to strengthen his power—by creating in 1900 the National Negro Business League, of which he became president.

Was Washington an Uncle Tom?

Booker T. Washington has been accused of being merely an Uncle Tom, a tool of powerful whites for controlling blacks. It is true that Washington often sounded as if he were speaking for whites as he urged blacks to create their own opportunities by hard work instead of demanding that whites eliminate discrimination through legal and political concessions. "I fear that the Negro race lays too much stress on its grievances and not enough on its opportunities," he said. In a speech at Fisk University, he advised blacks to react to discrimination and mob violence with "patience, forbearance, and self-control" and asked them "to suffer in silence."

But if whites believed that Washington favored black subordination forever, they were mistaken. As a black southerner, Washington was trying to develop a strategy for black progress in an extremely hostile environment. By the time of his Atlanta speech in 1895, the racial advances of Reconstruction were turning into a nightmare of retreat. The opportunities for effective black political activity were dwindling. Discrimination seemed a fact of life for the immediate future. Under these conditions, Washington concluded that the only thing blacks could do was improve the economic fortunes of themselves and their communities by self-help. As their importance in the U.S. economy increased, he believed, blacks would eventually achieve legal and political equality.

If whites had listened more carefully to the Atlanta speech, they might have understood this when he said: "No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ignored. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours." Washington worked quietly behind the scenes against black disfranchisement, segregation, and exclusion of blacks from juries. But considering the overwhelming prejudice against blacks, he thought that public protest would only cause an angry white backlash. He may or may not have been right, but his position was understandable. Some have credited him with sowing the seeds of black nationalism by urging black self-reliance and the building up of the black community. Indeed, the ghetto-based black entrepreneurs who enthusiastically backed him would be among the leading supporters of future nationalist organizations; also, future nationalist leaders such as Marcus Garvey would hail Washington as one of the inspirations for their movements.

But even if Washington cannot fairly be condemned as an Uncle Tom, the effectiveness of his strategy can be questioned. He urged blacks to acquire craft skills and establish small businesses just at a time when the new, giant industrial corporations were wiping out craft jobs and swallowing up small businesses. Also, it is difficult to separate economic and political issues, as Washington tried to do. So long as blacks faced severe discrimination, most would face restricted economic opportunities and would remain poor. And although the segregation of blacks into ghettos might create opportunities for black professionals and businesspeople, the average black consumer had little money to spend, and this sharply limited the growth of the black middle class. Furthermore, black businesspersons faced discrimination in obtaining the credit they needed to maintain and expand their businesses. The National Negro Business League reported that black enterprises doubled in number from 20,000 to 40,000 between 1910 and 1914. But they still represented the efforts of just a small minority within a black population of about 10 million.

Washington has also been accused of promoting racial discrimination and violence by encouraging whites to believe that blacks would not resist oppression. It is impossible to know for certain whether there is any truth to this charge. We can say, however, that he certainly did not reduce the severity of racism and discrimination. In fact, the situation deteriorated after his Atlanta address: disfranchisement and segregation spread in the South in the years after his speech, as did housing segregation and employment discrimination in the North. For these and other reasons, northern blacks and white liberals began to form organizations that broke with Washington's approach to racial issues.

Resisting Oppression: Voices From the North

From the beginning, Booker T. Washington had black critics. One was John Hope, president of Atlanta University and later of Morehouse College. He commented on Washington's Atlanta Exposition address in February 1896, five months after it was made:

> I regard it as cowardly and dishonest for any of our colored men to tell white people and colored people that we are not struggling for equality.... If equality, political, economic, and social, is the boon of other men in this great country of ours, then equality, political, economic, and social, is what we demand.

But most supporters of the civil rights struggle came from the North, where blacks were freer to express themselves. On October 6, 1895—less than three weeks after Washington's address—the Detroit Tribune commented sarcastically that the "latest Tennessee lynching should be exhibited at the Atlanta Exposition as a fine specimen of one of the staple products of the South." In 1900 T. Thomas Fortune—editor of the New York Age and founder in 1890 of the short—lived Afro American League, a civil rights organization—expressed a very different view from Washington's, stating: "It took tons of blood to put the Fifteenth Amendment into the Constitution and it will take tons to put it out. You want to organize and keep your powder dry."

Harry C. Smith, editor of the Cleveland Gazette since the 1880s, attacked all forms of discrimination and was a strong supporter of integrated schools, believing that they were the key to ending racial prejudice. In 1890 Smith was a cofounder of the Afro-American League with T. Thomas Fortune, and subsequently he became a critic of Washington. In 1901 William Monroe Trotter and George Forbes founded the Boston Guardian specifically to oppose Washington. Driven by an intense dislike of the Tuskegee educator's views, Trotter in 1903 attended the national convention of the Washington-controlled Afro-American Council. He tried to present anti-Washington resolutions but was not recognized. Just a few weeks later, on July 30, 1903, Trotter was in the audience for a speech by Washington at the AME Zion Church in Boston. Trotter shouted out hostile questions at Washington, and the commotion that followed became known as the Boston Riot. Trotter served a month in jail for his disruption.

Ida Wells-Barnett took a very different approach than Washington. Editor of the Memphis Free Speech in Tennessee, in 1892 she denounced in her newspaper the lynching of three of her friends. Two months later, she wrote another antilynching editorial. Soon afterward, when Wells-Barnett was out of town, a white mob burned down the newspaper's offices in retaliation, and she was warned never to return to Memphis. Wells-Barnett moved to the North, where she wrote antilynching articles for the New York Age and went

on antilynching lecture tours. Believing that pressure from abroad could help blacks, she visited Britain in 1893 and 1894. Her trips inspired the formation of several British antilynching and antisegregation organizations.

Black women's clubs that sprang up in the 1890s were by no means anti Washington, and their primary purpose was not to promote equal rights. Rather, they were self-help groups that established such programs as nurseries and kindergartens for the children of black working women, girls' homes, and evening schools for adults. Yet the clubs did have a political dimension. The major organization of black women's clubs—the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), founded in 1896 and headed by Mary Church Terrell—supported the white-led women's suffrage movement and urged it to back the right of black as well as white women to vote. The NACW also spoke out on issues such as lynching and Jim Crow.

W. E. B. DuBois and the Niagara Movement

In 1903 a collection of essays called The Souls of Black Folk appeared. Its author was W. E. B. DuBois, a northerner teaching history at Atlanta University and the first black American to receive a doctor of philosophy degree. A landmark in black history, the volume included a thoughtful and eloquent criticism of Booker T. Washington. DuBois acknowledged that Washington's Atlanta address had made him "the most distinguished Southerner since Jefferson Davis." But he went on to speak on behalf of those "educated and thoughtful colored men in all parts of the land … [who feel] deep regret, sorrow, and apprehension at the wide currency and ascendancy which some of Mr. Washington's theories have gained." DuBois attacked the two major elements of Washington's thinking: his emphasis on industrial education over higher learning (such as literature, history, and science), and his belief that the black struggle for legal and political equality should be abandoned, at least for the foreseeable future.

DuBois believed that blacks, like any other group, could not advance themselves without the leadership of highly educated individuals, whom he called the Talented Tenth. Mere industrial education, he argued, could not create such a leadership group. DuBois also believed that without legal and political rights, blacks' chances for advancement were small. He asked,
Is it possible and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meager chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any answer to these questions, it is an emphatic NO.

Furthermore, DuBois felt that black dignity was more important than economic well-being and that Washington's philosophy was especially harmful on that score. He asserted that accepting legalized discrimination, as Washington urged, "is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run." Furthermore, DuBois contended that by advocating industrial education and money making to the exclusion of almost anything else, Washington was preaching a "Gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life." DuBois argued that Washington "practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro race" and stated that "Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys."

W. E. B. DuBois was an outstanding black scholar and civil rights leader. He criticized Booker T. Washington for telling blacks not to fight for equal rights.

Those blacks who wished to continue the fight for civil rights realized that the days when they could count on the Republicans for help were gone. During the first two years of his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt took several actions that encouraged blacks. For example, he invited Booker T. Washington to the White House in 1901 (an act that enraged southern whites) and appointed a black customs collector in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1903. But later on he showed almost complete indifference to black needs. In particular, blacks resented his reaction to a riot in Brownsville, Texas. Responding to racial insults, parts of three companies in the black 25th Infantry participated in the riot. The 25th had served valiantly in the Spanish-American War. But when some of its men refused to identify the guilty soldiers, Roosevelt discharged the 3 companies—167 men and officers—without honor. Blacks had long taken pride in the achievements of their soldiers, and they remembered this incident with bitterness for decades. President William Howard Taft, elected in 1908, was too interested in building southern white support for the Republican Party to take any interest in black needs.

With no hope of government support, blacks seeking full equality had to take the initiative. In 1905 DuBois followed up his words with action when he called a meeting of educated blacks who shared his views. In July 1905, 29 blacks gathered at Niagara Falls, Canada. More would have attended, but pressure from Washington and his allies had frightened some people away. The gathering formed the Niagara Movement and chose DuBois as its leader. This founding conference published a platform that demanded for blacks "every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil, and social." More specifically, the document called for manhood suffrage regardless of race, the elimination of all caste distinctions founded on color, and equal employment opportunities. (Employers and unions both were denounced as responsible for employment discrimination.) The platform also advocated constant protest to achieve these goals.

By the end of 1905, DuBois claimed that 17 states had active branches of the Niagara Movement. In 1906 the Illinois branch helped secure the appointment of a black to the New Chicago Charter Committee, which reportedly was considering a proposal for segregated schools. The Illinois branch also fought the spread of racist ideas at a time when, as we have seen, they were becoming more common in the various arts. In 1906 a stage play called The Clansman—based on a novel by Thomas Dixon—opened in Chicago. It portrayed blacks of the Reconstruction era as ignorant, corrupt, and determined to have sexual relations with white women, by rape if necessary. With the help of Jane Addams, a white social worker in Chicago, the chapter persuaded local critics not to review the play. Meanwhile, the Massachusetts chapter fought a bill in the state legislature to legalize segregated railroad cars. In 1907 the national organization urged all northern branches to fight for civil rights legislation and southern branches to fight discrimination in railroad accommodations. Chapters also were asked to seek new trials for blacks convicted on doubtful evidence by juries from which blacks had been excluded.

But the Niagara Movement did not accomplish very much. DuBois sought recruits only from what he called "the very best class" of blacks—the Talented Tenth—and membership was probably never more than a few hundred. The gap between DuBois' Talented Tenth and the great majority of blacks was so large that the movement never had much influence among ordinary people. Also, the Niagara Movement did not have enough money; pressure from Washington discouraged wealthy, sympathetic whites from contributing. Finally, conflict between DuBois and William Monroe Trotter weakened the organization. Only 19 members attended the group's fourth annual meeting in 1908.

Write your answers on another sheet of paper in complete sentences with correct spelling and grammar. Be sure to reword the question in your answer.

1. Why did blacks move west from 1870-1900? Why did some racially mixed towns survive while others did not?

2. What groups funded black schools? Why did they do this?

3. What types of subjects/lessons did students learn at Washington's Tuskeegee Institute?

4. How did Washington think blacks could "carve out their place in American society?"

5. Explain the following passage: "…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…"

6. How was Washington's life changed after the Atlanta Compromise speech?

7. What were some of the mixed reviews of Washington's effect on the black community?

8. Was Washington an "Uncle Tom?" Why or why not?

9. What type of education would DuBois' "Talented Tenth" need in order to succeed?

10. What connection did DuBois make between legalized discrimination and black dignity?

11. Explain the following quote: "Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys."

12. What were the main goals of the Niagara Movement?

13. Why did DuBois' Niagara Movement have limited success?