

Booker t. washington era

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From Slavery to Freedom, Edition 9, CHAPTER 13

The Black race was considered inferior to other races and was therefore severely oppressed. In an effort to prove to other races that they were not different from them, the African Americans developed ways of proving that they were in no way inferior to the white race. The self-help ideology was formulated and adopted to uplift them during the harsh times and also to bring change for future generations through working hard for the betterment of the race. Black leaders at the time solicited funds from community organizations, families and individuals to build schools, colleges and churches. These institutions however were run by whites and despite the fact that African Americans were spectacular students, a good example being W. E. B Du Bois and Booker T. Washington; they were denied leadership roles and were only allowed to hold inferior titles.

Booker T. Washington, a de facto leader by virtue of his fight for equality, successfully converted the education landscape of African Americans. Through his speeches, he was able to convert both blacks and whites towards his ideologies. He however also faced opposition from both blacks and whites- key among them being W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois accused Washington of putting so much emphasis on work and money. These, he argued would only lead to artisans and money makers, but no real men. He was also opposed to Washington's liberal views towards the southern whites and laws that were still oppressing African Americans. Du Bois did not entertain the silent treatment that Washington fancied towards the matter. Du Bois together with other intellectuals formed the Niagara movement which became powerful to the extent that Washington felt threatened, even with the support he received from the white media and the white funding.

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Therefore, there rose two classes of black Americans: the Niagarites under Du Bois and Bookerites- Washington adherers. Economically, African Americans were disadvantaged due to the fact that whites were unwilling to sell land to them. Washington encouraged them to indulge in extensive farming in the rural. Furthermore, blacks began producing their own products and publishing their own journals and newspapers to counter the negative image that they were being portrayed by the white media. Blacks also established their own banks albeit through struggle.

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Despite his influence and admiration from both factions of the racial divide, Washington was not able to unite the two races. Ironically, African Americans were being severely lynched and flogged publicly at a time when powerful white Americans could listen to a black man. Furthermore, Africans were denied full citizenship despite a larger percentage of them being educated. Black Americans therefore shifted to music, dance, art and literature as uplifting tools. To counter the high lynching and racial violence cases, blacks and cooperative whites formed two civil rights movements: National Urban League (NUL) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). After the civil war, blacks enjoyed some rights although not in the same level as the whites. However, at the onset of the First World War, their rights were thrown out of the window through court action.