

## African American Struggle

### **Narrator:**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 90% of America's black population lived in the southern states – often in repressive circumstances.

Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the southern United States that enforced racial segregation and suppressed the ability for blacks to vote.

Enacted by white Democratic-dominated state legislatures in the late 19th century after Reconstruction, some of these laws continued to be in effect into the 1960s.

In an infamous 1896 Supreme Court Case, Plessy vs Ferguson, the court ruled it was legal to have two 'separate but equal' facilities – one for whites and one for blacks.

Schools, transit, housing, water fountains, libraries, restaurants, hotels had separate facilities for blacks and whites -- but they were far from equal.

Facilities for blacks were consistently inferior and underfunded compared to those for whites. Schools for black students were consistently underfunded compared to schools for whites.

It was very difficult for the black population to even vote.

Southern states kept blacks from the polls by instilling poll taxes, literacy tests, and even violence and intimidation.

Finding work was difficult for blacks. Many were poor sharecroppers who were trapped in debt.

Progressives and black activists sought to oppose Jim Crow Laws.

One man renowned for stepping up for change was Booker T. Washington.

Washington was born into slavery in 1856. After the Civil War, he was freed and completed school, becoming a teacher.

When Washington was 25 years old, he started the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. His goal was to train those who attended with skills that would best help them in the workplace.

Tuskegee became a center for agricultural research. It was the school of George Washington Carver who developed techniques to improve soils depleted by repeated cotton plantings.

He suggested that farmers restore nitrogen to soil by practicing crop rotation: alternating cotton crops with plantings of sweet potatoes or peanuts which restored nitrogen to the soil.

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Washington believed racism was so engrained in southern life that the only way to make change was to empower the lives of African Americans.

Through education, blacks could become productive members of society.

Washington's stance on racism was seen by some as too moderate.

To others, he was seen as a leader of the African American community.

He wrote a famed autobiography "Up from Slavery."

In 1901 he was asked to the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt – a remarkable invitation for the times.

Despite his achievements, another black scholar, W.E.B Du Bois challenged Washington's moderate stance on racism.

W.E.B. Du Bois strongly disagreed with Booker T. Washington's assertion that southern blacks should submit to white political rule as long as African-American received basic educational and employment opportunities.

Du Bois advocated for complete civil rights and political representation and participation.

He believed this would be led by the African-American intellectual elite. He referred to this group as the Talented Tenth.

Du Bois argued the country's future lay not with agriculture but with industry.

Du Bois was born in Massachusetts in 1868.

He became the first African American to receive a PHD from Harvard.

After graduating, he took a teaching position at Atlanta University.

Du Bois felt African Americans should receive a classical education in order to make gains legally.

He was a proponent of political and social equality to overcome Jim Crow laws which kept blacks from voting at the polls.

Du Bois met with a group of thirty men in 1905 at Niagara Falls, Canada.

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Together they created a series of demands to end discrimination. This was called the Niagara Movement.

This movement evolved into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (the NAACP) which fought for social equality.

DuBois became the editor for the NAACP's newspaper, the Crisis.

In the Crisis, African American culture was glorified.

By the end of his long life, DuBois was convinced full equality for African Americans was doomed.

He died in 1961 at age 96, just before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led his famous civil rights march on Washington.

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