

The New South 1877 to 1900

Three major themes we will consider:

1. The move to Democratic domination of the South politically after Reconstruction
 2. Race relations in the South after Reconstruction
 3. The desire of the "New South" leaders to industrialize, and their failure
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I. Theme One: The move to Democratic domination of the South politically

1. Republican coalition of freedmen, scalawags, and carpetbaggers that exercised control in Reconstruction South was torn apart by the Democrats after Compromise of 1877.
2. To separate black republicans from carpetbaggers and scalawags the Democrats used:
 - A. racism
 - B. disenfranchisement
 - C. underground terror embodied in organizations like the Klan
3. Racist Democrats used African Americans as a scapegoat for the failures of the South. The Democrats racist argument was aided by the poor economic conditions that existed in the South during the period of Republican rule (Reconstruction).
 - A. The Democrats blamed the economic situation in the South on blacks, who for the first time were participating in the political system. They had just gotten the vote with the Fifteenth Amendment.
 - B. Since the scalawags were from the upcountry and had little contact with African Americans, they bought the Democratic racist propaganda.
 - C. The scalawags had never been abolitionist, but most had only opposed slavery because they felt the slave owners were dependent on their slaves.
 - D. Scalawags owned their land and freedmen did not.
 1. Of all the arable land in the South 70% of it was occupied (lived on) by whites.
 2. 73% of the white occupants owned their land, while 27% tenanted.
 3. In contrast, 30% of the land in the South was occupied (lived on) by blacks.
 4. 32% of this land was owned by blacks, while 68% was tenanted.
 5. By appealing to the white landowners, Democrats brought scalawags to their side.
 6. Terms: Sharecropping, land owner breaks his property into divisions and sharecropper gets land, but gives a share of the crop to the owner. Usually a large share. Tenancy--renting, paying in money after selling a crop.
4. The Democrats also used Disenfranchisement, when it seemed that some poor whites and blacks might overcome the use of Democratic racist propaganda.
 - A. Disenfranchisement is the term for the process by which many blacks, immigrants, and poor whites loss their vote in the South (and, as we will see, in the North).
 - B. Two major methods were used to take the vote away.
 1. poll tax
 2. literacy test
 - C. The Democrats exempted those people from the tax and test by using methods that were advantageous to whites.
 1. Grandfather Clause
 2. Fighting Grandfather Clause
 - D. Overall, there were two obstacles to Disenfranchisement:
 1. 15th Amendment
 2. Convincing Congress and the North that everything was ok.
 - E. Disenfranchisement and the Fifteenth Amendment
 1. As it became obvious that these laws were designed to keep the vote from blacks, the question was raised: Don't these laws violate the 15th Amendment?
 2. There were many Constitutional challenges, but these provisions never mentioned race, color, or previous condition of servitude.
 3. The federal courts said that these laws did not violate the 15th Amendment, since the Constitution said that the States have the right to fashion the voting public any way they choose.

4. For instance, women, children, convicts, and insane all prohibited from voting.
 - F. Southern Democrats convince Northern Republicans Disenfranchisement is acceptable.
 1. Henry Cabot Lodge, a Northern Congressman, had wanted the Force Bill, in the 1880s, so that federal troops could force Southerners to give blacks the vote.
 2. However, other Northern worries, such as debt, economic crisis and corruption.
 3. Immigration made it easier for the Democrats to proceed with disenfranchisement schemes in the South.
 4. The great Second Wave of Immigrants came to America between the 1880s and World War One.
 - a. This group of immigrants caused a problem for the Republicans because most of them voted for the Democrats.
 - b. Republicans required a longer residency period for voting.
 - c. Republicans made it more difficult for poor people to vote, esp. immigrants.
 5. Both the North and the South said that they did not want uneducated, poor, destitute people to institute mob rule.
 6. Since Republicans made it hard for immigrants, Democrats said that they could make it hard for blacks.
 7. Disenfranchisement of blacks was successful in the South.
 - a. In 1896 in Louisiana there had been 130,000 black voters registered. In 1900 there were 5,320.
 - b. In Alabama in 1900, there were 121,159 literate blacks over 21, but there were only 3,742 registered to vote. (Tindall, 3rd. edition, v2, 745).
 - G. In addition to Disenfranchisement, the Democratic Party blocked black admission
 1. Blacks therefore could not vote in the Democratic primaries.
 2. Contested in court as well, but the Supreme Court said this did not violate the 15th Amendment because the Democratic party was a private organization.
6. When the Scalawags shifted to the Democratic side, and the Disenfranchisement system was put in place, the Republican Party in the South died. The Solid South was born.

II. Theme Two: Race Relations in the South after Reconstruction

1. Segregation in the New South

- A. White Southern Democratic leaders also nullified the 14th Amendment, which said that no state shall deny any person equal protection of the laws.
- B. They wanted to be sure that scalawags and freedmen did not unite
 1. Segregation laws were designed to extend and reinforce disenfranchisement.
 2. Jim Crow Segregation laws denied blacks rights to public facilities and transport
 3. Segregation drew a line between the races in public.
 4. The Democrats argued that blacks were unfit to govern.
 5. They were biologically different and had been slaves all of those years.
- C. Through segregation in schools, Southern white leaders made sure that whites moved beyond blacks in education.
- D. Black schools were under funded, the student-teacher ratio was worse, the buildings were older, and the books were out of date

2. Segregation and the Court: 1883 Civil Rights Cases

- A. Various blacks had been denied by the proprietors of hotels, theaters, and railway companies, the full enjoyment of the accommodations thereof, contrary to the federal Civil Rights Act of 1875 requiring no discrimination.
- B. The federal Civil Rights Act of 1875 was founded on Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibits discrimination by the states. [The 14th Amendment makes no mention of individual persons infringing on individual rights.]
- C. Even so, many African Americans brought suit against the proprietors if the hotels, theaters, and railway companies that denied them full service.
- D. At issue then was whether private citizens and not just the states were included under of the Fourteenth Amendment which prohibited discrimination.
- E. In other words, does the Fourteenth Amendment compel a private citizen to refrain from the practice of discrimination?
- F. In an 8 to 1 decision (written by Mr. Justice Bradley), the Court said No, and found the federal Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional.
- G. Bradley wrote:

If the state does not assist the discrimination of an individual against another individual, it is purely a matter as between the two individuals. "In fine, the legislation which Congress is authorized to adopt in this behalf is not general legislation upon the rights of the citizen, but corrective legislation; that is, such as may be necessary and proper for counteracting such laws as the states may adopt or enforce, and which by the amendment they are prohibited from making or enforcing, or such acts and proceedings as the states may commit or take, and which by the amendment they are prohibited from committing or taking."

H. Therefore, the attempt to punish private citizens operating inns, theaters, restaurants, and conveyances for engaging in racial discrimination was beyond national power.

I. The Civil Rights Cases state the law as it is today. The national Constitution does not forbid a deprivation of life, liberty, or property by a private citizen; racial discrimination by private citizens is unaffected.

J. All the cases we are cognizant of today are cases in which it is charged that a state is engaging in discrimination by requiring as a matter of law segregation of races in schools, on public transportation, and the like.

K. However, there was a dissenting opinion at the time, that of Justice Harlan. While Bradley followed the letter of the Fourteenth Amendment, Harlan sensed its spirit. He wrote:

The opinion in these cases proceeds, it seems to me, upon grounds entirely too narrow and artificial. I cannot resist the conclusion that the substance and spirit of the recent amendments of the Constitution have been sacrificed by a subtle and ingenious verbal criticism. "It is not the words of the law but the internal sense of it that makes the law: the letter of the law is the body; the sense and reason of the law is the "soul."

Constitutional provisions, adopted in the interest of liberty, and for the purpose of securing, through national legislation, if need be, rights inhering in a state of freedom, and belonging to American citizenship, have been so construed as to defeat the ends the people desired to accomplish, which they attempted to accomplish, and which they supposed they had accomplished by changes in their fundamental law.

3. Segregation and the Supreme Court: Plessy v. Ferguson 1893-1896

A. The case came from Louisiana, which in 1890 passed the Separate Car Law, providing that separate cars be provided for whites and blacks.

B. On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy, a black shoemaker, tested the law.

C. Plessy was only one-eighths black and seven-eighths white, but under Louisiana law, he was considered black and therefore required to sit in the "Colored" car.

D. Although the people on the train could not tell he was black, Plessy convinced the conductor to call the police.

E. Plessy was jailed for sitting in the "White" car of the East Louisiana Railroad.

F. Plessy went to court and argued, in *Homer Adolph Plessy v. The State of Louisiana*, that the Separate Car Act violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution.

G. The judge at the trial was John Howard Ferguson, a lawyer from Massachusetts who had previously declared the Separate Car Act "unconstitutional on trains that traveled through several states."

H. In Plessy's case, however, he decided that the state could choose to regulate railroad companies that operated only within Louisiana. He found Plessy guilty of refusing to leave the white car.

I. Plessy appealed to the Supreme Court of Louisiana, which upheld Ferguson's decision.

J. In 1896, the Supreme Court of the United States heard Plessy's case.

K. The state of Louisiana argued that its law was for Equal but Separate facilities (Henry Grady coined the phrase).

L. Plessy again argued that the Separate Car Act violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments.

M. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled, in a 7-1 vote, that "separate but equal" accommodations on railroad cars conformed to the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection.

N. Speaking for the majority, Justice Henry Brown wrote:

"That [the Separate Car Act] does not conflict with the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery...is too clear for argument...A statute which implies merely a legal distinction between the white and colored races -- a distinction which is founded in the color of the two races, and which must always exist so long as white men are distinguished from the other race by color -- has no tendency to destroy the legal equality of the two races...The object of the [Fourteenth A]mendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either."

O. The lone dissenter, Justice John Harlan, showed incredible foresight when he wrote:

"Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law...In my opinion, the judgment this day rendered will, in time, prove to be quite as pernicious as the decision made by this tribunal in the *Dred Scott* case...The present decision, it may well be apprehended, will not only stimulate aggressions, more or less brutal and irritating, upon the admitted rights of colored citizens, but will encourage the belief that it is possible, by means of state enactments, to defeat the beneficent purposes which the people of the United States had in view when they adopted the recent amendments of the Constitution."

P. The *Plessy* decision set the precedent that "separate" facilities for blacks and whites were constitutional as long as they were "equal." The "separate but equal" doctrine was quickly extended to cover many areas of public life, such as restaurants, theaters, restrooms, and public schools.

Q. However, over time, the words of Justice Harlan rang true.

R. Not until 1954, in the equally important *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, would the "separate but equal" doctrine be struck down.

4. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois

A. Two great leaders of the black community in the late 19th and 20th century were W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. However, they sharply disagreed on strategies for black social and economic progress.

B. Their opposing philosophies can be found in much of today's discussions over how to end class and racial injustice, what is the role of black leadership, and what do the 'haves' owe the 'have-nots' in the black community.

C. Booker T. Washington, educator, reformer and the most influential black leader of his time (1856-1915) preached a philosophy of self-help, racial solidarity and accommodation. He urged blacks to accept discrimination for the time being and concentrate on elevating themselves through hard work and material prosperity. He believed in education in the crafts, industrial and farming skills and the cultivation of the virtues of patience, enterprise and thrift. This, he said, would win the respect of whites and lead to African Americans being fully accepted as citizens and integrated into all strata of society.

D. Major books: *Up From Slavery* (1901); *Tuskegee and Its People* (1905); *The Life of Frederick Douglass* (1907); *The Story of the Negro* (1909); *My Larger Education* (1911).

E. W.E.B. Du Bois, a towering black intellectual, scholar and political thinker (1868-1963) said no--Washington's strategy would serve only to perpetuate white oppression. Du Bois advocated political action and a civil rights agenda (he helped found the NAACP). In addition, he argued that social change could be accomplished by developing the small group of college-educated blacks he called "the Talented Tenth:"

"The Negro Race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education then, among Negroes, must first of all deal with the "Talented Tenth." It is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the worst."

F. Major books: *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903); *Black Reconstruction* (35); *Dusk at Dawn* (40); *Autobiography* (68)

G. At the time, the Washington/Du Bois dispute polarized African American leaders into two wings--the 'conservative' supporters of Washington and his 'radical' critics. The Du Bois philosophy of agitation and protest for civil rights flowed directly into the Civil Rights movement which began to develop in the 1950's and exploded in the 1960's.

Booker T. today is associated, perhaps unfairly, with the self-help/colorblind/Republican/Clarence Thomas/Thomas Sowell wing of the black community and its leaders.

III. Theme Three: The New South Movement

1. In the 1870s, many Southerners wanted to present a new image of themselves and to stimulate economic development.

2. Henry Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, was a leader of this "New South."

A. Born in 1840, Grady, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, received a thorough education.

B. After engaging for some years successfully in business, his ambition turned to journalism.

C. He was a leading writer of several popular newspapers, and became Georgia correspondent of the *New York Herald*.

D. His writings through a series of letters under the title of "Sheep, Gold, and Oranges," aroused the interest of many Southerners in industrial development.

E. Subsequently he became the editor and part-owner of the *Atlanta Constitution* which became (and remains) one of the most influential organs of the South.

- F. He contributed numerous articles on Southern subjects to *Harper's* and *Century Magazine*, which were national.
- G. The influence of the *Atlanta Constitution* in political affairs was widely felt throughout the Southern states.
- H. Its doctrines advocated closer ties between North and South in all things that promoted the prosperity of the nation.
- I. In his famous speech, "The New South" Grady said:

"The Old South rested everything on slavery and agriculture, unconscious that these could neither give nor maintain healthy growth. The New South presents a perfect democracy, the oligarchs leading in the popular movement – a social system compact and closely knitted, less splendid on the surface, but stronger at the core – a hundred farms for every plantation, fifty homes for every palace – and a diversified industry that meets the complex need of this complex age."

3. The New South Movement – of Grady and others – had two main goals:

- A. Industrialization and diversification of the Southern economy
- B. Prevention of Northern intervention

4. Industrialization of the South would solve two problems:

- A. Economic plight of South
- B. Northern interference if they were worried about old south revival

5. Three major industries emerged in the South during the New South Period

A. Cotton and Textile Production

In the 1870s a "cotton crusade" began. Initial attempts to encourage construction of Southern mills with Southern finance capital gave way to a mill industry (1880 - 160 mills; 1900 - 400+mills), largely controlled by outside (Northeastern U.S. and foreign) capitalists. Racist hiring practices dominated employment.

B. Iron and Steel

Southerners tapped rich coal and iron ore reserves so effectively that by 1900, the South led the world in coal production. At the same time, they fostered (1880-1900) tremendous growth in iron and steel mills. Initial financing of the steel and iron industries came from Southern sources, but by 1900, foreign investors and Northerners such as Andrew Carnegie largely controlled these industries.

C. Tobacco Production

Traditionally tobacco was grown but seldom processed in the South. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, however, Southern tobacco factories began to rise. By 1900, tobacco processing was a major industry. As was the case with cotton and iron/steel, outside capitalists controlled the industry.

6. The South did not achieve a level of industry comparable to that in the North, and the industrialization that did take place did not help revitalize the South.

- A. Many industries were owned by people outside the South.
- B. They did not invest in Southern infrastructure.
- C. The industry that did develop were extractive. Timber and mining were two examples.
- D. This was a short lived extraction of natural resources.
- E. Boom and bust towns developed and fell.
- F. For the most part the extractive industries did not work with others to produce Southern finished products.
- G. The Southern industry was therefore not self-sufficient.
- H. There were not rising wages or a rising standard of living. Southern workers refer to industrialist as "foreigners."

7. Northerners reconstructed the Southern economy, one they now controlled, but the South itself (and particularly the prevailing social system) had not been transformed.

8. Although the New South Movement failed in its economic goal of starting Southern industrialization, the New South movement did succeed in keeping Northern interference out.