



Dealing and Responding to Jim Crow

Introduction

On February 26, 1877, a compromise was made to settle the disputed presidential election of 1876 within the walls of the Wormley Hotel in Washington D.C. If Republicans would end the post-Civil War military occupation of the South, then the Democrats would allow Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes to become president. The compromise signaled the beginning of a post-war reconciliation of white Americans from the North and South. However, removing troops from the South meant that African Americans would be at the mercy of white Southerners (many of whom were or sympathized with former Confederates), and Democrat-controlled state governments who wanted to see African Americans returned to their rightful place in Southern society, as politically disenfranchised and uneducated labor.

Nevertheless, it was ironic that the compromise, known as the Compromise of 1877, took place at the Wormley Hotel, owned by James Wormley, a wealthy and well-connected black entrepreneur. Wormley's Hotel was located in Lafayette Square, near the White House. James Wormley and his hotel were known internationally for their elegance, excellent hospitality, and delicious catering. Royalty, dignitaries, and Washington's elite including: presidents, cabinet members, Congressmen, Supreme Court justices, military officers, and business leaders considered Wormley a confidant and excellent host. Nonetheless, the same politicians who may have considered James Wormley a confidant chose to stagnate the ability of Wormley and African Americans to practice their full political, economic and social rights granted by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The Compromise of 1877 otherwise known as the "Wormley Compromise" ultimately made the path toward equality and civil rights more difficult for African Americans as it ushered in the long era of Jim Crow.

The Jim Crow Era legalized, normalized or reintroduced the vices experienced by African Americans during enslavement and the Reconstruction Era such as political disenfranchisement, violence and intimidation, economic suppression and social segregation. The early portion of the Jim Crow Era is known as the Nadir period (1890 – 1920). Disillusionment defined the Nadir period for the African American community. The fight for equality and civil rights was not forsaken but the methods changed from the extroverted activism of the Reconstruction Era to a more introverted, self-help philosophy during the Nadir. African Americans focused on strengthening themselves and their communities through establishing economic, social and political institutions. Yet, Jim Crow and its negative influences remained a cloud over the African American community.

Research Questions to Consider

How did Washington, Du Bois, and Wells-Barnett individually respond to the conflict of racism during the Jim Crow Era? How did they respond to one another?

How did the African American community respond to Washington, Du Bois and Wells-Barnett?

What was the effect on African American political and social organizations during this period?

How did the concept of respectability politics factor into the responses to Jim Crow?

How did literature and other media reflect the African American response to Jim Crow?



Three voices - W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Booker T. Washington - emerged with responses for dealing with Jim Crow.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (W.E.B. Du Bois) was born on February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Great Barrington was racially integrated, as was Great Barrington High School where Du Bois graduated at the top of his class in 1885. In 1886, Du Bois first experienced the harsh racism of Jim Crow while attending Fisk University in Tennessee where he concentrated on analyzing the historical, social and anthropological studies of African Americans. After graduating again at the top of his class, he continued his studies overseas at the University of Berlin for two years, before completing his studies at Harvard, where he was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. He believed the best course for African Americans to achieve equal rights was through education and political agitation. Du Bois further believed that compromise (or accommodating whites) would disrupt African American progress. Du Bois would be instrumental in the establishment of the Niagara Movement (1905 - 1909), and its successor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Du Bois' leadership as editor of the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, made this publication influential for the African American community.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett was born enslaved in Holly Springs, Mississippi in 1862. After emancipation, her parents became active in the Republican Party and encouraged their children to pursue education. She received her degree from Rust College in Mississippi and became a teacher. Two events defined Wells-Barnett's formal transition into activism: her experience with Jim Crow segregation on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, and the lynching of three black grocers - her friends - because of their success and competition with a white grocer. Wells-Barnett became an activist who, like Du Bois, believed in political and social agitation. She used journalism, lectures and political organization to promote rights for African Americans, women's suffrage, and to bring awareness of the horror and injustice of lynching that plagued the African American community. In 1909, Wells-Barnett, along with W.E.B. Du Bois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

In 1856, **Booker T. Washington** was born enslaved in Hale's Ford, Virginia. After the Civil War, Washington and his family relocated to West Virginia, where he would begin his long pursuit of education. At age 16, Washington attended Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia. Washington's education and experience at Hampton helped to develop his stance toward Jim Crow. He believed African Americans should strive for economic independence and not challenge white supremacy. Washington thought accommodation (others called it compromise) was a necessary evil for African Americans, but would ultimately prove to whites that African Americans were worthy of equality and civil rights. Washington pushed this philosophy as the president of the Tuskegee Institute (1881 – 1915) and with the founding of the Negro Business League in 1900. His stance made him controversial in the African American community, but popular among whites who found his non-confrontational views favorable. Washington's relationships with white leaders gained funding for the Tuskegee Institute and, gave him an audience with Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Howard Taft where his the advice was considered on racial matters of national importance.

Du Bois, Wells-Barnett, and Washington represented the main conflicts and compromises the African American community expressed throughout the era of Jim Crow. Despite their various approaches, each would contribute to building the long path toward civil rights.



Secondary and Primary Text Sources

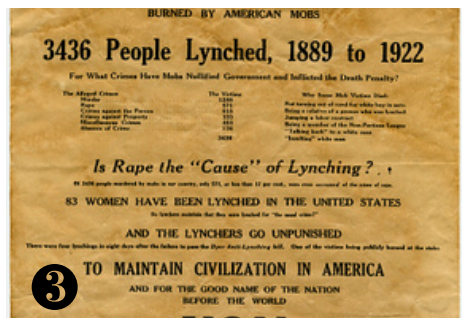
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3. Lewis, David Levering. *W.E.B. Du Bois, 1868-1919: Biography of a Race*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009.
4. Norrell, Robert J. *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011.
5. Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

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6. W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk; Essays and Sketches*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903.
7. Washington, Booker T. *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1901.
8. Wells-Barnett, Ida B. *The Red Record: By Ida B. Wells-Barnett*. Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, Printers, Binders and Engravers, 1894.

NMAAHC Resources



List of Resources:

1. *The Crisis Vol 13. No. 3* (Gift of Bobbie Ross in memory of Elizabeth Dillard)
2. *Beverage Set from Wormley's Tea Service* (Gift of Charles Thomas Lewis)
3. *Poster for the NAACP Anti-Lynching Campaign*
4. *National Negro Business League Pin*

Photo Headliner: (Left to Right)

5. *W.E. B. Du Bois* (© Tuskegee University Archives)
6. *Ida B. Wells-Barnett* (National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)
7. *Booker T. Washington* (© Tuskegee University Archives)

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