CHAPTER SIX

THE SHIELD OF SEGREGATION

"Ugh!" Theodore Roosevelt exclaimed. "I have got to wash my hands." As so often during his presidency, he had just shaken hands with hundreds, even thousands, of visitors to the White House. Now, on this day early in 1909, he hurried upstairs to find a washbasin. It had been a gilded affair, a full-dress reception for army and navy officers, replete with cabinet members, diplomats, and Supreme Court justices. But Roosevelt felt soiled, even threatened, by his contact with these people. "Ugh!" he exclaimed again. "Shaking hands with a thousand people! What a lot of bugs I have on my hands, and how dirty, filthy I am!" The President washed his hands immediately. "Now I am clean," he said with relief.[1]

In this diverse, industrializing nation, Americans had to put up with people different from themselves. Even presidents had to mingle with constituents. But when and where they could, many Americans pulled back from people who seemed different. Frightened, wary, or, like Roosevelt, repelled by contact with others, people drew boundary lines around themselves. This impulse to separate was fundamental to American society. The early twentieth century became the great age of segregation in the United States, a time of enforced public separations. The word *segregation* itself took on its modern definition in the first years of the new century: *segregation* meant "Jim Crow," the laws and practices that separated white from black in the states of the

old Confederacy. Americans have liked to pretend that Jim Crow was a regional aberration, an exception to our history. But segregation was not something that happened only in the South—boundary lines were established everywhere in the early twentieth-century United States. And segregation did not happen only to African-Americans: the boundary lines also set apart Native Americans, immigrants, and workers.[2]

Progressives seldom contested the increasing division of Americans into separate enclaves. In fact, middle-class activists and their political representatives eagerly led some of the campaigns to draw new social boundary lines dividing different groups. The progressives' support for segregation is, at first glance, surprising. Believing in "association," progressives so often tried to bring diverse people together. Believing in their power to manipulate the social and material environment, progressives so often refused to accept difference as a fundamental fact of national life: people could be changed and thus made more alike. But there were limits to the progressives' optimistic faith in transforming other people. Segregation revealed both a sense of realism and an underlying pessimism in the middle class. Even as they labored urgently to end the differences between classes, the progressives felt some social differences would not be erased for many years. And some differences, they believed, could not be erased at all.

Segregation was a complicated social phenomenon, and it served a complicated purpose for the progressives. Superficially a deviation from progressivism, segregation actually drew on basic progressive values and aims. True to their mission to create a safe society for themselves and their children, the progressives turned to segregation as a way to halt dangerous social conflict that could not otherwise be stopped. True to their sense of compassion, the progressives turned to segregation as a way to preserve weaker groups, such as African-Americans and Native Americans, facing brutality and even annihilation. Unlike some other Americans, progressives did not support segregation out of anger, hatred, and a desire to unify whites; but they certainly displayed plenty of condescension and indifference, as well as compassion. Segregation was never the separation of equals; one party always ended up with less—less power, less wealth, less opportunity, less schooling, less health care, less respect. Progressives fairly readily accepted the inequitable arrangement of segregation. They did so because usually there were worse alternatives. Most of the progressives told themselves that separation allowed reform to con-

tinue. Protected by the shield of segregation, the fundamental project of transforming people could go on in safety. But the cost was great.[3]

On Monday, July 23, 1900, a steamy day in the city of New Orleans, something gave inside Robert Charles. Thirty-four, unmarried, unemployed, well read, and black, Charles was upset over the violence and discrimination directed against African-Americans in the South; the son of Mississippi slaves, he doubted that blacks had any future in the United States. That night he was waiting on a doorstep with his roommate Lenard Pierce for two black women when a white policeman told the men to move on. As Charles, dark brown, six feet tall, and strong, got up, the policeman struck him with a billy club and pulled a gun. Charles took out his own .38 Colt; both men fired; both were wounded in the leg. Charles ran away to his apartment on Fourth Street, where the police confronted him later that night. Pointing his Winchester rifle, Charles shot police captain John Day through the heart. "You————," Charles yelled, "I will give you all some!" He shot a patrolman through the eye, and escaped again.[4]

The next day policemen and white mobs looked for Robert Charles. These white citizens of New Orleans had their frustrations, too. Black men like Charles seemed to threaten white jobs and white women. Less and less willing to mix with African-Americans at all, many whites had unhappily watched the state legislature defeat a bill that would have segregated the city's streetcars. Now whites noticed that blacks were obviously satisfied with Charles's "war on whites." So the police arrested African-Americans that day, but no one could find Charles, this "monster" and "unreasoning brute," this "ruthless black butcher" and "bloodthirsty champion of African supremacy." On Wednesday, the twenty-fifth, frustrated whites met at the monument to Robert E. Lee and resolved to lynch Robert Charles. Thousands marched to the parish prison and to the Storyville vice district, but in vain: no Charles. That night, whites killed three African-Americans and sent about fifty to the hospital. For good measure, the mobs killed two whites accidentally and, when refused rides on the streetcars, beat three white streetcar workers. On Thursday, whites killed three blacks and hurt at least fifteen more—but still no Charles. Then, on Friday, an African-American revealed Charles's hideout on Saratoga Street. When the police turned up, Charles

shot and killed a sergeant and a corporal. As hundreds and then thousands of people surrounded and fired into the building, Charles killed three more whites and wounded nineteen. When the mob accidentally set fire to the building in an attempt to smoke him out, Charles emerged, wounded but with his derby cocked defiantly on his head. Somehow he made it across the street and into a room, where a policeman shot him dead.

That was not the end, however. The mob shot Charles's body over and over; they pulled it into the street, where the son of one of the dead policemen smashed Charles's face. Three more black men died that day, uncounted others were beaten, and a black school was set ablaze. Finally, some weeks later, Lewis Forstall, an African-American, shot and killed the black man who had ratted on Robert Charles.

The Robert Charles riot reminded people of what they knew deep down: of all the social differences at the start of the twentieth century, those between black and white were the most volatile, the most difficult to control. Southerners understood that truth best of all. Seven million, nine hundred twenty-three thousand African-Americans, 90 percent of blacks in America, lived in the South; blacks made up 32 percent of the region's population. After the Civil War, the abolition of slavery and the reconstruction of the South had empowered African-Americans and threatened white Southerners. But in the 1870s and 1880s, blacks had seemingly been contained; the white Redeemers had thrust African-Americans decisively back into their "place." Violence, intimidation, and fraud kept them from political power; the sharecropping system bound them to white landowners and merchants. Yet, as the Charles riot made plain, race relations had not been controlled after all. Old passions and new truths had combined to stir up the South toward the end of the nineteenth century.[5]

For all the hyperbole of its boosters, the "New South" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an unsettling place. The uneven, painful processes of urbanization and industrialization were transforming the region and creating a new terrain for race relations. In the growing cities and towns of the New South, in Birmingham, Atlanta, Spartanburg, and Durham, white and black were thrown together in streets, restaurants, schools, and other public places. At the gates of sawmills, iron mills, and cotton mills, the races jostled each other in the search for jobs. On the land, things seemed more stable, even stagnant, but Southern agriculture was

going through its own difficult transformation: hard times on the farm and the relative decline of the countryside made the races uncomfortably aware of each other. The New South created new people, too. The younger whites, who had not grown up with the paternalist example of the old antebellum planter class, were less tolerant of blacks. Equally, there were "New Negroes," young black men like Robert Charles, less deferential because they had not grown up in slavery. There was also a new African-American middle class of well-dressed landholders and business owners whose visible success mocked the failures of poorer whites. Upper-class whites had their own, frightening "New Negroes"—the African-Americans of the Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party who made common cause with poor whites against the Democratic Party, the railroads, the merchants, and all the men in power. The New South was unstable, not only because it divided black and white but because it still might unite them.[6]

Under the circumstances, many Southern whites, out of unthinking emotion or cool calculation, had new reason to turn on blacks. The result was a fresh brand of racism, hysterical and harsh, proclaimed in legislatures, country stores, and newspaper columns. The titles of popular books summed up the essential racist message—*The Negro a Beast; The Negro: A Menace to American Civilization.* African-Americans, no longer raised in the stern school of slavery, were said to be headed back into primitive, uncontrolled savagery. Running through all this was an irrational fear of black sexual competition, of the bestial "New Negro" who preyed on white women. That fear, which also testified to the tensions between white men and women in the Victorian South, produced torrents of lurid rhetoric. In the United States Senate in 1907, Democrat Ben Tillman of South Carolina portrayed blacks "pulsating with the desire to sate their passions upon white maidens and wives"; he described the white Southern victim, "her body prostituted, her purity destroyed . . . robbed of the jewel of her womanhood by a black fiend." "Our brains reel under the staggering blow and hot blood surges to the heart . . . ," Tillman railed. "We revert to the original savage."[7]

Some white Southerners did just that. Seemingly determined not to coexist with blacks, these people turned to violence. They went, the Alabama minister and progressive Edgar Gardner Murphy observed, "from the contention that no negro shall vote to the contention that no negro shall learn, that no negro shall labor, and . . . that no negro shall live." In towns

and cities across the region, there were fights and race riots. As in New Orleans in 1900, so in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898. In rural areas especially, there was the lynching party. Rebecca Latimer Felton of Georgia, a Methodist layleader and journalist, urged white men to do their duty. "[If] it takes lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from drunken, ravening human beasts," Felton exclaimed in 1897, "then I say lynch a thousand a week if it becomes necessary." They never did manage that thousand a week, but mobs of Southern whites answered Felton's call. What had been mainly a way for white Americans to whip and discipline other whites became an increasingly vicious means for Southern whites to exterminate blacks. Nationwide, lynchings escalated in the 1880s and peaked at 230 in 1892. The numbers fell off somewhat because black men took pains to avoid trouble. Even so, there were 115 reported lynchings in America in 1900; 106 of the victims were black. Essentially unchecked by local, state, or national government, white Southerners usually invoked some imaginary assault on a white woman in order to murder a black man. There were hangings, shootings, burnings, castrations. Afterward, interested whites might claim an ear, a toe, or a finger as a keepsake, perhaps a souvenir watch fob. "You don't understand how we feel down here," a Mississippian told a Northern visitor in 1908; "when there is a row, we feel like killing a nigger whether he has done anything or not." A Mississippi African-American summed up the vulnerability of his race. "They had to have a license to kill anything but a nigger," he recalled. "We was always in season."[8]

To more-moderate whites, including progressives and the wealthy, it seemed as if the South had gone out of control. These men and women were disgusted by the lynch mobs. The lyncher, wrote Andrew Sledd, professor of Latin and Greek at Atlanta's Emory College, in 1902, acted "to gratify the brute in his own soul, which the thin veneer of his elemental civilization has not been able effectually to conceal." Whites like Sledd preferred the antebellum slaveholders' paternalist judgment of African-Americans: the black man was a submissive child, not an uncontrollable beast. Moreover, the moderates understood some basic realities: blacks were too numerous, their labor too important, for them to be driven from the South; corrupt elections, extralegal lynching parties, and race riots threatened the social order, damaged the region's reputation, and put economic development at risk. Obviously, there had to be some new means of stabilizing race relations.[9]

The solution, crafted in the 1890s and the 1900s, was a dramatic intensification and codification of segregation. White and black had been divided in many ways since the end of the Civil War, but now separation of the races became the regional creed, a way of life—"the elementary working hypothesis of civilization in our Southern States," as Edgar Gardner Murphy put it. "Ours is a world of inexorable divisions," he explained. "[G]ood fences make good neighbors." Those divisions were achieved through an intricate process of accommodation and challenge that proceeded unevenly but inexorably across the South. Everywhere, what had been de facto in the late nineteenth century became de jure by the twentieth; new segregation laws made the racial boundaries clearer, more rigid. Through differing mixtures of law and custom, every Southern town, city, county, and state tried to achieve two goals: first, to send an unmistakable message of racial inequality that would intimidate blacks and reassure whites; second, to deprive blacks of so much economic and political opportunity that they could never threaten white power.[10]

So whites arranged to put African-Americans in their "place" once again. More than ever before, that "place" was a literal, physical space as well as a matter of psychology and behavior. By statute and unwritten rule, whites denied blacks equal access to public facilities. African-Americans could not get into many hotels, restaurants, theaters, saloons, pool halls, bathhouses, swimming pools, and hospitals at all. They could get into other public places only by accepting segregated, inferior accommodations—back pews in churches, back seats in streetcars, balcony "nigger heavens" in theaters, "nigger cars" on railroad trains. And of course, black children had to attend separate schools—and of course, those schools were grossly underfunded. There was also a trend toward residential segregation in the early twentieth-century South. Traditionally, in towns and cities, blacks had often lived close to whites in servants' quarters or back alleys, in unimposing buildings across a street or a vacant lot. Now, even in such older communities as New Orleans, Charleston, and Savannah, white prejudice and economic forces were increasingly consigning blacks to their own sections of town. No Southern community had a true ghetto sealing off virtually all of the black population, but many towns and cities had one or more predominantly African-American sections, known predictably enough as "darktown" and "niggertown."

Jim Crow reached into the economy as well. In the tobacco business, the skilled jobs went to whites, the unskilled jobs, to blacks. African-Americans could get manual work in the iron mines and foundries of northern Alabama and in the bituminous coal mines of Tennessee and Kentucky. But the cotton mills of the Piedmont were for whites only. In general, blacks were condemned to the dirtiest, least skilled, lowest paying, most demeaning jobs—the "nigger work" of gang labor and domestic service.

Segregation also drew boundary lines through politics. For years since Reconstruction, whites had resorted to violence and fraud to keep down the black vote. Now, powerful whites turned to the law, to legalized disfranchisement, to keep blacks away from the ballot box without violence. Beginning with a constitutional convention in Mississippi in 1890, disfranchisement swept across the states of the old Confederacy in the next two decades. The effect of legal change on black voter turnout was harsh and unambiguous: there was about a 60 percent drop in black voting after suffrage restriction. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Southern African-Americans were almost as far from the levers of power as they had been in slavery.[11]

Although Jim Crow exacted countless costs, it was not the worst possibility for African-Americans, as progressives and other moderate whites rationalized. An ongoing race war or expulsion from the South could have been far worse. Were it not for segregation, wrote one of Mississippi's white newspaper editors in 1910, the state would have had "more race clashes and dead niggers than have been heard of since reconstruction." It was a self-serving remark, but truthful too. The boundaries of Jim Crow seemed to bring a measure of stability to the South: lynchings fell off from 115 nationwide in 1900 to 57 in 1905. For whites, there was no reason to doubt that segregation had indeed become "the elementary working hypothesis of civilization in our Southern States." And there was no reason to doubt that Jim Crow was there to stay.[12]

Certainly the North was unlikely to intervene, in part because the region had its own difficulties with race relations. As the African-American leader W. E. B. Du Bois observed in 1901, "The Negro Problem is not the sole property of the South." At the turn of the century, there were only 911,000 African-Americans outside the Southern states. Living mainly in Northern cities and towns, these blacks made up less than 1 percent of the

non-Southern population. But they posed a problem to many whites nonetheless. The passage of civil rights laws after the Civil War had hardly wiped away old antagonisms in the Northern states. Most whites held an enduring stereotype of backward "darkies" and "coons," expressed by such songs as "All Coons Look Alike to Me" and such vaudeville figures as Doolittle Black and Julius Crow. White Northerners also heard and read about the alleged brutality of the African-American; like white Southerners, they could think of the black man as a beast and a competitor. As black Southerners began to flee Jim Crow and rural poverty, the prospect of economic competition loomed. By 1906, an observer could already note the "prevailing dread of an overwhelming influx from the South." And so, Northern race relations had their own volatility. In New York City in August 1900, one month after the Charles riot in New Orleans, a race riot broke out in the Tenderloin, the black section on the West Side of Manhattan. As in New Orleans, it began with an altercation between a black man and a white policeman; as in New Orleans, a policeman died; as in New Orleans, white mobs, aided and abetted by the police, staged a "nigger chase" through the streets.[13]

Accordingly, the North drew its own boundaries between black and white. The Northern version of segregation was generally milder than Southern Jim Crow, not because Northern whites were more virtuous but because blacks were less numerous and therefore less dangerous. Whites in the North did not insist so much on writing Jim Crow into state and local law, and they did not segregate their communities quite as thoroughly. Still, Northern segregation resembled Southern segregation in important respects. As in the South, communities kept African-Americans out of hotels, restaurants, theaters, and parks or condemned them to inferior accommodations. Such cities as Boston and New Haven retained integrated schools, but many other communities made sure black and white children did not learn in the same classrooms. Northern churches became less receptive to black worshipers; the Young Men's Christian Association did not want black members. Occasionally the Northern segregators did their work with almost Southern flair. In Cincinnati, the white members of the YMCA, to make sure that there was no implication of racial equality, even compelled local African-Americans to rename their own organization the "Young Boys' Christian Association."

The trend toward residential segregation was at least as strong in the North as in the South. Northern cities did not yet have the kind of black ghettoes that would develop later in the twentieth century. African-Americans often shared neighborhoods with predominantly working-class white immigrants who could not afford to live elsewhere. But especially as migration from the South increased, Northern communities were quickly developing predominantly black districts. New York had the Tenderloin and San Juan Hill; Cleveland had Central Avenue; other towns and cities had their own "Niggertown," "Buzzard's Alley," "Bronzeville," "Nigger Row," "Chinch Row," or "Black Bottom." Typically, these neighborhoods had poor housing and poor sanitation. The police usually allowed vice districts, with gambling and prostitution, to develop there too. In all, these were dangerous places to live. San Juan Hill got its name because the sharp incline up West Sixtieth Street and the numerous racial battles reminded New Yorkers of Theodore Roosevelt's famous charge up a Cuban hill of the same name during the war with Spain; "Death Avenue," the district's western boundary, got its name because so many black children died on the open railroad tracks of Eleventh Avenue. African-Americans lived in such places, of course, because limited incomes and white prejudice made it difficult to go anywhere else in town. Members of the small black middle class had the wherewithal to move into better white neighborhoods, but these men and women ran into hostile white homeowners and realtors. In some areas, whites were already resorting to restrictive covenants to make sure blacks would stay out.[14]

Economic segregation was a reality in the North as well as in the South. Clustered in low-status occupations, Northern African-Americans had trouble getting manufacturing jobs, joining unions, and keeping positions as waiters and barbers. Blacks' reputations as strikebreakers made relations with white workers even more tense. In politics, at least, Northern blacks did not face disfranchisement in the twentieth century. But their political power was eroding. African-Americans held fewer state and local offices and played a smaller role in political parties. "The plain fact is," progressive journalist Ray Stannard Baker confirmed in 1909, "most of us in the north do not believe in any real democracy as between white and colored men."[15]

Baker was guilty of understatement. Even white progressives, North as well as South, did not believe in any sort of equality between the races at the turn of the century. A time of environmentalist thinking, the Progres-

sive Era was equally a time of race thinking. As the nineteenth century ended, science increasingly endorsed many Americans' belief that some races were better than others and that racial characteristics were hereditary and therefore quite possibly unalterable. Influenced by these ideas, white progressives held a range of opinions about race. Some, like Social Gospel leader Josiah Strong, were equally ardent believers in the superiority of Anglo-Saxons—"all-conquering," "more vigorous, more spiritual, more Christian"—to all other races in the United States and around the globe. "Is there room for doubt," Strong demanded, "that this race . . . is destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others, and mold the remainder, until, in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?" A few reformers, like the Illinois factory inspector, New York settlement house resident, socialist, and journalist William English Walling, were ardent supporters of black rights. Condemning "race hatred," Walling insisted that "we must come to treat the negro on a plane of absolute political and social equality." The majority of progressives, clinging to a firm belief in African-American inferiority, fit somewhere in between. Most Northern progressives said notably little about their racial views. By and large, it was an awareness of class differences, not racial differences, that animated middle-class reform. Firm believers in white superiority, most progressives were nevertheless more interested in making the world middle-class than in making it Anglo-Saxon.[16]

White progressives in the South did not have the luxury of silence about race. Perhaps the best known Southern reformer, Edgar Gardner Murphy, spoke out frequently on the subject; in the process, he made very clear how well segregation fit with progressive values. Murphy approached the question of African-Americans' status from both the pessimistic perspective of race thinking and the optimistic perspective of environmentalism. "There is a distinct assumption of the negro's inferiority," he said; "but there is also a distinct assumption of the negro's improvability. It is upon the basis of this double assumption that the South finds its obligation." That obligation was to abandon antiblack violence and institute segregation. In addition to halting racial strife, Jim Crow would, Murphy believed, allow the process of reform to continue among African-Americans as it did elsewhere among whites. Safe behind the racial boundary line, Southern blacks were becoming new people. "The segregation of the race has thrown its members upon their

own powers and has developed the qualities of resourcefulness . . . the noblest of the gifts of freedom, the power of personal and social self-dependence," Murphy maintained. "The very process which may have seemed to some like a policy of oppression has in fact resulted in a process of development." Furthermore, Jim Crow was swelling the ranks of the black middle class. Murphy rejoiced that "the social and educational separation of these races has created the opportunity and the vocation of the negro teacher, the negro physician, the negro lawyer, the negro leader of whatever sort." Such developments would continue, Murphy knew, if the South responded to his urgent crusade for better education for blacks as well as whites. In typically progressive terms, Murphy concluded that government activism could change the environment of African-Americans and therefore improve the race. "The fact that the negro is a negro, the State may not alter," he acknowledged; "but the fact that the negro—quite as much at the North as at the South—has not been adequately accorded the economic support of the profounder social forces of security, opportunity, and hope, the State may largely alter if it will. Will it do?" Murphy and other progressives believed the answer should be "yes"—as long as the boundary lines of segregation remained firmly drawn.[17]

Those Southern politicians dependent on progressive support repeated Murphy's argument in somewhat cruder form. In 1901, Governor Charles Brantley Aycock of North Carolina put the case for Jim Crow bluntly to a black audience. "No thoughtful, conservative, and upright Southerner has for your race aught but the kindest feelings, and we are willing and anxious to see you grow into the highest citizenship of which you are capable," he explained:

> But to do this it is absolutely necessary that each race should remain distinct, and have a society of its own. Inside of your own race you can grow as large and broad and high as God permits. . . . But all of them in the South will insist that you shall accomplish this high end without social intermingling.

For Aycock and other Southern leaders, there were no alternatives. Segregation's "violation," the governor bluntly warned his black audience, "would be to your destruction. . . ."[18]

As Jim Crow took hold with progressive support or acquiescence, the highest levels of the federal government did virtually nothing to help black Americans. Not surprisingly, the conservative United States Supreme Court gave segregation its imprimatur. In 1896, a majority of the justices ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that segregation was legal on Louisiana trains as long as blacks were provided "separate but equal" accommodations.

The progressive presidents were not going to contest the ascendancy of "separate but equal," no matter how truly unequal the state of affairs for blacks in the South and in the North. Theodore Roosevelt shared the progressives' condescending view of African-Americans. For the President, race was a crucial, though often vague, category. In private, racial epithets came easily to his lips—his was a world of "micks," "dagos," "chinks," and "japs." Race had multiple meanings for him: it referred to the distinctions of color, the differences among white, red, black, and yellow; it conjured up a romantic vision of a superior white Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic heritage; it included a "bio-social" theory that acquired characteristics could be inherited. This was perhaps the most hopeful aspect of the President's thinking about race. A neo-Lamarckian, Roosevelt believed that environment and culture could modify heredity. Although races could go wrong and decline over time, presumably they could also improve. Yet, Roosevelt held out little hope for blacks. The President carefully avoided calling African-Americans "niggers," but he had no doubts about their merits. He confided to a friend in 1906 that "as a race and in the mass they are altogether inferior to the whites." As always with Roosevelt, class made a difference: he approved of more refined, middle-class blacks. But African-Americans could never be assimilated into the national "Race"; there could be no intermarriage with whites.[19]

These ideas pushed Roosevelt toward a position rather similar to that of the progressives. Like them, he had a paternalist view of the black race. Like them, he deplored violence and instability. Like them, he considered Jim Crow preferable to turmoil as a solution for "the terrible problem offered by the presence of the negro on this continent." So, rather than use federal power to mitigate segregation, he preferred to let the South handle its own race problems. "The white man who can be of most use to the colored man is that colored man's neighbor," Roosevelt explained. "It is the southern people themselves who must and can solve the difficulties that exist in the South."[20]

Believing he needed the support of black Southern Republicans, the so-called Black-and-Tans, in order to assure his nomination in 1904, Roosevelt did appoint some "colored men of good repute and standing" to federal jobs. In the process, he consulted Booker T. Washington on patronage matters and invited him to the White House for dinner in October 1901. But that invitation angered Southern whites. The Washington dinner was, according to a Memphis paper, "the most damnable outrage that has ever been perpetrated by a citizen of the United States." Washington never dined at the White House again. Although Roosevelt relished standing his ground on some disputed appointments, he remained the careful politician. Safely nominated and reelected in 1904, Roosevelt leaned away from the Black-and-Tans toward their white Republican rivals, the Southern "Lily Whites." Touring the South in 1905, the President reassured whites by stressing his Southern background and his admiration for the South, the Confederacy, and Robert E. Lee; he even sent roses to Stonewall Jackson's widow. It was, said a black leader, "national treachery to the Negro."[21]

Roosevelt condemned lynching during his second term, but he also revealed his profound reservations about African-Americans.[22] In an infamous episode in 1906, Roosevelt dishonorably discharged 170 black soldiers of the U.S. Army who had declined to tell what they knew, if anything, about a nighttime rampage through streets of the inhospitable town of Brownsville, Texas. Angered that the town's white-owned saloons either refused to serve blacks or forced them to drink in back rooms, ten or twenty of the soldiers had shot and killed a bartender and wounded a police lieutenant. The raid was, Rooosevelt fumed, "unparalleled for infamy in the annals of the United States Army"; the guilty soldiers were "bloody butchers" who should have been hanged. "If the colored men elect to stand by criminals of their own race because they are of their own race," the President warned, "they assuredly lay up for themselves the most dreadful day of reckoning." It was a sorry performance. The administration eventually agreed to let the soldiers appeal to an army panel for the right to reenlist—but only fourteen of them made it back into the service. Roosevelt left the whole matter out of his memoirs, as well he might have.[23]

Roosevelt's successors did not do much more for African-Americans. President William Howard Taft sought the support of white Southern Republicans and made clear he would not interfere with the region's social

arrangements. Woodrow Wilson, a son of Virginia elected to the White House in large part by the votes of white Southerners, did more than tolerate segregation. As President, he allowed a number of federal departments to segregate their black employees in Washington and demote or fire black federal workers in the South. In an angry White House encounter with the black leader William Monroe Trotter in 1914, Wilson finally admitted what was obvious: that he believed segregation was the best policy for African-Americans.[24]

A few progressives knew better. More than almost any other reformer, Jane Addams managed to get past racist culture and acknowledge the sham of "separate but equal." Contradicting the cherished creed of Edgar Gardner Murphy and other progressives, Jane Addams wrote in 1911 that segregation made it harder, not easier, to improve the welfare of African-Americans. The creation of "a colony of colored people" in large cities, Addams insisted, broke down the black family and weakened its ability to bring up its children amid urban temptation. The leader of Hull-House worked with national black leaders, but Hull-House did not, as her friend and associate Louise de Koven Bowen conceded, make much of an effort to cross racial boundaries and promote association among different races. Addams raised funds for the Frederick Douglass Center, one of the very few settlements serving both blacks and whites. But African-Americans, Bowen noted, "were not always welcomed warmly" at Hull-House. Years later, Addams herself summed up the progressives' failure—with a persisting, telling note of condescension. Despite the predicament of African-Americans, she admitted in 1930, "we are no longer stirred as the Abolitionists were, to remove fetters, to prevent cruelty, to lead the humblest to the banquet of civilization."[25]

In these circumstances, "the humblest" had only a few, difficult alternatives: accommodate segregation; resist; or leave the country. Some African-Americans were indeed interested in going. Robert Charles belonged to the International Migration Society, which pledged to get African-Americans to Liberia. He was also a follower of Henry M. Turner, bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who called on blacks to go back to Africa. But Charles did not leave America; instead, he stood his ground and fought. Then and afterward, many blacks, workers in particular, admired his resistance and embroidered his story. "[T]here never has been anything authentic that Robert Charles was captured," the pioneering New Orleans jazz pianist,

composer, and bandleader Jelly Roll Morton insisted years later. Blacks even made up a song about Charles. But they also understood what it meant to make his choice, to risk white violence. "I once knew the Robert Charles song," Jelly Roll Morton admitted, "but I found out it was best for me to forget it and that I did in order to go along with the world on the peaceful side. . . . [I]t was a trouble breeder."[26]

In the short run, at least, the choice for most African-Americans was to accommodate segregation, much as earlier generations had accommodated slavery. Like the slaves, twentieth-century blacks had to learn to live a double life. Inwardly, they did not have to believe in white supremacy and black inferiority, but outwardly, they had to offer deference and submissiveness. For safety's sake, this feat of self-control had to be mastered early in life.[27]

Benjamin Mays, born on a farm ten miles outside the town of Ninety Six in Greenwood County, South Carolina, in 1894 or 1895, was the child of former slaves. His first memory was of the mob of white men on horseback who "cursed my father, drew their guns and made him salute, made him take off his hat and bow down to them several times." Young Benjamin saw bloodhounds hunting a black man; he watched a black man, on the run from whites, hide in a swamp. In the process, Benjamin began to understand the arbitrary nature of white power. "Negroes always got the worst of it," Mays remembered. "Guilt and innocence were meaningless words: the Negro was always blamed, always punished." Mays also began to understand the limited scope of black power. "Among themselves, Negroes talked much about these tragedies," he noted. "They were impotent to do anything about them." Benjamin saw what happened to blacks who talked back to whites or, worse, struck back at them. And so, as a child, he learned mutualistic lessons similar to those learned by Hamlin Garland on the farm and Rahel Golub in the tenement and the sweatshop; but he focused more on some very different lessons: not to talk about racial matters, not to get too close to white women, not even to mention the black boxer Jack Johnson, who whipped a white man to win the heavyweight championship in 1908. "In this perilous world," Mays observed, "if a black boy wanted to live a halfway normal life and die a natural death he had to learn early the art of how to get along with white folks. . . . [I]t behooved Negroes to be humble, meek, and subservient in the presence of white folks." Even that might not be enough: "No matter how they acted, it was not always possible for Negroes to 'stay out of trou-

ble'; the many who cringed and kowtowed to white people the most were in just as much danger as the few who did not. How could a Negro avoid trouble when his 'place' was whatever any white man's whim dictated at any given time?" Benjamin recognized the toll that this life took on his people. "It certainly 'put the rabbit' in many Negroes," he wrote. "Negroes lived under constant pressures and tensions all the time in my community. . . . To be at ease, to be relaxed, to be free were luxuries unknown to Negroes in Greenwood County and in most sections of the South." Some frustrated African-Americans fought among themselves. "It was difficult," Mays concluded, "virtually impossible, to combine manhood and blackness under one skin in the days of my youth."[28]

The principles that Benjamin Mays learned as a boy guided some black leaders as well. At the turn of the century, prominent African-Americans, North and South, pursued a strategy of accommodation. The most famous of them was Booker T. Washington, a slave at his birth in Virginia in the 1850s, founder of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute for blacks in the 1880s, and adviser to Republican politicians and Northern philanthropists by the 1890s. In a speech at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895, Washington offered what became known as the "Atlanta Compromise." With an eye on moderate whites, Washington urged blacks to accept segregation and disfranchisement and concentrate instead on economic progress through self-help, thrift, and hard work. "In the long run it is the race or individual that exercised the most patience, forbearance, and self-control in the midst of trying conditions that wins . . . the respect of the world," he insisted. "An inch of progress is worth more than a yard of complaint." To make that progress, Washington favored the kind of industrial education offered at the Tuskegee Institute rather than higher education in the liberal arts. A politician at heart, Washington knew how to say different things to different people: whites could hear the promise of acquiescence; blacks, the promise of upward mobility and eventual equality. "It is not within the province of human nature," Washington declared, "that the man who is intelligent and virtuous, and owns and cultivates the best farm in his county, shall very long be denied the proper respect and consideration." Washington's optimism—"look always upon the bright side of life," he would say—must have been hard to take sometimes. But he also offered a vision of black solidarity, strength, and separateness: "We are a nation within

a nation." And Washington himself lived the double life. Privately, he pushed a more assertive policy. At various times, he worked behind the scenes to limit disfranchisement legislation and Jim Crow practices on the railroads. Yet, outwardly, like young Benjamin Mays, he preached accommodation.[29]

At the beginning of the new century, Booker T. Washington had many willing listeners. The black middle class—African-Americans who had some property and income and hoped for more—generally accepted his strategy. Many working-class blacks, at least in the South, probably did too. But there were already signs that some African-Americans disliked so much accommodation. Beginning in the late 1890s, blacks in many Southern communities refused to ride on segregated streetcars. By shaming the streetcar owners and hurting their profits, these black boycotters hoped to end one element of Jim Crow in the South. The boycott movement peaked from 1900 to 1906, with actions in more than twenty-five Southern cities, but the results were disappointing. The loss of black riders was not enough to make whites give up Jim Crow on the cars.[30]

During these years, Booker T. Washington also began to face direct challenges to his leadership. Prominent African-Americans resented Washington's influence over black educational institutions and newspapers and his ties to white philanthropists and politicians. Some blacks believed that Washington's strategy of accommodation was shameful. William Monroe Trotter, the Harvard-educated editor of the African-American paper the Boston *Guardian*, labeled Washington a "self-seeker" and a "coward." Other blacks questioned Washington's fundamental strategic choice to emphasize economic development and acquiesce in disfranchisement.[31]

The strongest, most comprehensive challenge to Washington came from W. E. B. Du Bois, a professor at Atlanta University. Brought up in western Massachusetts, educated at Fisk, Harvard, and Berlin in the 1890s, Du Bois was already, in his thirties, a powerful intellectual and an accomplished sociologist. Once essentially a follower of Washington, Du Bois had come to question the trade-offs of the "Atlanta Compromise." That became quite clear in 1903 when Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk*, complete with an essay criticizing Washington for advocating "submission." Du Bois feared that economic progress would be impossible unless blacks had political rights. Emphasizing the importance of educated blacks, the "talented tenth," for the progress of the race, Du Bois also rejected Washington's focus on

industrial rather than higher education. Joining the Socialist Party in 1904, Du Bois seemed willing to range far beyond Washington's conventional Republicanism and individualism.

Du Bois offered more than a rejoinder to Washington. In his work, Du Bois explored the duality of African-American identity: "One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." Du Bois envisioned a pluralist America, one in which blacks could be themselves rather than appear as whites wanted them to appear. The nation had to be black as well as white. "He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world," Du Bois wrote. "He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face."[32]

To help create a pluralist America, Du Bois arranged for a small meeting on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls in July 1905. What came to be known as the Niagara Movement firmly rejected accommodation of Southern whites, protested disfranchisement, praised collegiate as well as industrial education, and demanded protest as well as economic self-help. "We do not hesitate to complain," the meeting declared, "and to complain loudly and insistently." By 1909, the Niagara Movement had helped give rise to a new organization that became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People a year later. The association included white supporters and benefactors—Lillian Wald and William English Walling, for instance—as well as African-Americans. Du Bois became its director of publicity and research and began to edit its journal, aptly named *The Crisis*.[33]

There were other African-American protests, including a passionate campaign against lynching. Georgia African-Americans held an Equal Rights Convention at Macon in 1906. "We must encourage Negro businessmen," the convention's president, William Jefferson White, declared. "And at the same time we must agitate, complain, protest, and keep protesting against the invasion of our manhood rights . . . and above all organize these million brothers of ours into one great fist which shall never cease to pound at the gates of opportunity until they shall fly open." Bishop Henry M. Turner was still bolder. "To the Negro in the country the American flag is a

dirty and contemptible rag . . . ," he declaimed. "I wish to say that hell is an improvement upon the United States when the Negro is involved." Few African-Americans were ready to go that far. Many may have liked what Du Bois had to say—but they also heeded Washington's message. North and South, the realities of white power tempered black emotion. The streetcar boycotts faded away; the NAACP struggled. A true African-American mass movement against segregation was a long way off.[34]

The differences between Du Bois and Washington are obvious, and often remarked. The ideas they shared, including an uneven relationship to progressivism, are less plain but nonetheless revealing about the prospects for a "middle-class paradise" in America. Du Bois and Washington, along with other black middle-class leaders, shared the often condescending attitude of white progressives toward a working class supposedly in need of improvement. The African-American elite spoke of "uplifting the race." To achieve that goal, they emphasized the same kind of programs, especially educational and recreational reform, that progressivism emphasized. And they employed the same kinds of organization: women's clubs, religious groups, and such settlements as the Robert Gould Shaw House in Boston, the Lincoln House in Manhattan, the Neighborhood Union in Atlanta, Locust Street Settlement in Hampton, Virginia, Flanner House in Indianapolis, and Plymouth Settlement House in Louisville. As in progressivism, women played a prominent role. With black men cut off from the ballot and political participation, black women artfully capitalized on male deference to their roles as mothers and guardians of the home in order to press the African-American cause. It was, for instance, women such as Mary Church Terrell and the outspoken journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett who led the black protest against lynching.[35]

Still, the necessities of life in Greenwood County and New Orleans, in San Juan Hill and the Tenderloin, also moved African-American activism away from progressivism. Unlike Edward Bellamy and so many other white progressives, black Americans had little reason to place their faith in state power and little to reason to believe they could gain it. Skepticism about the state in turn helps explain African-Americans' rather Victorian emphasis on self-help and self-development. At a time when the white middle class stressed the importance of association, of the individual's adjustment to the group, the black middle class necessarily invoked a more old-fashioned indi-

vidualism of "patience, forbearance, and self-control." And finally, at a time when white progressives stressed social unity, and worked to make social groups more alike, African-Americans were determined to maintain their sense of difference in the United States. Whether it was Du Bois writing of black "twoness" or Washington talking of "a nation within a nation," African-American activism, for all its similarities to progressivism, also pointed away from white reform and its notion of human identity.

African-Americans had good reason to chart an independent course from progressivism. Segregation, the progressive solution, not only exacted a heavy toll from blacks in lost freedom, power, and opportunity; Jim Crow did not even make the United States a safe place. Across the country, the lynching of blacks actually increased from fifty-seven in 1905 to eighty-nine in 1908. Atlanta saw four days of white mob violence in September 1906, inspired by the usual rumors of black attacks on white women. Black Atlantans fled the city's center in terror; the rioting spread even into the black middle-class section of Brownsville, home of W. E. B. Du Bois. Perhaps twenty-five black people, as well as one white, died. During the Roosevelt administration, racial violence struck the North as well. Evansville, Indiana, was the site of rioting in 1903. In August 1908, there was a riot in Springfield, Illinois, the home of Abraham Lincoln. Two blacks and four whites died; the homes of blacks were burned. "Lincoln freed you," white rioters shouted, "now we'll show you where you belong!" "[The] conditions in Springfield are not peculiar to that city," a reporter wrote. "Almost every community in the country is face to face with the same possibilities. A mob may form in an hour." Despite segregation, it seemed, differences between black and white might not be safely contained after all.[36]

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Differences between