

History-Social Science Framework Resource Collection

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GRADE 8, STANDARD 8.11.3
GRADE 9, ETHNIC STUDIES
GRADE 11, STANDARD 11.1.4

How did W.E.B. Du Bois' research challenge dominant narratives about black Americans during the Jim Crow period?

NARRATIVE CONTENT FROM THE HSS FRAMEWORK

GRADE 8

Students analyze how events during and after Reconstruction raised and then dashed hopes that African Americans would achieve full equality. They should understand how, over the next couple of decades, courts and political interests undermined the intent of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. They learn how slavery was replaced by black peonage, segregation, Jim Crow laws, and other legal restrictions on the rights of African Americans, capped by the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896 ("separate but equal"). Racism prevailed—enforced by lynch mobs, the Ku Klux Klan, popular sentiment, and federal acceptance—which spread outside of the South.

ETHNIC STUDIES

As a field, Ethnic Studies seeks to empower all students to engage socially and politically and to think critically about the world around them. It is important for Ethnic Studies courses to document the experiences of people of color in order for students to construct counter-narratives and develop a more complex understanding of the human experience. Through these studies, students should develop respect for

cultural diversity and see the advantages of inclusion.

GRADE 11

Teachers may want to highlight the emergence of a free, democratic system of government alongside an entrenched system of chattel slavery that lasted for nearly a century. The question How have American freedom and slavery coexisted in the nation's past? reminds students of the parallel—and seemingly paradoxical—relationship.

Students can continue with a selective review of American government by considering this question: How did the country change because of the Civil War and Reconstruction in the nineteenth century? The events leading up to the Civil War, the successes and failures of Reconstruction, and informal and formal segregation brought on by Jim Crow laws also provide context for understanding racial inequities in late-nineteenth-century America. To help students understand the history of the Constitution after 1787, teachers pay particular attention to the



Note: In the interest of space, all images are hyperlinked. Citations are included at the end.

post-Civil War amendments (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth), which laid the foundation for the legal phase of the twentieth-century civil rights movement.

The amended Constitution gave the federal government increased power over the states, especially for the extension of equal rights and an inclusive definition of citizenship. A focus on these topics later on in the course allows for a comparative study of the civil rights movement over time as ethnic and racial minorities experienced it.

In addition to the civil rights groundwork laid by the Reconstruction-era Constitutional Amendments, students should closely read the Fourteenth Amendment as it has been continually reinterpreted and applied to different contexts by the courts; for example, sometimes it has been employed as a protection for workers and other times as a protection for corporations. In the context of the late nineteenth century, civil right advocates such as Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute and author of the 1895 Atlanta Exposition address, and W. E. B. Du Bois, a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and author of *The Souls of Black Folk*, had different perspectives on the means of achieving greater progress and equality for African Americans. Racial violence, discrimination, and segregation inhibited African Americans' economic mobility, opportunity, and political participation.

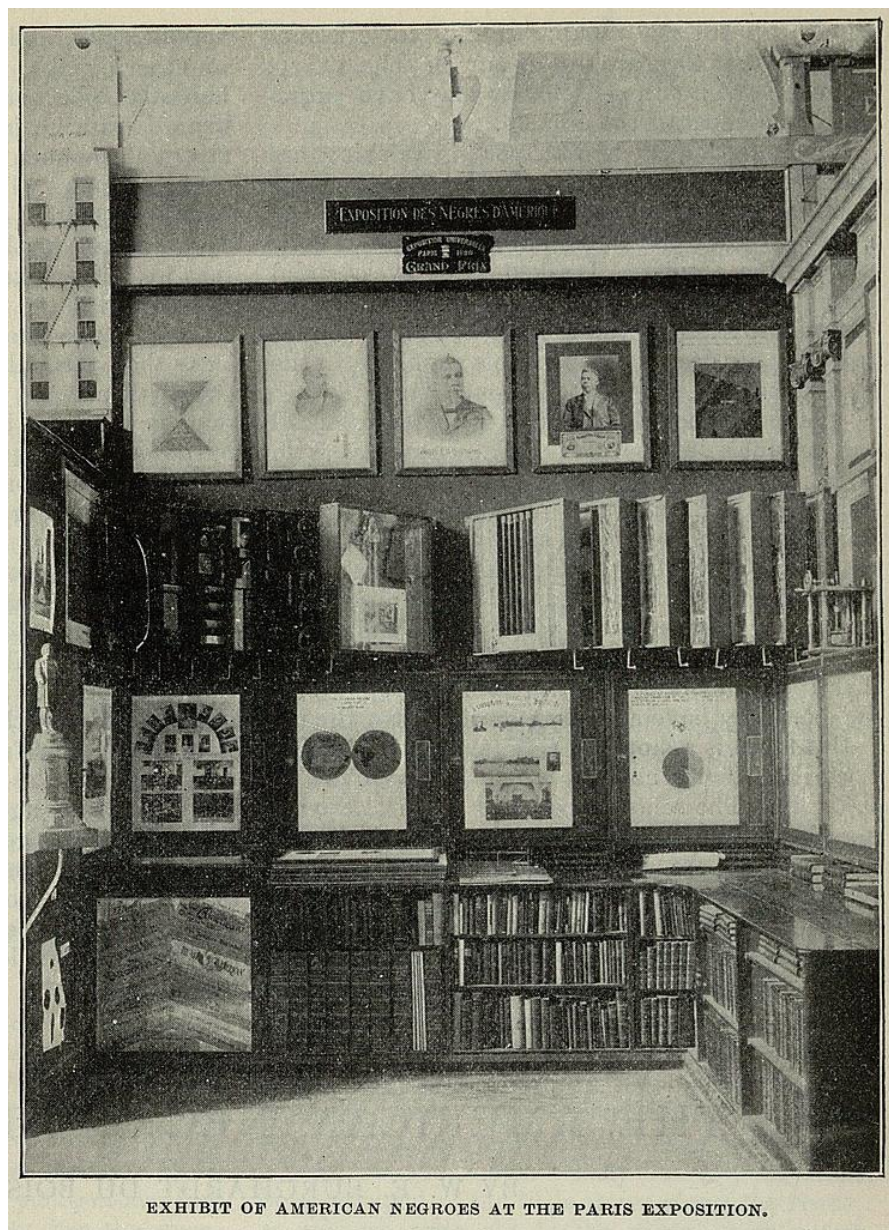
TEACHER BACKGROUND

In the decades that followed the US Civil War, white supremacists made every effort to maintain the status quo of African Americans within the existing social order. This included promoting the racist idea that African Americans deserved their subordination in slavery, and thus, undeserving of equality. The dominant cultural narrative demeaned and dehumanized African Americans by portraying

them as ignorant, barbaric, and incapable of contributing to the advancement of American society. Jim Crow laws and violent physical attacks against African Americans nationwide reinforced these sentiments.

The pervasive racism and discrimination caused Thomas Calloway, Special Commissioner of the African American exhibit for the 1900 World's Fair, to ask, "How shall we answer these slanders?" A group of influential African Americans, which included the scholar and activist

W.E.B. Du Bois, answered the call to provide a counternarrative. Du Bois, then a professor at Atlanta University, led the team of scholars in curating an exhibit titled "The Exhibit of American Negroes." Among its many offerings, the collection included photographs and hand drawn graphs to describe the collective progress of African Americans in the years following emancipation. These documents challenged racist beliefs of that era that Special Commissioner Calloway labeled as "conclusions which do us harm." Ultimately, the exhibit humanized



Community Support



Washington, D.C., Oct. 18 1899.

Dear Sir:

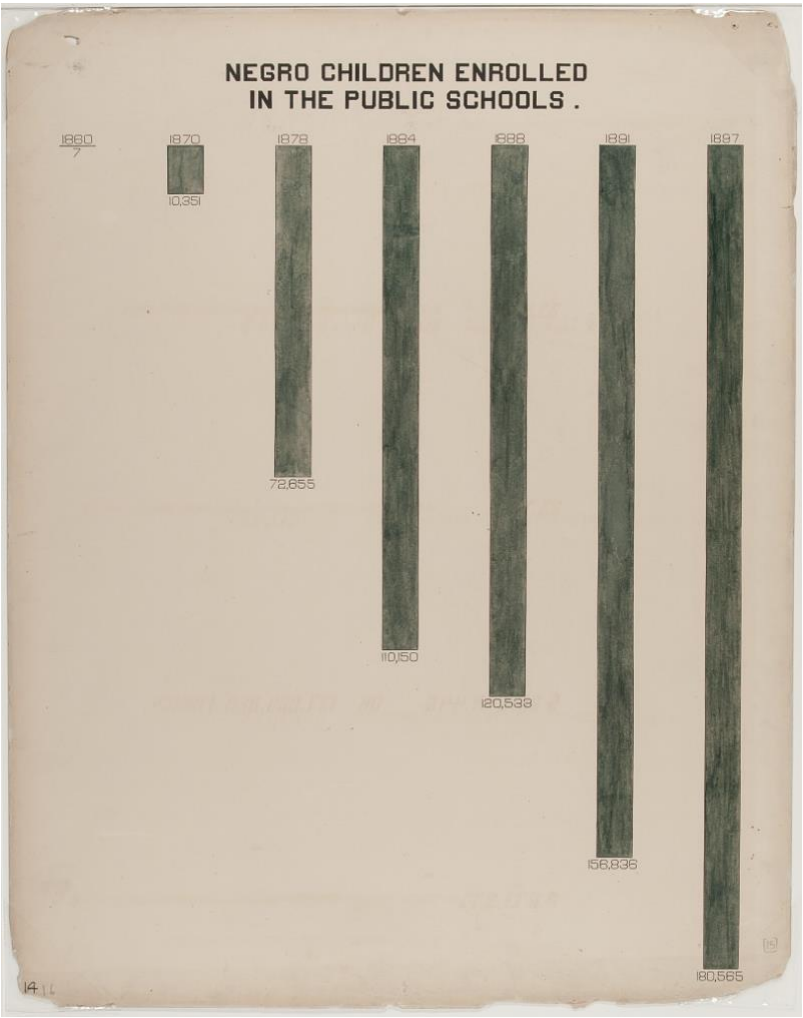
The effort you are making to provide for a Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exhibit is laudable, and should be encouraged by every man and woman identified with the race. In this way alone can the evidences of our progress be made a living, breathing reality not only to Europeans, but to many Americans, who know almost nothing of the strides the Negro has made in literature and in art, as well as in the various industries and trades.

MARY CHURCH TERRELL.

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An exhibition at the 1900 World's Fair, held in Paris, encouraged many African Americans of the time. Prominent among them was Mary Church Terrell, a journalist, an activist, and one of the founding members of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Church Terrell also earned the honor as one of the first African American women college graduates in the United States. She exemplified the progress W.E.B. Du Bois and the educators who collaborated on "The Exhibit of American Negroes" wanted to highlight. This excerpt is from an edition of *The Colored American*, a Black-owned newspaper, that published public responses to the Paris showcase. Church Terrell praised the exhibit for educating Europeans and many Americans, who knew "almost nothing of the strides the Negro has made in literature and in art, as well as in the various industries and trades." The exhibition had the potential to dismantle negative stereotypes, and in Church Terrell's words, "a living, breathing reality," of African American advancements.

School Enrollment



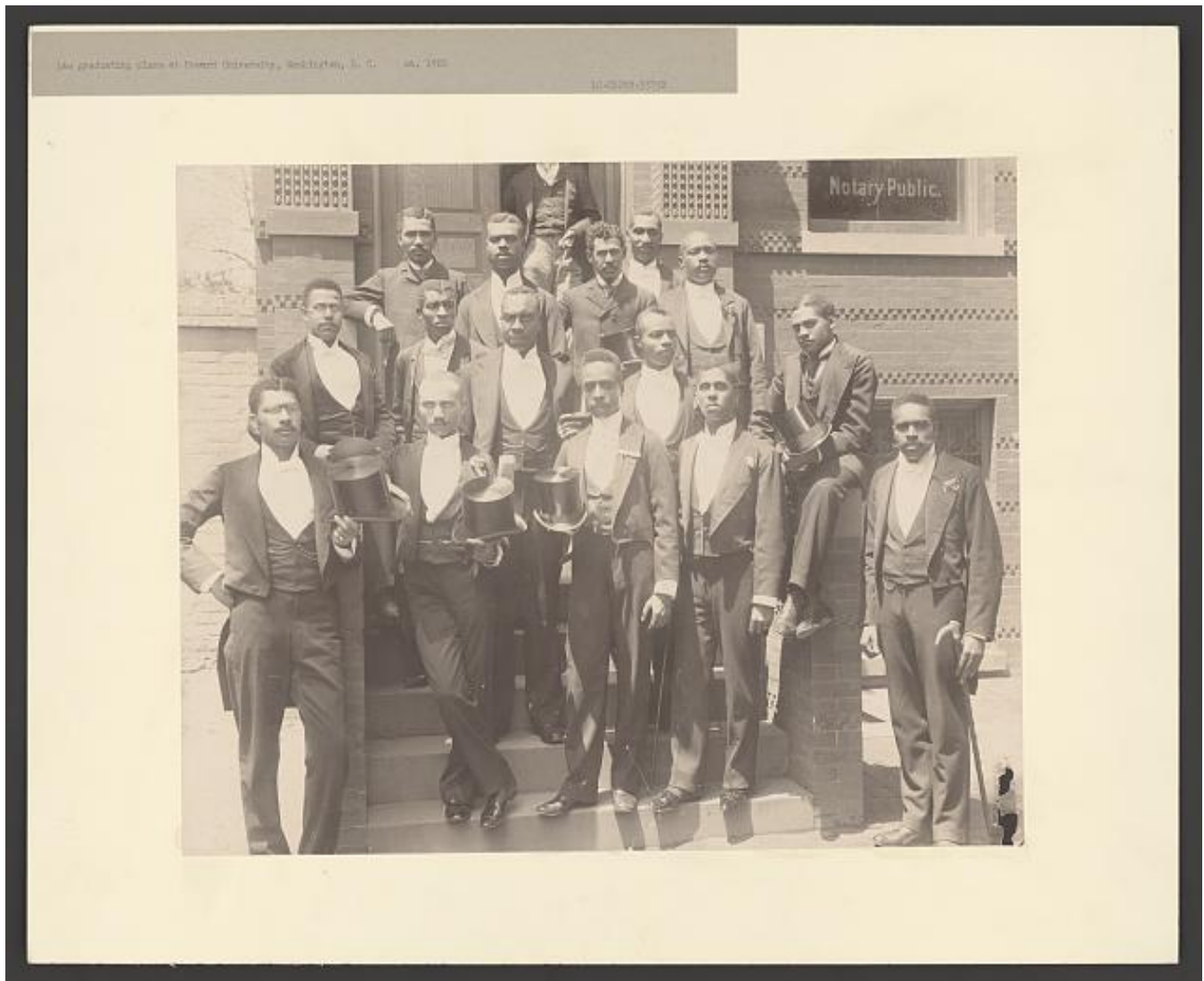
Thousands of attendees of the 1900 World's Fair in Paris had the opportunity to view "The Exhibit of American Negroes" and its many graphic representations of African American life, past and present. Throughout his life, W.E.B. Du Bois fiercely championed education as a means towards greater opportunity for African Americans. In the thirty two years since the end of the Civil War (1865), the number of African American students grew steadily. This graph shows the number of African American children enrolled in public schools between 1860 and 1897.

According to the graph, in 1860, at the start of the Civil War, only seven African American children were enrolled in public schools. Throughout the

institution of slavery, supported by slave codes they enacted, whites harshly punished Black people caught learning to read or write. With freedom came educational opportunity. The number Black students grew to 180,585 by 1897. This was due in large part to the efforts of government agencies such as the Freedmen's Bureau, which trained new teachers and opened new schools. The proliferation of African American schools and students confounded the prevailing generalization that black people were incapable of book learning, much less academic success. Furthermore, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that are still in existence today were established and expanded in the post-Civil War period.

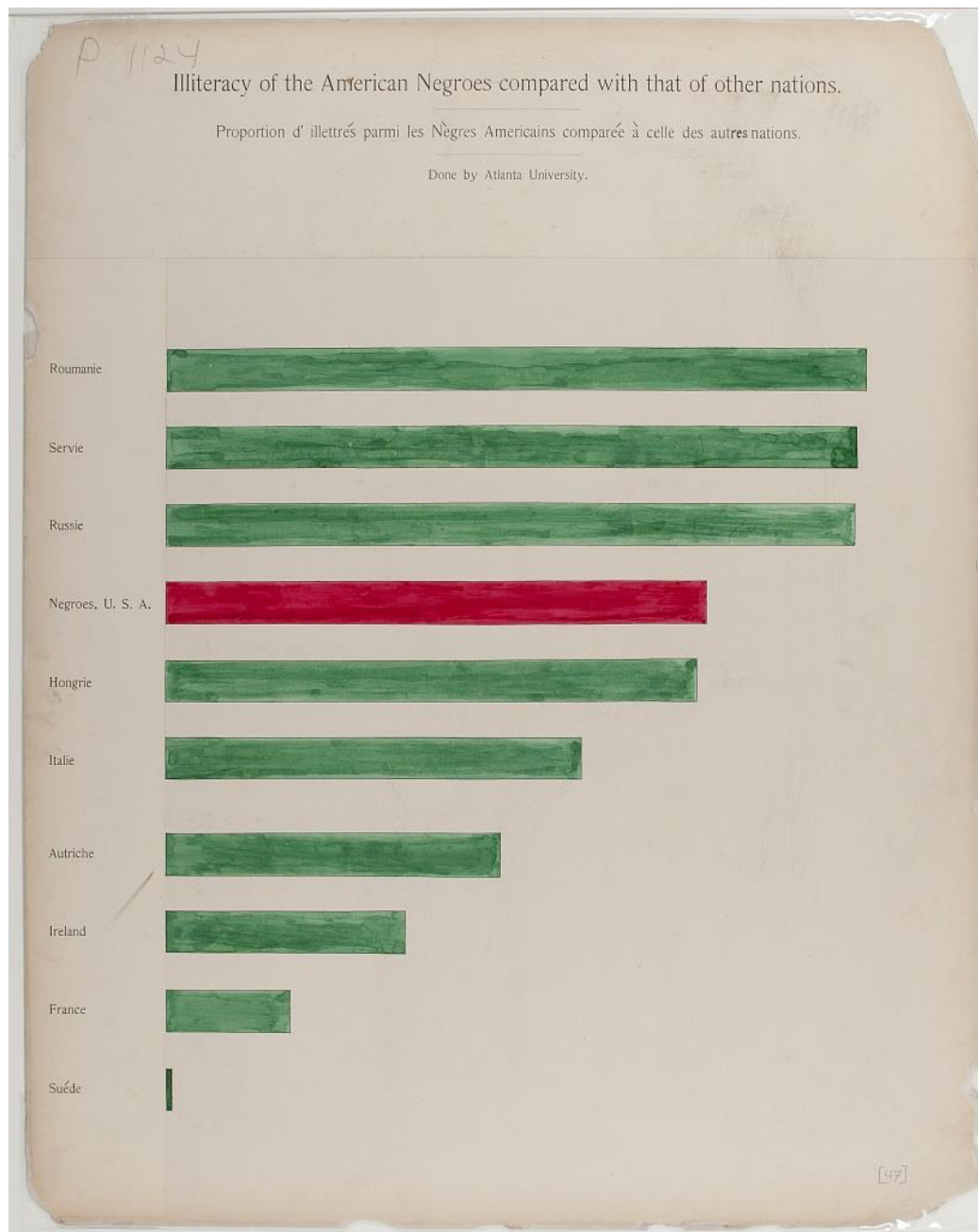
YEAR	STUDENTS
1860	7
1870	10,351
1878	72,655
1884	110,150
1888	120,593
1891	156,836
1897	180,565

Higher Education



“The Exhibit of American Negroes” included a large number of photographs that showcased African American successes at the turn of the 20th century. This image depicts sixteen graduates of Howard University’s Law School. Founded in 1869, it was the first school to train black students for a career in law. Graduate students, like the men pictured, would likely have been members of a group W.E.B. Du Bois characterized it as the “Talented Tenth.” Du Bois, among others, believed that an elite group of African Americans would become leaders in education, the arts, and other professions, creating more opportunities for the broader community through their example.

Comparative Illiteracy



The presenters of “The Exhibit of American Negroes” at the Paris World’s Fair attempted to appeal to their largely European audience. This graph juxtaposes the illiteracy rate of African Americans with the illiteracy rates in European countries. According to the information compiled by the researchers at Atlanta University, illiteracy among African Americans similarly matched illiteracy in European countries, such as Hungary.

*Countries listed in order from top to bottom: Roumanie, Servie, Russie, Negroes, U.S.A., Hongrie, Italie, Autriche, Ireland, France, Suede

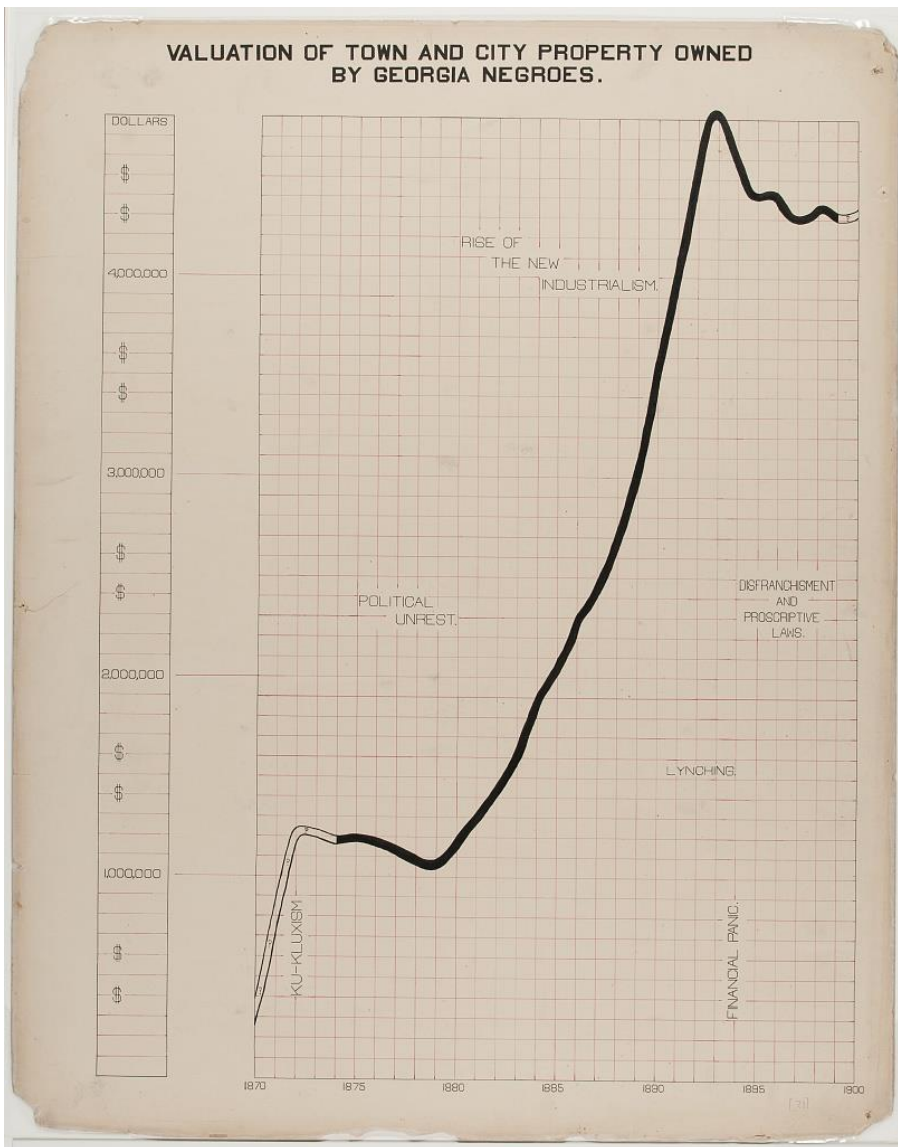
Thirty years after the end of slavery, illiteracy in the African American community was less than that of some European countries, namely Russia and Romania. Because the latter countries had their own socio-economic disparities, the exhibitors seemed to be arguing that African Americans, at the very least, had the aptitude for learning. Thus, they debunked the long held racist contention that Black people were cognitively compromised.

Pursuit of Science



W.E.B. Du Bois and his team included this photograph as part of their Paris collection to document Black progress in academic and research settings. African American men and women are shown conducting experiments in the Biological Laboratory of The Agricultural and Mechanical College in Greensboro, N.C. The college - now known as North Carolina A&T State University - was established in 1891 as a post-secondary institution exclusively for black students. Comparatively, qualified white students attended North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, now North Carolina State University.

Economic Gains



*References to contemporary events:

- Ku-Kluxism
- Political Unrest
- Rise of the New Industrialism
- Lynching
- Financial Panic
- Disfranchisement and Proscriptive Laws

Why would current events affect economic progress or decline?

"The Exhibit of American Negroes" also sought to spotlight African American economic achievement and the socio-political obstacles in their path. This graph shows the economic progress and decline of those living in Georgia, including socioeconomic and political trends, between the years 1870 and 1900. Not surprisingly, there is rapid economic growth in the years immediately following the US Civil War. The course seems to have reversed during a period of "political unrest" between 1875-1880. While not explicitly stated on the graph, this annotation may be a reference to the end of Reconstruction and numerous acts of racial violence that occurred in the US South in places like Colfax, Louisiana or Meridian, Mississippi. Property ownership then rose again sharply, most likely as a result of the industrial revolution. The graph also shows a more recent decline in African American economic progress in the early 1890s, which Du Bois and his colleagues attribute to lynchings, financial panic, disenfranchisement and "proscriptive laws."

Additional Resources

[DuBois in Paris – Exposition Universelle, 1900](#)

[The colored American. \[volume\], November 03, 1900](#)

[Materials Compiled by W.E.B. Du Bois](#)

[African American Photographs Assembled for 1900 Paris Exposition](#)

[What W.E.B. DuBois Conveyed in His Captivating Infographics](#) (External)

[W.E.B. DuBois Papers, 1803-1999, UMass, Amherst](#) (External)

Bibliography

[The colored American. \[volume\], November 03, 1900, Page 2, Image 2](#)

[\[The Georgia Negro\] Negro children enrolled in the public schools.](#)

[Law graduating class at Howard University, Washington, D.C.](#)

[Illiteracy of the American Negroes compared with that of other nations](#)

[Agricultural and Mechanical College, Greensboro, N.C. Biological laboratory](#)

[Valuation of town and city property owned by Georgia Negroes](#)