

### 3-2 Short Paper: Early Civil Rights Organizations

#### \*Make-up Assignment

Although the American Civil War only lasted for four years, the changes it brought about would permanently change the future of the nation. The fundamental difference that awaited black Americans wasn't just their release from chains and from difficult, unpaid labor, but also the voice they would grow as they faced the Reconstruction era and the emergence of new challenges in the 20th century. As history tells it, "most white people believed African Americans were an inferior race capable of little more than manual labor and entitled to only the most basic legal rights," (Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2011, 439). Basically, even though black Americans were legally "free" their social status among white people still prevented them from the same privileges. Blacks were paid significantly less than whites, faced discrimination that prevented them from getting the same educational opportunities, and were even denied fair trials in the court of law. So yes, blacks were free, but with limitations that still put them in a place of submission to whites. After all, most whites, especially in the South, were so angered by the results of the war that they were willing to go to great lengths to ensure they remained "dominant" over black Americans.

If anything, the most prominent change in the pursuit of Civil Rights leading into the 20<sup>th</sup> century was to challenge the "separate but equal" ideology that began with the Plessy v. Ferguson case that challenged the effects of the fourteenth amendment. Additional problems would persist, but one thing was certain: With the rapid changes that America was facing that came with the Progressive Era, the first World War, and even the Great Depression, black Americans simply refused to stand down and remain the doormat of society. This would lead to the rise of famous organizations led by prominent black leaders who simply wanted to challenge

the rules of society that kept black Americans bound by invisible chains that only seemed to tighten through the years.

To add, the organizations may have had the goal of equality in mind, but that did not mean they were all on the same page in obtaining that goal. In fact, it was differences they all had that addressed the societal issues black Americans faced individually that could have been looked over by other organizations simply due to a lack of focus in those areas. This didn't mean that said organizations didn't care about those issues, but it was only expected for these organizations to focus on certain issues to establish their overall message in the face of the public. As an example, Booker T. Washington and William Edward Burghardt Du Bois may have clashed because of their belief in the approaches they had in their pursuit of civil rights, but that didn't mean they lacked the drive necessary to make a difference. For instance, Washington "believed economic acceptance would lead to political and social acceptance" (Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2011, 440). He was described as a "complex" man and "had an uncanny ability to elicit a positive response from other people" (Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2011, 441). His ability to calmly dine in the presence of white philanthropists and his charming demeanor upset some, but it was this way that he felt would solve the issues in the black community concerning education. Then we have leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois who in contrast with Washington "was a fearless activist determined to confront disfranchisement, Jim Crow, and lynching" (Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2011, 444). Washington believed that working together with whites would solve the problems he was focused on at the time, but Du Bois frowned at working so closely with the same people that were institutionalizing him and the black community. Plus, his concerns focused more closely on the annoyance he felt toward "white people who accepted or ignored white domination and had

little tolerance for black people who were unwilling to demand their civil and political rights”  
(Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2011, 444).

To conclude, the many organizations when put together made a difference that would last throughout the many years of civil rights movements that would further shape the nation.

## Bibliography

Hine, Darlene C., William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold. *The African-American Odyssey*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall, 2011