

Niagara Movement Declaration of Principles, 1905 (Excerpts)

Background: In July of 1905, W.E.B. DuBois, Monroe Trotter, and other black leaders convened in Buffalo, New York to craft an assertive alternative to the patient accommodation advised by Booker T. Washington. They drew up a position statement for the Niagara Movement, beginning with an acknowledgement of social and economic progress among American blacks in the previous decade. However, they also demanded civil, legal, and social equality and affirmed their determination to engage in peaceful protest against inequality with respect to suffrage, civil liberty, economic opportunity, education, justice in courts, and other social issues.

Color-Line: Any discrimination based simply on race or color is barbarous, we care not how hallowed it be by custom, expediency or prejudice. Differences made on account of ignorance, immorality, or disease are legitimate methods of fighting evil, and against them we have no word of protest; but discriminations based simply and solely on physical peculiarities, place of birth, color of skin, are relics of that unreasoning human savagery of which the world is and ought to be thoroughly ashamed.

“Jim Crow” Cars: We protest against the “Jim Crow” car, since its effect is and must be to make us pay first-class fare for third-class accommodations, render us open to insults and discomfort and to crucify wantonly our manhood, womanhood and self-respect.

Soldiers: We regret that this nation has never seen fit adequately to reward the black soldiers who, in its five wars, have defended their country with their blood, and yet have been systematically denied the promotions which their abilities deserve. And we regard as unjust,

the exclusion of black boys from the military and naval training schools.

War Amendments: We urge upon Congress the enactment of appropriate legislation for securing the proper enforcement of those articles of freedom, the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments of the Constitution of the United States.

Oppression: We repudiate the monstrous doctrine that the oppressor should be the sole authority as to the rights of the oppressed. The Negro race in America stolen, ravished and degraded, struggling up through difficulties and oppression, needs sympathy and receives criticism; needs help and is given hindrance, needs protection and is given mob-violence, needs justice and is given charity, needs leadership and is given cowardice and apology, needs bread and is given a stone. This nation will never stand justified before God until these things are changed.

The Church: Especially are we surprised and astonished at the recent attitude of the church

of Christ—of an increase of a desire to bow to racial prejudice, to narrow the bounds of human brotherhood, and to segregate black men to some outer sanctuary. This is wrong, unchristian and disgraceful to the twentieth century civilization.

Agitation: Of the above grievances we do not hesitate to complain, and to complain loudly and insistently. To ignore, overlook, or apologize for these wrongs is to prove ourselves unworthy of freedom. Persistent manly agitation is the way to liberty, and toward this goal the Niagara Movement has started and asks the cooperation of all men of all races.

Help: At the same time we want to acknowledge with deep thankfulness the help of our fellowmen from the Abolitionist down to those who today still stand for equal opportunity

and who have given and still give of their wealth and of their poverty for our advancement.

Duties: And while we are demanding, and ought to demand, and will continue to demand the rights enumerated above, God forbid that we should ever forget to urge corresponding duties upon our people:

The duty to vote.

The duty to respect the rights of others.

The duty to work.

The duty to obey the laws.

The duty to be clean and orderly.

The duty to send our children to school.

The duty to respect ourselves, even as we respect others.

This statement, complaint and prayer we submit to the American people, and Almighty God.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. According to the Declaration of Principles, what practice would lead to liberty?
2. This excerpt of the Declaration of Principles lists seven duties. Number them 1 – 7 based on the priority you believe Booker T. Washington would have assigned them. Then number them based on your understanding of DuBois's approach. Be prepared to discuss your rankings with other students.
3. What virtues and principles of constitutional government are addressed or implied in the document?
4. Find current events articles on topics similar to those addressed in this document and compare the Niagara Movement's goals to current topics.