

Primary Source

W. E. B. Du Bois, Niagara Movement Speech, 1905



To what extent did Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice become a reality for African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century?

- I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice in the first half of the twentieth century.
- I can explain how laws and policy, courts, and individuals and groups contributed to or pushed back against the quest for liberty, equality, and justice for African Americans.
- I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
- I can analyze issues in history to help find solutions to present-day challenges.

Building Context

In 1905, 29 Black leaders, including W. E. B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter, met near Niagara Falls to formulate an organization and statement dedicated to full Black equality. Du Bois and the Niagara leaders criticized Booker T. Washington for not directly or publicly challenging white supremacy. They urged Black Americans to work for immediate recognition of equal political and civil rights. The organization, called the Niagara Movement, established chapters in more than 20 states. The Niagara Movement struggled financially and disbanded in 1910, but it laid the foundation for the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.

Niagara Movement Speech

Source: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/niagara-movement-speech/>

We will not be satisfied to take one jot or tittle less than our full manhood rights. We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil and social . . . The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone but for all true Americans. It is a fight for ideals, lest this, our common fatherland, false to its founding, become in truth the land of the thief and the home of the Slave. . . . In detail our demands are clear and unequivocal. First, we would vote; with the right to vote goes everything: Free-dom, manhood, the honor of your wives, the chastity of your daughters, the right to work, and the chance to rise, and let no man listen to those who deny this. . . . Second. We want discrimination in public accommodation to cease. Separation in railway and street cars, based simply on race and color, is un-American, un-democratic, and silly. . . . Fourth. . . . We are not more lawless than the white race, we are more often arrested, convicted, and mobbed. We want justice even for criminals and outlaws. We want the Constitution of the country enforcedWe want the Fourteenth amendment carried out to the letter and every State disfranchised in Congress which attempts to disfranchise its rightful voters. We want the Fifteenth amendment enforced and No State allowed to base its franchise simply on color. . . . Fifth. We want our children educated. The school system in the country districts of the South is a disgrace and in few towns and cities are Negro schools what they ought to be. . . . We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any pro-posal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have a right to know, to think, to aspire. . . . Justice and humanity must prevail. [No monetary gain] is worth the surrender of a people's manhood or the loss of a man's self-respect. We refuse to surrender the leadership of this race to cowards

Notes

and trucklers. We are men; we will be treated as men. On this rock we have planted our banners. We will never give up, though the trump of doom finds us still fighting.	
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Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. What does Du Bois mean when he states that the United States is “false to its founding”?

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2. What demands does Du Bois make?

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