

Section Two: Workshop Goals and Intellectual Rationale

1. To use historic sites related to civil rights events in Atlanta to trace the history of the color line in twentieth century American history.
2. To read the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and to listen to the voices of civil rights protestors at associated sites in Atlanta.
3. To provide teachers with the opportunity to develop curriculum that makes use of historic landmarks in Atlanta and related historic documents to teach the history of the color line and the Civil Rights Movement in 20th century American history.

Intellectual Rationale

In *The Souls of Black Folk* as he reflected on the history of the South and the nation at the dawn of the 20th century, W. E. B. Du Bois stated: “The Problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.” Now that the twentieth century has concluded, it is clear that Du Bois was right. The Atlanta writings of Du Bois from his base at Atlanta University will be the starting point for the workshop. When Du Bois penned his observations in Atlanta’s **Stone Hall** of the Atlanta University Center in 1903, he did so in a segregated city where Jim Crow regulated the relationships between the races, subjecting African American citizens to a second-class status. Just eight years before Du Bois published his reflections, Booker T. Washington had come to Atlanta to address the dignitaries and well-wishers who assembled for the opening of the Cotton States and International Exposition at what is now **Piedmont Park**. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech was hailed by whites for its accommodation to the color line, but criticized by Du Bois who believed that segregation needed to be confronted.

Du Bois had come to Atlanta University in 1897 to conduct scientific studies of the social conditions of the Negro, the results of which he published as the *Atlanta University Studies* (1900-1913) as annual investigations of such African American institutions as the family and the church. However, he found that African Americans were the objects of white violence, demonstrated by the Atlanta Race Riot in 1906, when white mobs attacked, beat, and murdered Black trolley riders who were on their way through the downtown. After helping to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Du Bois left Atlanta for New York City, where he edited the NAACP magazine, *Crisis*.

The Atlanta that Du Bois left behind was a place where the color line was hardened. As the 20th century progressed, Atlanta's racial divide could be seen in its institutions, its businesses and its neighborhoods. On the east side, **Auburn Avenue** became the nexus of black business near the downtown and at its extremity a center of middle-class residential living. On the West Side African American millionaire Alonzo Herndon built his home (the **Herndon Home**) next to the President’s Home of Atlanta University. The creation of a separate place of black business (**Atlanta Life Insurance**) and worship (**Big Bethel AME, Wheat Street Baptist, and Ebenezer Baptist**) not only represented the color line, but also embodied the places of organized resistance to a second-class status.

After the white-only Democratic primary was declared unconstitutional in Georgia in 1946, African Americans began to influence the outcomes of Atlanta elections, and in the late 1940s and 1950s, gained modest political concessions such as the hiring of black policemen. By the early 1960s, young African Americans were becoming impatient with the relatively slow pace of change. Students at the **Atlanta University Center** campuses published a full-page ad in the Atlanta newspaper titled “An Appeal to Human Rights,” which stated that they were unwilling to wait as rights that were due them were meted out. The following week, small groups of students organized to request service in white-only restaurants and cafeterias in government buildings throughout the downtown.

With organized resistance from African Americans and the assistance of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black representatives began to take their places in **Atlanta City Hall** and the **State Capitol** and to dismantle the legalized Color Line. The Atlanta landscape where these struggles took place is now filled with landmark sites that speak to this history.



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