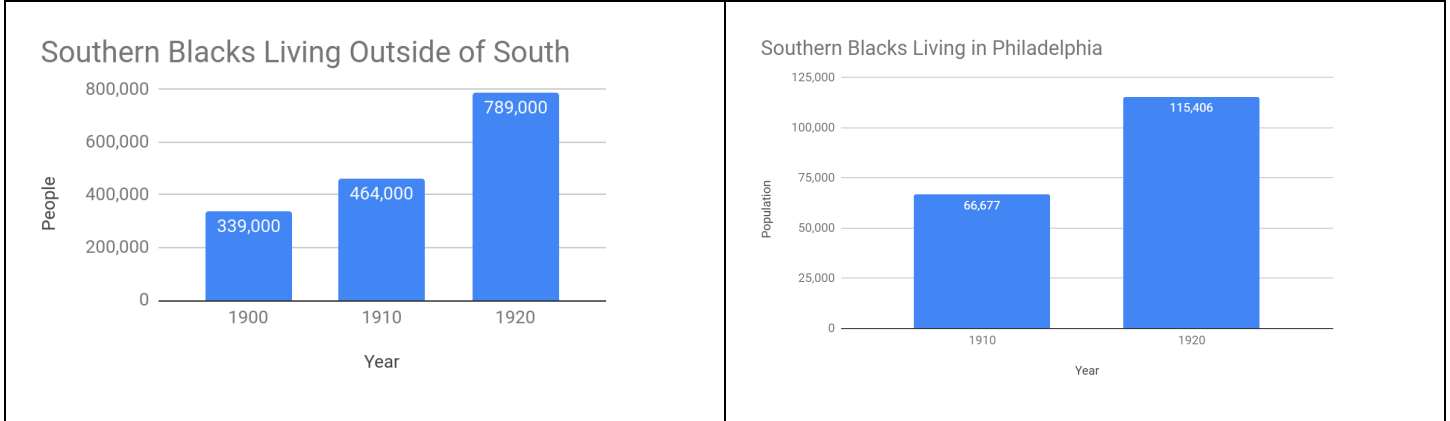


Race & Progressivism: What Were They Thinking

Q3: What were Progressives thinking about segregation in the United States?

Racial Geography

From [Mapping The Great Migration](#)



1. According to the documents under **Racial Geography** what is happening in the US during the Progressive Era?

Reaction

Senechal, Roberta. *The Sociogenesis of a Race Riot: Springfield, Illinois, in 1908.*

In August, 1908 there was a race riot in Springfield, Illinois. The following quotes are taken from the book cited above.

White rioters shouting to black residents.

'Lincoln freed you now we'll show you where you belong!'

Journalist reporting on the riot.

'[The] conditions in Springfield are not peculiar to that city. Almost every community in the country is face to face with the same possibilities. A mob may form in an hour.'

Benjamin Mays, *born to former-slaves, reflecting on his childhood in the South during the Progressive Era (197)*

'In this perilous world if a black boy wanted to live a halfway normal life and die a natural death he had to learn early the art of how to get along with white folks...[I]t behooved* Negroes to be humble, meek, and subservient in the presence of white folks...Negroes lived under constant pressures and tensions all the time in my community...To be at ease, to be relaxed, to be free were luxuries unknown to Negroes...in most sections of the South.'

behooved-a responsibility for someone to do something

2. According to the documents under **Reaction**, what were both white & black Americans thinking in response to the changes noted in the **Racial Geography** section?

Race & Progressivism: What Were They Thinking

Defending Segregation

Edgar Gardner Murphy (188)-*Murphy was a white Southern clergyman, social worker, and educator--he was a Progressive.*

‘There is a distinct assumption of the negro’s inferiority, but there is also a distinct assumption of the negro’s improvability. It is upon the basis of this double assumption that the South finds its obligation. The segregation of the race has thrown its members upon their own powers and has developed the qualities of resourcefulness...the noblest of the gifts of freedom, the power of personal and social self-dependence. The very process which may have seemed to some like a policy of oppression has in fact resulted in a process of development.’

3. What does Murphy assume about black Americans according to the quotations above?
4. What are the benefits of segregation according to Murphy?

‘The fact that the negro is a negro, the State may not alter, but the fact that the negro--quite as much at the North as the South--has not been adequately accorded the economic support of the large social forces of security, opportunity and hope, the State may largely alter if it will. Will it do?’

5. According to Murphy, what do Progressives need to do for black Americans?

From Oyez.com, a website that collects information about Supreme Court decisions. This excerpt summarizes an important Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson* which established the doctrine of separate but equal.

Louisiana enacted the Separate Car Act, which required separate railway cars for blacks and whites. In 1892, Homer Plessy – who was seven-eighths white – agreed to participate in a test to challenge the Act. He was asked by the Comite des Citoyens (Committee of Citizens), a group of New Orleans residents who sought to repeal the Act. They asked Plessy, who was technically black under Louisiana law, to sit in a “whites only” car of a Louisiana train.

The railroad cooperated because it thought the Act imposed unnecessary costs through the purchase of additional railroad cars. When Plessy was told to vacate the whites-only car, he refused and was arrested. At trial, Plessy’s lawyers argued that the Separate Car Act violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. The judge found that Louisiana could enforce this law insofar as it affected railroads within its boundaries. Plessy was convicted.

The Court held that the state law was constitutional. In an opinion authored by Justice Henry Billings Brown, the majority upheld state-imposed racial segregation. Justice Brown conceded that the 14th Amendment intended to establish absolute equality for the races before the law, but held that separate treatment did not imply the inferiority of African Americans. The Court noted that there was not a meaningful difference in quality between the white and black railway cars. In short, segregation did not in itself constitute unlawful discrimination.

6. Using the documents above, how would a Progressive justify the Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In other words, what were Progressives thinking in upholding segregationist policies?