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Industrialization and Urbanization, The New South

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Industrialization and urbanization also affected the South. Southern merchants, manufacturers, and newspaper editors of the 1880s led the campaign for a "New South," where Southern industrialism would break the cycle of rural poverty. States provided special breaks for new businesses and promised cheap labor. Birmingham, Alabama, became a railroad and steel center where mills hired black workers.

Southern textile mills opened in the 1880s in the Piedmont region from central Virginia to Alabama. Mill owners depended on low-skilled, low-paid white labor, and their mills attracted workers from rural areas. Workers settled in company towns where entire families worked for the mill. The South replaced New England as the nation's leading locale for textile mills.

Overall, however, the campaign to industrialize the South faltered. As late as 1900, only 5 percent of the Southern labor force, most of it white, worked in industry. Furthermore, Southern industry did not enrich the South. Except for the American Tobacco Company, located in North Carolina, Southern industry was owned mainly by Northern financiers.

For African Americans, the New South of the late 19th century meant increased oppression; race relations deteriorated. Black voting was not quickly extinguished; in the 1880s, some African Americans continued to vote in the upper South and in pockets elsewhere, but black office holders and voting majorities vanished, fraud and intimidation were common, and black votes often fell under conservative control. Between 1890 and 1908, starting in Mississippi, Southern states held constitutional conventions to impose new voting regulations, such as literacy testing—regulations that registrars could impose at will on blacks and not on whites. Southern states also introduced a "grandfather clause," which exempted from literacy testing all those entitled to vote on January 1, 1867, (before Congress gave black men the right to vote) and their male descendants. This enabled most illiterate whites to go to the polls but stopped illiterate blacks from voting. Some states imposed stringent property qualifications for voting or poll taxes, which meant that each voter had to pay a tax in order to vote.

Increasingly, Southern blacks (the vast majority of the nation's African Americans) were relegated to subordinate roles and segregated lives. Segregation laws, or Jim Crow laws as they were known, kept blacks and whites apart in public places such as trains, stations, streetcars, schools, parks, and cemeteries. The Supreme Court confirmed the legitimacy of Jim Crow practices in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which upheld segregation in railroad cars. In the 1890s, finally, the number of lynchings of African Americans rose markedly. Between 1890 and 1900, more than 1,200 lynchings occurred, mainly in the Deep South. At the end of the century, the New South remained an impoverished and racist region, with the nation's lowest income and educational levels.

Article key phrases:

company towns, black votes, Black voting, poll taxes, constitutional conventions, Segregation laws, Plessy, American Tobacco Company, Southern blacks, Jim Crow laws, grandfather clause, steel center, Piedmont region, railroad cars, cheap labor, streetcars, Deep South, Southern states, central Virginia, voter, upper South, intimidation, Ferguson, New South, railroad, black men, educational levels, polls, race relations, African Americans, Supreme Court, cemeteries, registrars, trains, new businesses, Mississippi, New England, public places, whites, mills, Alabama, North Carolina, majorities, fraud, pockets, rural areas, parks, century, campaign, Congress, percent, workers, schools, stations, vast majority, States, owners, end, order, manufacturers, right

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