



Ex-Sharecropper Turned Hobo, 1939

died in violent clashes between strikers and mill owners. The strike helped eliminate the “company towns” that had held lintheads in virtual enslavement.

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study

Starting in 1932, 399 poor (and mostly illiterate) Black sharecroppers from around Tuskegee, Alabama were deliberately infected with syphilis by a government research team without their informed consent. Instead of being told they were being given syphilis, they were told they had ‘bad blood’ and were lucky to qualify for a program of free treatment and a daily hot meal. When penicillin was discovered as an effective treatment for syphilis, the patients in the study were not given it: the scientists wanted to watch syphilis’ progress untreated. The study was ended in 1972, and then only because of a press leak. By the end of the study, 174 of the patients had died from syphilis. 40 of the men’s wives had been infected with syphilis and 19 children had been born with congenital syphilis.

WWII (1941-1945)

In Brief- WWII brought manufacturing, urbanization, lifted many out of poverty. Many Blacks moved to Northern cities to escape segregation.

The Second World War finally helped raise the South out of the economic slump it had been in since the Civil War. The South became a center for military manufacturing. People streamed to Southern cities from all over the South, and from other parts of the country, to work in manufacturing. Southern cities had to scramble to create enough housing for all these workers. Many poor Blacks and Whites from around the South joined the military and were given education and vocational training they wouldn’t have otherwise been able to afford.



Lexington, Kentucky, 1939

Civil rights fell by the wayside under the New Deal government and little or no progress was made during this period.

Economic depression meant that conditions grew even worse for the South’s industrial workers. Despite violent resistance to unions, textile workers began to unionize en masse during the depression. In 1934, more than 10,000 textile workers across the South went on strike. The strike lasted 3 weeks and approximately 20 workers



With increased manufacturing, the need for power rose sharply, and the Tennessee Valley Authority began work on an unprecedented number of power plant projects. Unfortunately, building the hydroelectric dams meant that many Southern towns were flooded and more than 15,000 people were displaced.

Beginning in WWI, many Blacks started moving to Northern cities (especially Chicago, Baltimore and New York) to escape Jim Crow segregation and gain new economic opportunities. The economic boom

of WWII only gave Blacks more funds to use to escape the South and the Black exodus peaked. In these Northern cities Blacks created communities that kept Southern Black culture alive. Southern Black institutions such as professional Root Workers (Hoodoo) could now be found in Northern cities.

The popularity of the KKK declined in WWII when it became known that the KKK leadership had sympathies with Hitler.

The Tuskegee Airmen

In 1941, Congress told the War Department to form a unit of Black pilots. The military created a program for training Black airmen at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. The War Department decided to make the qualifications for this program extremely difficult, so much so that they thought nobody would be able to get in. They were surprised by the large numbers who applied and who met the qualifications. 991 pilots were trained in Tuskegee from 1940 to 1946. One Tuskegee unit was the only unit in WWII to never lose a bomber to enemy fighters. Many White pilots, who would request escorts from Tuskegee units without knowing it was a Black unit, were later humbled out of their racism to learn the race of the pilots they so admired.



Greyhound Station, Kentucky, 1943

