



A Chance to Make Good: African Americans 1900-1929 (The Young Oxford History of African Americans)

James R. Grossman

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Many people think of the first three decades of the 20th century as the formative years of Jim Crow, or legal segregation, a time when African Americans shared in the aspirations and expectations of their fellow citizens, but who did so as a people with a unique set of barriers to overcome. In the South, segregation had become a way of life. In the North, opportunities for work were hard to come by in the face of a less overt racism. Yet, even in the face of such discrimination, a new generation of African Americans left an indelible mark on the nation and its affairs. Luminaries such as Booker T. Washington, Mary Church Terrell, and Marcus Garvey inspired and led thousands of black men and women as they obliterated, removed, tiptoed around, climbed over, and even passed through these barriers. This is the story of sharecropper Minnie Savage, NAACP founder W. E. B. Du Bois, and countless others who lived in this time of hope and age of despair.

It was also a time of movement. By the second decade of the 20th century, cotton cultivation still employed more black Southerners than any other single activity. Encouraged by recruiting efforts and the desire to leave the stifling racial climate in Southern communities, approximately 1.5 million African Americans left the rural South during what came to be known as the Great Migration. Scores settled in New York's Harlem and Chicago's South Side. But thousands also moved to Detroit, Gary, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, as well as Philadelphia, Camden, Newark, and Boston.

James Grossman's *A Chance to Make Good* is peopled by the ordinary and the famous, the migrants and those who stayed behind. Documenting the efforts of individuals and communities to claim a place for themselves in America, it narrates the powerful story of black aspirations, frustration, and determination in the years from 1900 to 1929.

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