

JUNE · 1887

division eventually included ten mines. By 1889, 46 percent of the company's laborers were black, many of them first being hired as strike breakers. In 1888 the company began to use convict labor, and six years later more than a thousand convicts were working in the Pratt mines. In April 1894 the area exploded into labor violence after a strike called by the United Mine Workers.

To the Editor of the New York *Freeman*

Tuskegee, Ala., June 7 [1887]

To the Editor of THE NEW YORK FREEMAN: I must take just a moment to give you my hearty and thorough endorsement of your plans and suggestions for the formation of a Colored League.¹ Such an organization conducted on strong, intelligent and honest principles cannot fail to accomplish good. There are thousands of colored men and women in the South who are ready to support you in this matter. We shall wait to hear from you regarding a plan of procedure. Let us have something definite as soon as possible.

Booker T. Washington

New York *Freeman*, June 18, 1887, 2.

¹The Afro-American League was the creation of T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the New York *Freeman* (later *Age*), who wanted an organization that would fight for black civil rights through the courts and publicize such issues as black voting rights in the South, the horrors of lynching, the convict-lease system, and discrimination in public accommodations. The league had chapters in twenty-three states by 1890.

In January 1890 league delegates mostly from the Midwest met in Chicago to form the National Afro-American League. The organization floundered within a few years, and in 1893 Fortune announced its demise due to lack of funds and failure to gain the support of black leaders and citizens. Five years later, as racial conditions continued to deteriorate, Fortune revived the league under the name of the National Afro-American Council. It received the support of black leaders but failed to gain mass support. The council was dominated by Fortune and the A.M.E. Zion bishop, Alexander Walters. Although BTW seldom attended its meetings, he had a powerful influence on the council through his long friendship with Fortune. The Afro-American Council gradually became identified with BTW's conciliatory approach to race relations and became a battleground of racial ideology. Race leaders who approved of BTW's conservatism were in a majority, but other members wanted the council to be more aggressive and militant in its approach to race problems. Floundering and strife-torn, the council was at a low ebb in 1905 when W. E. B. Du Bois called for a new, more militant organization, the Niagara Movement. Spurred by this competition, the council held its largest