Black Women’s Club Movement
Racism in the late 19th century

- Failure of Reconstruction (1877)
  - Rise of the Ku Klux Klan
  - Systematic disfranchisement
    - Poll taxes, voter intimidation, etc.

- Rise of lynching

- Civil Rights Cases (1883)
  - Invalidated most of the Civil Rights Act of 1875

- Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)
  - Upholds constitutionality of segregation

- Booker T. Washington
  - “Atlanta Compromise” Address (1895)
National Association of Colored Women, 1896
“Lifting as We Climb”
Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin (1842-1924)

- Grew up in Boston
- Graduated from Bowdoin College
- Helped form the American Woman Suffrage Association
- Published the *Woman’s Era*, first paper directed toward African-American women
Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954)

- Grew up in Memphis, daughter of former slaves
  - Father became a wealthy businessman
- Attended Oberlin
- Studied in Europe
- Also active in the American Woman Suffrage Association
Consider if you will, the almost insurmountable obstacles which have confronted colored women in their efforts to educate and cultivate themselves since their emancipation…. not only are colored women with ambition and aspiration handicapped on account of their sex, but they are everywhere baffled and mocked on account of their race. Desperately and continuously they are forced to fight that opposition, born of a cruel, unreasonable prejudice which neither their merit nor their necessity seems able to subdue. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women, are discouragement and disappointment meeting them at every turn.
NACW and maternalism

• Less emphasis on government programs
• Emphasis on “racial uplift” and solidarity
• Greater cooperation with male reformers
• Most black women reformers (like Terrell, Ruffin and Wells) married
• Less fixated on the idea of the “family wage”
• Addressed a wider range of issues
Ida B. Wells (1862-1931)

• Parents and brother died when she was 14; became head of the household
• Studied at Fisk
• 1884: refused to yield her train seat to a white man; literally dragged from the train
• 1891: a friend (grocery store owner) lynched
  – Writes angry editorial:
    • “Nobody…believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men assault white women.”
  – Fled the South; newspaper office burned
Ida B. Wells

• How did she attack lynching?
  – Strategies of muckraking journalists: garnering facts; rhetorically powerful presentation
    • Not sentimental
  – Takes her case abroad: travels to GB in 1893-94

• What does she urge blacks to do?
  – Proto black nationalist
    • Leave the South
    • Understand their power as consumers
    • Arm themselves
    • Expose false accounts of lynching

• Tensions with Terrell:
  – More militant; more identified with the working classes; less concerned with ladylike refinement
Frances Willard (1839-1898)

• Educator, temperance reformer
  – From a strong anti-slavery background
• Attended Oberlin
• Led the WCTU from 1879-98
  – Became president of the World WCTU in 1891
• Never married
Temperance as a woman’s issue

• WCTU (founded in 1874) largest women’s organization in the late 19th century
  – Attracted both black and white club women
• Alcohol a symbol of male power
  – Linked to domestic violence
  – Women’s economic vulnerability
  – Saloons drew men from the home
• Anti-immigrant strain to the temperance movement
• After 1886 (under FW’s leadership), the WCTU endorsed woman’s suffrage
Woman’s Temple Building,
WCTU Headquarters,
Chicago, ca. 1905
WCTU Pledge Card

Woman's Christian Temperance Union
PLEDGE
I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain from all distilled, fermented and malt liquors, including wine, beer and cider; and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same.

Name: Mrs. Agnes Gole

Date: Aug. 17, 1917
THE COLORED W. C. T. U. OF SEATTLE, WASHINGTON. MRS. L. P. RAY (FOURTH FROM LEFT IN CENTER ROW) WAS FOR MANY YEARS THE PRESIDENT
WCTU and race

- WCTU one of the first national organizations to do outreach to the black community
  - Department of Colored Work
- Black women participated in northern and midwestern locals
- Formed their own branches in the South
- Willard had in fact denounced lynching
  - BUT she was also very interested in courting white southern women
    - 1890: WCTU for the first time held its annual meeting in the South (Atlanta, GA)