**SS8H7 Evaluate key political, social, and economic changes that occurred in Georgia during the New South Era.**

**b. Analyze how rights were denied to African Americans or Blacks through Jim Crow laws, Plessy v. Ferguson, disenfranchisement, and racial violence, including the 1906 Atlanta Riot.**

The social and political gains made by African-Americans during the 1870s and 1880s began to be chipped away by white politicians in the 1890s. Laws called **Jim Crow Laws**, named after a fictional black ministerial character, took away most of the citizenship rights of African-Americans. Under these laws most blacks could not vote or serve on juries, and were denied many of the other rights of US citizens. After the Supreme Court decision in the Plessy v. Ferguson case, almost every aspect of life was segregated. This included separate schools, sections of public transportation, water fountains, bathrooms, and even separate cemeteries and Bibles used to swear oaths in courts. As civil rights activist Fred Gray said, “We were segregated from the cradle to the grave, the toilet to the train, the classroom to the courtroom.” During this period, intermarriage between the races was strictly forbidden in the southern states and lynching was used in largely rural areas as a means to enforce the social order of segregation. According to the New Georgia Encyclopedia from 1882-1930, 482 African-Americans were lynched in Georgia, second only to Mississippi.

Though this system also inhibited the economic progress of most African-Americans, some such as Alonzo Herndon were able to rise above the discrimination and become successful businessmen. Herndon, for example, created the Atlanta Mutual Life Insurance Company, in response to white owned insurance companies refusing to sell policies to black customers. Many African-American educators also rose to prominence during this time period such as W.E.B. Dubois and Georgians John and Lugenia Burns Hope.

The landmark court case, Plessy v. Ferguson, had a far-reaching impact on Georgia. On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy was arrested in Louisiana for sitting in the “Whites Only” section of a railcar. In this planned protest, Plessy, who was 1/8th black and “could pass for white” identified himself as a black man. This orchestrated event was planned by the “Committee of Citizens,” a group of well- educated African-Americans who wanted to test Louisiana’s segregation laws. The case went all the way to the U. S. Supreme Court, where the court ruled in favor of Louisiana, based on the “separate but equal” doctrine. The court determined that under the Constitution (14th and 15th Amendments) Blacks had political rights, but social rights were not required. According to the court, as long as facilities were equal for both races they could be separate.

Upon this ruling most southern states, including Georgia, separated all aspects of life. This included separate theaters and movie houses, rail and street cars, and separate bathrooms. Though separate, these facilities were most certainly not equal. For example, according to the New Georgia Encyclopedia, the average white school in the state spent about $43 dollars per student in 1930, in comparison to $10 per student in all black schools.

The 14th and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed citizenship rights to all African-Americans and voting rights to African-American men, were ratified by the U.S. Congress and included the votes of the Southern states. However, during the Jim Crow era, most African American or Blacks in the South lost these voting rights. Due to the federal government’s lack of enforcement, southern states, including Georgia, established many laws that prevented Blacks, and poor whites for that matter, from voting. These laws which led to Black disenfranchisement in Georgia included:

Georgia

• **Poll Taxes** (1877): Taxes on voting. Most poor blacks and many poor whites could not pay this tax and were unable to vote. In some cases, the poll tax was waived for poor whites.

• **The White Primary** (1900): Due to the fact that the dominate party in the Georgia was the Democratic Party, most of major political decisions took place during the primary. The White Primary did not allow African-Americans or Blacks to vote in the all-important primary elections.

• **Literacy Tests** (1908): Used to prevent African-Americans or Blacks from voting. Due to the substandard education in the South for both poor Blacks and whites many Georgians could not read or write and could not pass these tests in order to vote. Some Whites were “passed” by polling officials to allow them to vote, though others were not. However, many educated Blacks were told that they still failed the test and were unable to vote.

• **The Grandfather Clause** (1890-1910): was used to allow some poor white citizens the opportunity to vote while continuing to deny the right to African Americans. These laws usually said that if a person’s father was able to vote before the Civil War then they could too, without paying a poll tax or taking a literacy test. The law in some states said that if a person’s grandfather fought in the Civil War they could vote as well.

**The 1906 Atlanta Riot** resulted in the death of at least 25 African-Americans. The immediate spark for this 48-hour riot (September 22-24, 1906) was a series of local newspaper articles alleging African-American male attacks on white women. These articles proved to be untrue. However, as with most historical events, there were many other deep-seated causes of the riot. These included the large number of unemployed and frustrated whites who viewed African-American as threats to jobs and the established social order. Whites were also jealous of successful African-American business leaders such as Alonzo Herndon. His barbershop, sometimes called the “Crystal Palace,” was one the first businesses targeted by the White mob. Additionally, Georgia gubernatorial candidates Hoke Smith and Clarke Howell fueled the racial fires as they based their campaigns on the platform of white supremacy and used their newspaper publications to encourage racial tensions.

On the morning of the riot, there were four articles published about assaults on white women. A group of mostly unemployed white men and boys gathered in downtown seeking revenge for the false attacks. Though city officials tried to calm the mob, the group of men began attacking any African American that they saw. Travelling into the African American business district, the mob killed two barbers and beat several men to death on street cars. Due to the violence, the Georgia militia was called in to the city. In turn, African-Americans began to arm themselves and, in some cases, fought off their attackers. Despite these efforts, sporadic fighting occurred throughout the next day.

The riot caused unwanted negative national and international attention for the “jewel of the New South.” Atlanta business leaders, African American and white, quickly came together to end the riot and restore order. Though this bi-racial committee was historic in itself, as a group such as this had rarely met in the South, the end result led to deeper segregation in the city and more of an economic divide between the African American social elite and lower class. It also proved that Booker T. Washington’s views concerning the use of hard work and economic accomplishment as a means for African-American equality would not work in the South and there needed to be more direct approaches for gaining civil rights.

The 1906 Atlanta Riot was one of the largest demonstrations of this violence along with the over 400 lynchings that happened in the state from 1880-1930. These lynchings were often orchestrated by members of the Ku Klux Klan, who, during this time period, consisted of teachers, policemen, ministers, and other community leaders. Some of the most famous Georgians during the time period, including Tom Watson, supported racial violence and lynching.