BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND THE MYTH
OF ACCOMMODATION

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

by

Douglas C. Brennan, B.A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1994
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Since his rise to fame in the late nineteenth century, Booker T. Washington has been incorrectly labeled a compromiser and power-hungry politician who sacrificed social progress for his own advancement. Through extensive research of Washington's personal papers, speeches, and affiliations, it has become apparent that the typical characterizations of Washington are not based exclusively in fact.

The paper opens with an overview of Washington's philosophy, followed by a discussion of Washington's rise to power and consolidation of his "Tuskegee Machine," and finally the split that occurred within the African-American community with the formation of the NAACP. The thesis concludes that, while Washington's tactics were different from and far less visible than those of more militant black leaders, they were nonetheless effective in the overall effort.
PREFACE

The need for strong leadership within the African-American community has been and remains an important barrier to progress, both socially and intellectually, among members of the race. Although many leaders, exhibiting a wide variety of styles and beliefs, have made important advances in the black community, the general rule seems to indicate that leaders in the post-Civil Rights era lack the authentic anger and immediateness of their predecessors. As the respected scholar Cornel West points out in his essay titled "The Crisis of Black Leadership," "what stood out most strikingly about Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ella Baker, and Fanny Lou Hamer was that they were almost always visibly upset about the condition of black America." West goes on to point out that black politicians of today, who should be working for the betterment of their race, seem to be more concerned with personal success.

In the midst of this "crisis of black leadership," which has been a problem throughout American history, lies the unmistakably complex personality of Booker T. Washington. While many scholars misquote, misinterpret, and misconstrue Washington and his operations centered in Tuskegee, others simply choose to ignore him, as if he were merely a minor figure in the long list of great African-Americans. Even West characterizes Washington as simply a "powerbroker," excluding him from the list of great intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Cooper, E. Franklin Frazier, Oliver Cox, and Ralph Ellison. How important can Booker T. Washington be, then, if great scholars refuse to even acknowledge his contributions?
The answer lies in the deepest and darkest secrets Washington kept, some even to his grave, about his true actions and intentions. The purpose of this thesis is to explore and expose the real influence Washington enjoyed, the methods by which he consolidated and maintained his personal and political power, and his true goals, as illustrated by his actions and beliefs. Although many refuse to view Washington as a true supporter and leader of his race because his actions were outwardly patronizing to whites, his covert activities demonstrate that he was as dedicated to the ideals of equality and social progress as even his harshest critics.

Although numerous volumes have been written discussing Washington and his beliefs, few explore the complexities of his character. Louis Harlan and August Meier both touch on this issue in a variety of books and articles, yet both scholars occasionally contradict themselves with regard to Washington's intentions. This thesis will attempt to demonstrate that Booker T. Washington was misunderstood during his lifetime and continues to be misunderstood to the present only because the evidence that supports the alternative view of Washington has not been presented in such a way as to make a clear and decisive case. The desired result, of course, is a clearer comprehension of the historical roots of today's "crisis of black leadership," and thus an indication of what African-Americans need and want in a strong leader for modern times.
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CHAPTER I

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

Although nearly eight decades have passed since Booker T. Washington's death, historians, civil rights workers, and innovators in the field of education continue to evaluate and re-evaluate his work. The popular notion, espoused by historians representing a wide spectrum of leanings and biases, remains that Washington was what W.E.B. Du Bois termed "a compromiser between the South, the North, and the Negro." Despite the years he spent working to improve the average African-American's opportunities for economic success and social equality, Washington is most well known for the speech he gave in Atlanta in 1895, in which he stated that members of his race should prepare themselves mentally for the civil rights they would one day receive, but that those rights should not be enjoyed by any citizen, black or white, who could not demonstrate an adequate intelligence.

For that statement, Washington earned the reputation of being a patron of the southern white man who was willing to sell out the political and human rights of an entire race for a few dollars in donations to his school. Nothing could be further from the truth; intense study of Washington's personal papers, speeches, and business transactions demonstrates that Washington was as dedicated as Frederick Douglass and Du Bois to obtaining social equality for African-Americans. In fact, Washington's innate understanding of the South and the southern mind,

particularly that of the southern white man, allowed him to be more effective in
gaining rights for his race than those who took a harsher stance. Indeed, Booker T.
Washington allowed the misconception that he patronized the white South to go
unchallenged. He used the influence this brought him to his advantage many times
in his career, a feat which his opponents were never able to accomplish. In summary,
Booker T. Washington was a solitary realist among the numerous idealists who
worked for equal rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and
his methods brought African-Americans more opportunities than his opponents then
or now have admitted.

At the turn of the century, the American public heard two voices above all
others expressing the needs and desires of the African-American community. Booker
T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois both made it their life's work to improve the
status of the African-American worker in the U.S., yet each held distinct views on
the African-American worker's place in society. Admitting that his race began with
a distinct historical disadvantage, Washington believed that African-Americans could
win the respect and trust of whites by proving they were overwhelmingly loyal and
effective workers who deserved an equal chance. In an article appearing in the
magazine *World's Work* in 1901, Washington wrote:

> I have heard the race question discussed by a good many people in various
> forms, but I have always maintained that the Negro's greatest and safest
> protection would come from his usefulness. I am almost ready to say that
> the whole question as to the future of the Negro in America hinges upon
> the questions as to whether he can make himself so valuable to the
> community in which he lives that the community will feel that it cannot
> dispense with his presence.²

(July, 1901), 969.
Du Bois respected Washington's desires to improve the poor state of African-American society, but his opinions on the methods necessary to bring about needed changes represented a complete dismissal of Washington's premise: that African-Americans should prove their abilities, then work for political and social equality until white America accepts African-American society into its own. In this particular case, Du Bois may have been better served to point out that the realities of the American South would most likely prohibit social equality despite Washington's influence, a key point which Washington seems to either ignore or dismiss entirely.

According to Du Bois, "Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission; but adjustment at such a peculiar time as to make his programme unique." Indeed, Washington's theories on race relations drew criticism from many members of his own race. His reputation as an educator and liaison between poor, uneducated African-Americans and the world of learned and respected scholars, however, gave Washington a keen advantage and a strong following in many circles. Ultimately, a powerful sense of optimism drove Booker T. Washington to dedicate his life to improving the lives of others. However controversial his teachings, no scholar can doubt Washington's dedication as illustrated in the final chapter of his celebrated autobiography, Up From Slavery:

Despite temporary and superficial signs which might lead one to entertain a contrary opinion, there was never a time when I felt more hopeful for the race than I do at the present. . . . The outside world does not know, nor can it appreciate, the struggle that is constantly going on in the hearts of both the southern white people and their former slaves to free themselves from racial prejudice; and while both races are thus struggling they should have the sympathy, the support, and the forbearance of the rest of the

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To Booker T. Washington, the method by which African-Americans could achieve greater opportunities in business, greater freedoms in personal life, and greater ability to mold their own futures was through education. To this effect, Washington spent his life building and expanding the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama as an industrial training school for African-Americans. Through education, which at the Tuskegee Institute heavily emphasized agricultural and vocational training, Washington believed the African-American worker could "add something to the wealth and the comfort of the community in which he lived," and thus gain the respect of his neighbors, whether they be white or black. He recognized, however, that African-Americans could not bring about these changes on their own, maintaining throughout his life and career that his race would only succeed economically and socially if whites, who controlled the government, felt their ideals of separation from and dominance over their black neighbors was unchallenged. Once again, despite being raised in the South, Washington failed to recognize the lengths to which whites would go to retain the status quo.

In his The Educational Outlook in the South, published in 1885, Washington stated "any movement for the elevation of the Southern Negro in order to be successful, must have to a certain extent the cooperation of the Southern whites."  

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5 Ibid, 203.

Washington even challenged southern African-American and white leaders to agree on what the relationship between the races would be in an attempt to erase all doubts on both sides. In 1903, Washington announced his revolutionary idea:

I believe the time has come—and I believe it is a perfectly practicable thing—when a group of representative Southern white men and Northern white men and negroes should meet and consider with the greatest calmness and business sagacity the whole subject, as viewed from every point. The age of settling great questions, either social or National, with the shotgun, the torch, and by lynchings, has passed.\(^7\)

To Booker T. Washington, violence and prejudice were objects of the Old South, whereas the New South was moving toward becoming logical and tolerant.

This outward belief in the ability of southern whites to become tolerant of African-Americans who proved their worth to society seems to be a serious weakness in Washington’s argument. As W.J. Cash points out in *The Mind of the South*, the state of sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South following the Civil War was grim: “we find growing up in the South a body of Negroes at loose ends, without any definite place in the economic order or any settled means of support.”\(^8\) To southern land owners, both black and white farmers were merely an extension of the chattel slavery system of which they had been deprived.

Despite the economic condition of most southern blacks, Washington’s observation of reality, included within the espousal of praise for African-Americans

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common in Washington's writings, seems far more appropriate than the suggestions of many of Washington's critics. In particular, Du Bois found his contemporary far too passive in his efforts to improve the race. To Du Bois,

On the whole the distinct impression left by Mr. Washington's propaganda is, first, that the South is justified in its present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro's degradation; secondly, that the prime cause of the Negro's failure to rise more quickly is his wrong education in the past; and, thirdly, that his future rise depends primarily on his own efforts.9

Washington's views, although often misunderstood and manipulated, stressed that African-Americans and whites in the South were inseparable and dependent upon each other. He observed that "the most intelligent whites are beginning to realize that they cannot go much higher than they lift the negro at the same time."10 He admitted, however, that his race had a massive barrier to cross before improvements became evident, and that "long years of patient, hard work will be required for the betterment of the condition of the negro in the South."11

The speech Washington delivered at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia on September 18, 1895 provides the greatest insight into his philosophy of race relations. In this unprecedented speech, which was given before an audience of both whites and African-Americans, Washington outlined his personal beliefs and those taught at the Tuskegee Institute. In what he described as "the first time in the entire history of the Negro that a member of my race has been asked to speak from the same platform with white

9 Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, 49.

10 Booker T. Washington, "Signs of Progress Among the Negroes," The Century Magazine 59, No. 3 (January, 1900), 474.

Southern men and women on any important National occasion,"12 Washington broke important ground in directly addressing African-American issues, receiving thunderous applause at the end of his speech. To the satisfaction of many southern whites, Washington stated that African-Americans should start at the bottom, not at the top as during the Reconstruction era, and that cooperation between the races was vital. While it was his finest hour in public speaking, the address at the Atlanta Exposition enraged many of Washington's loudest African-American critics.

Following a reiteration of his earlier proposition that whites and African-Americans in the South are inseparable, Washington cited the failures of Reconstruction policies in the South: "Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill."13 Washington advised African-Americans to "cast down their buckets"14 in various industries such as agriculture, mechanics, and domestic service. Only through success in the commercial world, he maintained, could African-Americans gain the respect and trust of their white neighbors:

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the production of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life. ... No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.15

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15 Ibid, 220.
In this highly significant speech, Washington told the audience and the nation that whites and African-Americans could remain separate races, yet work together toward a common goal. Washington firmly believed "in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."\(^{16}\)

Booker T. Washington felt that agriculture and small businesses offered African-Americans the greatest opportunities to support themselves and demonstrate their ability to succeed. In *The World's Work* (1901), Washington once again proposed unprecedented ideas that provoked heavy criticism from his opponents. Washington wrote in "The Salvation of the Negro" that "Slavery did... leave the four million negroes emancipated with a higher degree of civilization than was possessed by any equal number of Negroes to be found anywhere else. Out of slavery the Negro got the Christian religion, the English language, a knowledge of agriculture, domestic life, and, in many cases, a high degree of mechanical skill."\(^{17}\) He did not support or defend slavery, and he was quick to point out the differences between forced and free labor.

In an attempt to fit his philosophy comfortably into the body of southern white sentiment, Washington once again failed to emphasize the true conditions in which most African-Americans found themselves at the turn of the century. Economic reconstruction in the South left most of the land in the hands of whites; blacks were forced to find a way to survive in freedom but had very little skill or

\(^{16}\)*Ibid*, 221-222.

\(^{17}\) Washington, "Salvation of the Negro," 961.
knowledge of the agriculture business as an economic venture. Thus, blacks entered into sharecropping or tenant farmer relationships with white land owners, merely extending the system of domination and subservience created and cultivated under slavery. Blacks in the South were often forced into sharecropping rather than working for wages or renting despite the limits to freedom the economic relationship demanded.  

According to Washington's autobiography, the main obstacle to effectively training African-American workers for agricultural and industrial work was making them believe that manual labor was as honorable as any other type of work. Washington pointed out that at the Hampton Institute, where he received his early education and much of his inspiration, he "learned that it was not a disgrace to labour, but learned to love labour, not alone for its financial value, but for labour's own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants done brings." He sought desperately to pass on this love of labor to his students, but found it difficult in many cases. For Washington, education did not free one from working with the hands as many of his students assumed.

As with other issues, Washington's emphasis on industrial labor drew fire from writers and scholars who felt he wasted his valuable energy and enthusiasm on compromise. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* that "Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things—First,

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political power, Second, insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of Negro youth, —and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South.\textsuperscript{20} To the contrary, Washington believed that African-Americans possessed tremendous capabilities that needed to be developed through sheer hard work. According to \textit{The Negro in Business}, which Washington published in 1907, "The very conditions under which we are compelled to do business demands that we show the energy and initiative of pioneers. The task of the negro business man is not merely to develop the latent wealth in the soil and in the mountains but still more the latent capacity of the Negro people [sic].\textsuperscript{21}" His critics may have labeled him a compromiser, but Washington maintained a sincere desire to educate and improve the African-American people in America. Through success in industry and business, he believed, the African-American could succeed in social areas. Washington firmly believed that "The Negro in the South as a rule works, but he has not learned in any large degree to use the results of his labor."\textsuperscript{22} He took it upon himself to teach his students the importance of labor, but they could only teach themselves how to fully use the fruits of that labor to their own advantage.

Washington's position on suffrage provided yet another avenue for critics to attack his policies. Consistent with his belief that African-Americans should work

\textsuperscript{20} Du Bois, \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}, 44.


\textsuperscript{22} "Hampton and Tuskegee," \textit{The New York Times} 51, No. 16,275 (March 6, 1902), 9.
their way up from the bottom, Washington wrote in *Up From Slavery* that prerequisites for voting should be enforced, a measure that would have excluded poorer and less educated African-Americans and whites:

> Still, as I look back over the entire period of our freedom, I cannot help feeling that it would have been wiser if some plan had been put into operation which would have made the possession of a certain amount of education or property, or both, a test for the exercise of the franchise, and a way provided by which this test should be made to apply honestly to both the black and white races.

Perhaps this issue illustrates most clearly the weaknesses of Washington's theories. Although Washington saw in the South a certain degree of integrity and desire to allow African-Americans to increase their status in society, he failed to recognize the fundamental truth that whites wanted any increase in status among blacks to occur only within limits set by whites. Thus, to believe that southern whites would honestly and fairly apply tests for the franchise equally to blacks and whites was naive. Although Washington's policy was logical and ambitious, it was based on an observation of fairness and honor within southern society that would prove to be simply untrue.

> As Du Bois points out in *The Souls of Black Folk*, African-Americans had been denied the right to vote in the South, and it would be tremendously difficult for them to "make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meagre chance for developing their exceptional men." In Washington's point of view, participation in political elections was a privilege to be exercised by those who reached a certain

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level of education or economic success, despite their skin color. White leaders in the South supported this theory, for it gave them a prominent African-American voice supporting disenfranchisement of many of those who they did not want to vote.

In the late nineteenth century, southern politics centered largely on the issue of black voting rights. Most southern whites were loyal supporters of the Democratic party; with the help of The Alliance, originally an agriculture and labor organization which had recently entered into politics, Democrats won the governorships of several southern states toward the end of the century. In 1890, for instance, Alliance-supported Democrats won executive control of South Carolina, Texas, and Tennessee, and the Alliance sent several of its members to state legislatures in the South. As a result, the move for disenfranchisement of blacks in the South became institutionalized rather than merely a weak reflection of white public sentiment.25

Recognizing the power Democrats would have over state and local governments in the South, the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives passed the Lodge Election Bill in 1890. Known as the "Force Bill" in the South, the legislation mandated federal supervision of elections to ensure that African-Americans were given the right to vote freely in southern elections. As a result, Republicans hoped they could expand their voter base while fighting the violation of political and civil rights common in the South.26

Convinced that their society hinged on the domination of blacks by whites, southerners worked to disenfranchise African-Americans. As U.S. Senator James Z.

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George of Mississippi explained in 1890, the southern states would "devise such measures, consistent with the Constitution of the United States, as will enable us to maintain a home government, under the control of the white people of the state." In "The Mississippi Plan," the state attempted to circumvent the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution by requiring all voters 1) to have resided in the state for at least two years and in their election districts for one; 2) to have paid all taxes due for two years before registering to vote; and 3) to pay a poll tax of $2.00 upon registration. Voters were also required to "be able to understand" any part of the constitution if asked to explain. Several other states passed similar measures, effectively excluding blacks and poor whites from the political process in the South.

While Washington was certainly aware of the effort to disenfranchise African-Americans in the South, he continued to propose voting qualifications that would equally exclude both blacks and whites who were unable to understand the issues at hand. Thus, while he did not agree with disenfranchisement, Washington understood his options and maintained his position regarding voting rights. At times Washington seemed to be willing to sacrifice the right of blacks in the South to vote, if only temporarily, to secure his personal status among whites and to gather financial support for his school. That is not to say, however, that Washington agreed with or even liked the idea. He simply wanted to move ahead slowly and carefully, at a pace with which southern whites would be comfortable, toward eventual social and

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Ibid, 523.

Ibid, 523.
political equality. Washington's opponents, of course, saw this as accommodation and patronage rather than strategic positioning for future challenges. Most importantly, Washington's personality demanded that he obtain and foster complete control of African-Americans in the South.

As the son of a freed slave, Booker T. Washington understood the resentment of whites and the hardships African-Americans fought against in the effort to make a place for themselves within a white-dominated society. Even more importantly, Washington's pride in his race brought whites and African-Americans together, particularly in support of the Tuskegee Institute, but also in other areas. An editorial in *The Outlook*, a popular magazine of Washington's time, summarized his views:

To Dr. Washington the negro race is a great race; during the Civil war the negro exhibited a remarkable 'self control,' and was 'to the last faithful to the trust that had been reposed upon him' by his master, yet was always 'an uncompromising friend of the Union,' and never, either in freedom or slavery, under a suspicion of being a traitor to his country; and since emancipation has he given abundant evidence that he can make himself a useful, honorable, and desireable citizen.  

While this editorial certainly did not speak for every African-American in the South, Washington chose to believe the best and worked to make the white South believe the same. Despite his emphasis on the South, Washington understood that racism was not isolated to the former slaveholding states. According to a speech he gave in 1902, "the South is not alone responsible for what is known as the negro problem. It is the Nation's problem, because the Nation as a whole was responsible for its creation."

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It is not difficult in the 1990's to understand why many African-Americans still view Booker T. Washington as a compromiser who made his fortune in the world telling southern whites what they wanted to hear. Washington wrote in 1885:

Poverty and ignorance have effected [sic] the black man just as they effect [sic] the white man. They have made him untruthful, intemperate, selfish, caused him to steal, to be cheated, and made to be the outcast of society, and he has aspired to position which he was not mentally and morally capable of filling.\textsuperscript{31}

These hardly sound like words of an African-American working for the improvement of his race. Despite an apparent weakness in his ability to judge the true intentions of southern whites in some contexts, Washington was able to recognize many realities of the nineteenth century. Great thinkers like Du Bois and Washington were not the majority of African-Americans. Most were poor farmers or manual laborers attempting to make the best of a life that was constantly limited by white society.

The Reconstruction policies of the U.S. Congress created deep divisions between African-Americans and whites, and the absence of federal supervision following Reconstruction allowed state legislatures to ensure that African-Americans would no longer help determine the political future of the South. Although controversial, Washington acted in a context acceptable to a post-Reconstruction South dominated by recently defeated whites. Had Washington applied any more overt pressure than absolutely necessary to reach his immediate goals, he would have destroyed a lifetime of work in advancing the cause of African-Americans in the United States.

Through effective demonstration of speaking ability and common courtesies, Washington illustrated to whites, both in the North and South, that African-

American men of impoverished upbringing could master the art of civilization. With education and manners that far surpassed those of most whites, he was able to persuade many wealthy whites to part with large sums of money to support his school in Alabama all in the name of improving the lot of African-Americans. Ultimately, Washington’s actions and writings taught African-Americans to have hope in an era when many could barely feed their families from day to day. Often misconstrued and misquoted, Washington fully understood the changes that would come in the future for the African-American:

One might as well try to stop the progress of a mighty railroad train by throwing his body across the track, as to try to stop the growth of the world in the direction of giving mankind more intelligence, more culture, more skill, more liberty, and in the direction of extending more sympathy and brotherly kindness.\(^{32}\)

To that effect, Washington worked covertly to influence politics and protect and defend the rights of his race.

The uniqueness of Washington’s approach lies in his ability to work within the limits set by southern whites while continuing to make progress by other means. Washington employed numerous people, both directly and indirectly, who overtly challenged the white-dominated system while he remained a friend of the white South. Washington also built a powerful political machine centered at Tuskegee to control the voices of his critics and advance his program for education and training of poor blacks. Born a slave, Washington fully understood the realities of black poverty in the South. Washington believed in the qualities of his race, and he worked throughout his life to improve the economic opportunities and social standing of

\(^{32}\) Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 204.
African-Americans. Booker T. Washington knew, however, that southern whites were not ready for full implementation of social and political equality for blacks. He thus created a machine that would establish the groundwork for what later civil rights leaders would eventually achieve.
CHAPTER II

CONTRACTIONS IN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS
OF BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the mass of historical research concerning Booker T. Washington is the lack of consensus regarding his ultimate goals. Although most historians who have studied Washington's papers, speeches, and personal life conclude that his tactic was that of accommodation to the southern white, they contradict each other, and often themselves, as to why Washington was willing to compromise. The details of historical conclusions about Washington are contradictory at best, illustrating that the man and his philosophy were much more complex than many historians have suggested.

August Meier, one of the many historians who have struggled with Washington and his motives, provides a perfect example of this phenomenon of contradictory conclusions. In his monograph, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, Meier concludes:

> All in all, in viewing Washington's philosophy, one is most impressed by his accommodating approach. By carefully selected ambiguities in language, by mentioning political and civil rights but seldom and then only in tactful and vague terms, he effectively masked the ultimate implications of his philosophy. For this reason his philosophy must be viewed as an accommodating one in the context of southern race relations.1

In the same text, however, Meier mentions Washington's "covertly conducted attack

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on racial discrimination,"² stating further that Washington's "very prominence brought him into situations that led to secret activities that directly contradicted the ideology he officially espoused."³ While one might be most impressed by the accommodating approach of Washington's philosophy, it defies logic to conclude that because he was able to manipulate public opinion and use southern whites for his own cause without their knowledge of the reality of the situation, Washington was therefore an accommodationist.

Despite the contradictory but strong conclusions about the nature of Washington's philosophy Meier makes in Negro Thought in America, which was published in 1963, Meier had apparently evolved his theories about Washington somewhat. Writing for The Crisis in 1954, for instance, Meier stated very plainly:

A study of the Washington papers reveals that the Tuskegeeian had for his goals full equality and citizenship rights. He sincerely believed that an approach stressing economic development and vocational education, attacking mob violence tactfully and only occasionally, and flattering southern upper class whites and northern industrialists, would eventually accomplish the ends desired by both himself and his critics.⁴

Although August Meier's conclusions about Washington are perhaps the most extreme example concerning the complexity of Washington's philosophy, they are not by any means the only example. C. Vann Woodward, one of the most respected historians of the South, proposed a sort of realism in Washington's methods in

²Ibid, 103,
³Ibid, 103.
Origins of the New South, 1877-1913, stating that his prominence among African-Americans at the time "was not due so much to the genius and personal influence of Booker Washington as to the remarkable congeniality between his doctrines and the dominant forces of his age and society, forces that found an eloquent voice in the brown orator, but that would have made themselves felt in any case . . ." Yet, Woodward states in the same text that the controversy surrounding the "Atlanta Compromise" of 1895 was caused by "the shortcomings of a philosophy that dealt with the present in terms of the past." As Woodward illustrates, Washington's philosophy did not lack the realism necessary to gain support of African-Americans and southern whites, yet it did fail to recognize all the important aspects of southern society.

Teaching blacks to grow crops and make farm machinery, for instance, was important in Washington's curriculum of study for his students at Tuskegee. He failed in many cases to emphasize training pertinent to the industrialism of the twentieth century, however, so many of his students left Tuskegee to become poor farmers or unskilled industrial workers. The training at Tuskegee failed to push students to utilize modern technology, which may have better prepared them for future growth. Yet, at the turn of the century, Washington's Tuskegee Institute was one of the few schools in the South offering any training to poor blacks at all.

In a lesser known but nonetheless important study of Washington published


6Ibid, 105.
in 1955, Samuel R. Spencer, Jr. concludes Washington's "policy was distinctly realistic. He began by looking at his race with a critical and remarkably objective eye, admitting the prevalence of ignorance, immorality, and and irresponsibility; thereby he disarmed his white listeners and gave logic and common sense to his proposed remedies." Even Louis R. Harlan, who has perhaps spent more hours of research on Washington than any other scholar, notes that Washington's pragmatic approach often caused him to disregard the democratic process with regard to suffrage rights for African-Americans. This illustrates the complexity of Washington's character.

Much of the confusion surrounding Washington and his beliefs is derived from the comments of his contemporary critics and not necessarily from Washington himself. W.E.B. Du Bois in particular was highly critical, but this appears to be based more in hatred for Washington's accumulation and use of political and emotional control rather than for his philosophy on race relations. On a basic level, Washington's beliefs were nearly identical to those of Du Bois and Frederick Douglass, yet Washington was forever stamped with the label of 'compromiser' and 'accommodationist' for his willingness to work toward his goals within white-dominated society rather than against it.

To compare and contrast Washington with his contemporaries, it must first be stated that he believed, without a doubt, that African-Americans deserved and would eventually receive rights and liberties equal to those enjoyed by whites. Washington declared in his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, "my own belief is,

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although I have never before said so in so many words, that the time will come when
the Negro in the South will be accorded all the political rights which his ability,
character, and material possessions entitle him to." Specifically, Washington believed
that southern African-Americans must prepare themselves mentally and physically
to properly utilize social and political freedoms through hard work. Those who
accused Washington of giving away social rights did not fully understand his purpose
or goal. Second, it is necessary to acknowledge that Washington did, in fact, build
a virtual empire with himself at the helm. Washington enjoyed the fruits of his
establishment, which Du Bois termed the "Tuskegee Machine," including political
power and the ability to control the press. Du Bois summarized his criticism of
Washington in Dusk of Dawn, stating:

I was increasingly uncomfortable under the statements of Mr. Washington's
position: his depreciation of the value of the vote; his evident dislike of
Negro Colleges; and his general attitude which seemed to place the onus
of blame for the status of Negroes upon the Negroes themselves rather
than upon the whites. And above all, I resented the Tuskegee Machine."

Except for Du Bois' comment about the power of Washington's establishment
centered at Tuskegee, each of his points can be easily disputed by analysis of
Washington's speeches and writings, illustrating that Du Bois' criticisms were perhaps
based more on political envy than true differences of opinion as to the future of the

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10Ibid, 32.
African-American.

On the issue of voting rights, Washington drew severe attacks from Du Bois and others who believed that he was willing to give up the right to cast a ballot as part of his program to educate and prepare African-Americans for their eventual acceptance into society. On the contrary, Washington spoke out vehemently against the deprivation of voting rights on numerous occasions. In *Up from Slavery*, Washington wrote, "as a rule, I believe in universal suffrage, but I believe that in the South we are confronted with peculiar institutions that justify the protection of the ballot in many states, for a while at least, either by an educational test, a property test, or by both combined; but whatever tests are required, they should be made to apply with equal and exact justice to both races."\(^{11}\) Washington did indeed support the right for his people to vote, but in his analysis only those who qualified through economic or education means, whether the person be black or white, should enjoy that right. In fact, Washington wrote in his famous article "Is the Negro Having a Fair Chance?," which appeared in *The Century Magazine* in November, 1912, that unequal laws favoring whites were the root cause of the racial troubles that plagued the South; he concluded that, as far as southern whites were concerned, "no greater harm can be done to any group of people than to let them feel that a statutory enactment can keep them superior to anybody else."\(^{12}\)

Although Washington outwardly supported equal testing for both races to determine voting qualification, it is unclear whether he believed this would solve the


\(^{12}\)Booker T. Washington, "Is the Negro Having a Fair Chance?" *The Century Magazine* 63 (November, 1912), 47.
more serious problem of legislated superiority. It is apparent, however, that following Washington's approach would have at the very least institutionalized voting regulations and worked against arbitrary laws that favored whites. Eventually many southern states enacted such laws, but equal enforcement in the South proved to be impossible. Regardless, Washington's work provided a legal base upon which later groups, specifically those which operated in the 1960's, could challenge southern laws and force equal enforcement for blacks and whites.

Du Bois' second major complaint about his adversary alleged that Washington disliked Negro colleges. Ironically, Du Bois mentions in the same article that "Mr. Washington was not absolutely opposed to college training, and sent his own children to college." The controversy over Washington's opinion toward college training versus industrial training has long kept the attention of historians, but Washington made his position clear from the outset. In an article titled "Industrial Training for the Negro," which was published in The Independent in 1898, Washington wrote:

I would say to the black boy what I would say to the white boy, get all the mental development that your time and pocketbook will afford—the more the better...Whether they receive the training of the hand while pursuing their academic training or after their academic training is finished, or whether they will get their literary training in an industrial school or college, is a question which each individual must decide for himself; but no matter how or where educated, the educated men and women must come to the rescue of the race in the effort to get and hold its industrial footing.  

Washington obviously supported those African-Americans who could afford to attend

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a college, yet at the same time he recognized that most could not. For that majority, Washington suggested the merits of industrial training would provide valuable self-respect, integrity, and economic stability that would ensure the individual's worth in society.

Finally, Du Bois claimed that Washington blamed African-Americans for their own low status rather than blaming whites who attempted to keep them from attaining their rights as citizens. Once again, Du Bois failed to fully understand the reality of Washington's message. While Washington did point out that, in his opinion, blacks made serious errors during Reconstruction, he did not wish to place blame on either blacks or whites. To Washington, it was much more important to move forward with progress in race relations then to spend time placing blame. He acknowledged the obvious inhumanity his race experienced under the tortuous chattel slavery system, yet he believed it made more sense to accept the past for the mistake it was and move forward with positive, rather than negative, energy. In an article published in *World's Work* in November, 1913, Washington typically proclaimed that African-Americans possessed more rights and privileges than any collection of blacks in the world: "I mention this, let me add, not because I want to minimize or make light of the injustices which my race has suffered and still suffers, but because I believe that it is important that we view our present situation in its true light and see things in their proper perspective."15 In each of these situations, Du Bois' allegations and criticisms simply cannot be supported by Washington's statements.

To the historian, many of Du Bois' actions seem contradictory and illogical. While he reports in Dusk of Dawn that "beginning in 1902 considerable pressure was put upon me to give up my work at Atlanta University and go to Tuskegee," the fact remains that The Booker T. Washington Papers reveals that Du Bois himself wrote a letter as early as 1894 which "began a flirtation of almost a decade with a possible position at Tuskegee".

Gt. Barrington, Mass, 27 July '94

President Washington, Sir! May I ask if you have a vacancy for a teacher in your institution next year? I am a Fisk and Harvard man (A.B. & A.M.) & have just returned from two years abroad as scholar of the John F. Slater trustees. My specialty is history and social science but I can teach German, philosophy, natural science classics &c. You[r] wife knows of me, and I refer by permission to

President Gilman, Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore
Secretary, Harvard Univ.,
5 University Hall, Cambridge
President Fisk Univ. Nashville
Rev. C.C. Painter of Indian Rights Association
President Calloway of Alcorn

I can procure letters from any and all of these. Respectfully Yours,

W.E.B. Du Bois

Washington took almost a month to respond to Du Bois' letter, by which time he had already accepted another position elsewhere.

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18 Ibid, 459.

19 Ibid, 459.
It seems that Washington may have felt somewhat threatened by Du Bois’ formal education. After all, although well-educated himself, Washington’s skills were largely self-taught; he was developing a leadership under which unskilled and uneducated black workers could become productive members of society. Unlike Du Bois’ idea of the "Talented Tenth," Washington’s programs served to assist and educate the majority of African-Americans rather than a select few. Thus, Washington’s form of education often excluded the classics of higher learning, replacing them with more useful learning tasks such as brick making and mechanics.

Another letter from Du Bois, dated April 1, 1896, following the famous speech Washington gave in Atlanta which Du Bois later dubbed 'The Atlanta Compromise,' again discusses the possibility of the two leaders joining in their efforts to improve the race. Du Bois wrote, "I feel that I should like the work at Tuskegee if I could be of service to you . . . I am willing and eager to entertain any proposition for giving my services to your school." Although Du Bois claimed in retrospect that he was pressured into joining the faculty at Tuskegee so that Washington could control him, the contents of Washington’s private papers seem to suggest that Du Bois actively sought a position at the school.

Like the conclusions many historians have drawn regarding Booker T. Washington and his motives, the historical treatment of the relationship between Du Bois and Washington has failed to fully encompass the range of evidence on both sides with respect to Washington’s true thoughts on the matter. Once again, the

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21Ibid, 152-153.
historical evidence currently available supports Du Bois' theory that Washington created a massive political establishment that supported himself and quieted his opponents. Yet, Du Bois' style and recognition as a powerful leader allowed him to emerge as one of the few who survived after challenging Washington. The reasoning behind Du Bois' misconceptions concerning the black leader's true intentions, therefore, remain a mystery, but the historians should acknowledge that Washington has for a century been judged primarily by the words of his opponents rather than by his own.

For example, in David Levering Lewis' biography of W.E.B. Du Bois, the author continually relies on quotations from his subject to relay personal attitudes toward Washington. In chapter 12 of the biography, Lewis concludes:

The power to make and unmake careers (even those of white men desirous of presidential favor), his [Washington] near monopoly over the philanthropic monies assigned to his people, his stewardship of their civil liberties and of the broad agenda for advancement—all would collapse into relative insignificance if he failed to discipline the upstart celebrity Du Bois and his admirers.  

This conclusion is only somewhat supported by Washington's actions or words, and it seems only to serve as justification for Du Bois' growing paranoia related to Washington's power within the African-American community. As C. Vann Woodward pointed out, southern society was dominated by whites; the doctrine Washington followed was merely a reflection of the realities of white-black relations in the South.

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Using Du Bois' words from *The Souls of Black Folk*, which was first published in 1903, to prove that prominent African-Americans opposed Washington and his beliefs, which many have attempted to do, is hazardous at best. Du Bois in his youth was one of many who followed and revered Washington as a leader, and *The Booker T. Washington Papers* contains numerous letters between the two discussing strategy for moving forward with the goals they both shared. Du Bois' review of *Up From Slavery*, written in July, 1901, states that "Washington came with a clear and simple programme, at the psychological moment; at a time when the nation was a little ashamed of having bestowed so much sentiment on Negroes and was concentrating its energies on Dollars."\

In other words, Washington was able to conquer the South, a feat which Du Bois states "is by all odds the most notable thing in Mr. Washington's career." Although Washington and Du Bois would later part ways, the admiration and sense of pride felt between them during this period was unmistakable. The two leaders corresponded and planned meetings and strategies together, and Washington even planned to assist Du Bois financially in his lawsuit in relation to the unfair treatment African-Americans received aboard public commuter trains, so long as the assistance remained confidential. Washington understood that the future effectiveness of his programs depended entirely on

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confidentiality, for many of those who made Washington's activities financially possible had no awareness of his true goals.

Perhaps the turning point in the relationship between the two, and the event which probably cemented Du Bois' beliefs about Washington's Tuskegee Machine, was the controversy surrounding the National Negro Business League. Apparently, the idea for such an organization uniquely belonged to Du Bois as early as 1899, and Washington, directly or indirectly, arranged to have the postage funding for the project canceled. Shortly thereafter, Washington himself asked Du Bois for a list of the businesses that wished to participate, and in 1900-1901 he organized the League himself, excluding Du Bois from its leadership. The original purpose of the League was to assist and support African-American business owners and entrepreneurs, but Washington used the organization to cement his control over a number of local groups, and thus the black population of nearly every major city in the country. In response to criticism from Du Bois and Ida B. Wells, an anti-lynching crusader, defenders of Washington charged that Washington was simply a man of action who chose to move ahead in organizing the League. Washington insisted the idea for the League came to him during a lecture tour; he never publicly acknowledged the criticism against his heavy-handed tactics to gain control of the organization.

According to David L. Lewis, biographer of Du Bois:

The founding in 1901 of the National Negro Business League under his presidency was meant to be the centerpiece of Washington's progress-through-prosperity agenda. The idea was Du Bois's, as was the wealth of

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28 *Ibid*, 266.
data on which the organization was built, but the start-up energy, publicity, and resources came from Tuskegee. The unmistakable major premise of Washington’s business gambit, in fact, was that through financial successes and by making themselves indispensible to the South’s economic growth, eventually African-Americans would earn their way into full citizenship. The bitterness Du Bois felt toward Washington following the founding of the League grew so intense that the two pursued their agendas for African-American advancement in separate directions. The two leaders continued, however, to secretly work together fighting Jim Crow laws as late as December, 1904.

Although Washington’s relationship with W.E.B. Du Bois has been well-documented, the similarities and differences between Washington and Frederick Douglass are not as apparent. Following the end of Reconstruction in 1877, anti-northern, anti-African-American leaders in the southern states slowly but consistently regained control of the state legislatures in the 1890’s through disenfranchisement, segregation, and mob violence. In Washington’s point of view, Frederick Douglass’ style of persistent agitation and political action not only made conditions worse in the South, but they were generally destructive in the overall attempt to gain equal rights for African-Americans. Recognizing this reality, Washington used tactics that did not agitate whites, but made them feel as if they were being left alone to solve their own "race question." His speech in Atlanta in 1895 assured southern whites that African-Americans would not agitate for immediate recognition of social and political rights; under Washington’s leadership, blacks in the South would publicly endure disenfranchisement and abuse while he secretly worked to bring about a


quicker turn of events.

In many ways, the emphasis in Washington’s philosophy was merely a segment of Douglass’ overall philosophy. Both men had the same ultimate goal in mind, but they emphasized differing methods at different periods of time to reach those goals. In terms that would later be viewed as uniquely Washington’s, Douglass announced as early as 1847, some nine years before Washington’s birth, "We must become valuable to society in other departments of industry than those service ones from which we are rapidly being excluded. We must show that we can do as well as be; and to this end we must learn trades . . . Use every means, strain every nerve to master some important mechanic art."\(^{31}\) In yet another speech that could well have been written by Washington himself, Douglass stated in 1863, "Neither we, nor any other people, will ever be respected till we respect ourselves, and we will never respect ourselves till we have the means to live respectably . . . A race which cannot save its earnings, which spends all it makes . . . can never rise in the scale of civilization."\(^{32}\) In these and many other ways, Douglass and Washington were very similar in their views toward the ultimate goal of improving the African-American way of life.

Although Booker T. Washington is not normally associated with political agitation, whether direct or indirect, it can be argued that his philosophy fit nicely into the mindset of the early civil rights demonstrators in the 1960’s, which would suggest that Washington held more in common with Douglass than merely his desire

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\(^{32}\) *Ibid*, 17.
for equal treatment for African-Americans. As historian August Meier points out in *Along the Color Line*, "not satisfied with mere resolves and declarations, Douglass was constantly in active rebellion against segregation and discrimination in all its forms, and was one of the few men of his time who engaged in what today would be regarded as nonviolent direct action."33

In the early 1960's, Booker T. Washington's pragmatic message of the African-American making "himself a useful, honorable, and desireable citizen,"34 became more realistic than ever before in history. African-American students attended colleges and universities throughout the country, and many gained jobs previously held only by whites. Segregation was still a barrier to progress, however, and many groups began nonviolent demonstrations, mainly consisting of sit-ins, to point out the unfair nature of legal segregation. Although Washington never outwardly promoted or suggested outright civil disobedience, his assertion that African-Americans should make the best of the situations and improve themselves to gain the respect of whites helped ambitious African-American leaders create a tiny series of demonstrations that evolved into an overwhelming cultural advancement for African-Americans. Only 60 years after Washington wrote "progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing,"35 the American Civil Rights Movement gave African-Americans legally established rights and freedoms,

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33Ibid, 10.

34"Two Typical Leaders," *The Outlook* 74 (May 23, 1903): 214.

to be protected by the federal government, that far surpassed Washington's expectations.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, pride in the African-American as illustrated by the work of Booker T. Washington became more common among the young generation. Successes in landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) meant that real changes, though slow in most cases, were transforming American society. The civil rights demonstrations of the early 1960's represented a direct extension of Washington's teachings. In six decades African-Americans in the South had proved their worth, their ability to succeed, and their ability to compete with whites. The next logical step was to "cast down their buckets" and try to improve the conditions in which they were forced to live.

In many ways, Washington's proposals that African-Americans not "permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities" fit perfectly into the agenda of the early civil rights leaders. As more African-Americans discovered a strong pride in their race, the desire to become contributing members of American society became overwhelming. Just as Washington's ideas offered an alternative to lynching and other types of terror, the sit-ins in particular and the nonviolence movement in general gave African-Americans an avenue to express their dissatisfaction with the system while remaining, in most cases, within the boundary of the law. The similarities between Washington's philosophy, which greatly complimented nonviolent demonstration, and Douglass' positions on agitation, are remarkable.

Despite the many common traits the two possessed, they were not without

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their differences. For example, Douglass was highly critical of the idea of restricting voting rights by property tests, a concept which Washington advocated so long as the same test was used to determine the rights of whites and African-Americans. In response to Horace Greeley’s suggestions that African-Americans stop agitating for the vote and work toward economic improvement, Douglass responded, "why should we be sent to hoeing, and planting corn, as the 'preferable and more effective' method of abrogating the unjust, anti-Republican and disgraceful race relations imposed upon us in the property qualification?" While Washington maintained friendly relations with whites, disguising his true cause with inoffensive words, Douglass would never fail to insist on immediate and full equality between the races. Although Washington and Douglass ultimately worked toward the same goals, their methods were very different, although each leader’s style was appropriate for the time in which it was exercised.

\[37\] Frederick Douglass' Paper, October 5, 1855, in Meier and Rudwick, Along the Color Line, 20.
Delivered in a crowded meeting hall on a steamy Georgia day in September, 1895, Booker T. Washington's speech at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition represents the turning point in his life at which Washington was elevated from a small town teacher in Alabama to the spokesman for his entire race. More importantly, however, Washington gained control of and was able to dominate the African-American community until his death in 1915. As many historians have pointed out, the speech itself added very little to what Washington had already announced and published numerous times. The atmosphere of the event, however, made Washington the celebrated hero of his race as the first African-American to speak before a mixed audience of both whites and blacks at such an important occasion. To members of his community, Washington made the first step across unofficial but nonetheless real barriers between themselves and whites. Although many did not agree with his basic compromising philosophy, Washington had managed to take Frederick Douglass' place as the leader of the race only seven months after Douglass' death.

In addition to the obvious instruction intended for both African-Americans and whites, Washington's speech contained many more not-so-obvious references to participation in labor unions and political activities. The speech was well constructed and timed, and the author and orator managed to capture his audience in
amazement at his feat. Whether right or wrong, through effective delivery of his short but powerful message in Atlanta, Washington told southern whites that African-Americans wanted simply to become a part of society by proving their worth. Commenting on his address in an article appearing in World's Work years later, Washington stated:

This seemed to me to be the time and the place, without condemning what had been done, to emphasize what ought to be done. I felt that we needed a policy, not of destruction, but of construction; not of defense, but of aggression; a policy, not of hostility or surrender, but of friendship and advance. I stated, as vigorously as I was able, that usefulness in the community where we resided was our surest and most potent protection.¹

To many whites and blacks, Washington succeeded in presenting a timely and appropriate message, but from the outset the reaction among the African-American community was mixed.

As in all other aspects of Washington's career, historians frequently disagree about the purpose and meaning of the famous speech. Historian Louis R. Harlan, for example, concludes in his biography of Washington that the speech caused the black leader to rise in his leadership role, and that "as often in his career, Washington's rise coincided with a setback of his race."² Not willing to make a conclusion quite that damning, Rayford Logan comments in The Negro in American Life and Thought, The Nadir, that "the preeminent significance of the speech stems from the acceptance of the doctrine of compromise by a Negro with close personal


contacts with powerful men who had made compromise the national policy."
Perhaps the most correct and appropriate observation of the speech was that Washington understood the southern mind so thoroughly that he operated, not on a whim, but with carefully calculated phrases that would pacify those who controlled the legal and judicial systems in the South. Washington fully understood that it would be outrageous for an African-American to stand before an audience of mostly whites in Georgia in 1895 and demand equal social and political rights for his race. Thus, he walked up to that line, but did not cross.

Washington opened his speech by pointing out that "one-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race" and that southern whites needed African-Americans to work and cooperate if the South was to ever rebuild itself following the severe divisions and hatred caused by Reconstruction. He then praised the sponsors of the exposition for recognizing the value of African-Americans by allowing them to participate, a concept that most likely struck the white convention planners as odd considering they spent a large amount of time debating whether or not blacks would be allowed inside the hall.

The next statement in Washington's speech was one he had written and spoken about over and over again many times. Recognizing that Reconstruction has allowed many of his race to rise directly from the bondage of slavery into political

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office, Washington stated, "ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our life we began at the top instead of at the bottom." Washington truly believed that, just as he had done, the best workers and most well-educated leaders would work their way from the bottom and master a variety of skills that would increase their worth in society. He was highly critical of those who sought the easy way out of work, particularly the numerous African-American preachers in the South who, in his opinion, given the choice between working the fields and leading the congregation, suddenly found themselves "called to preach."

Washington continued the speech with perhaps his most famous analogy, the story of the ship lost at sea. Borrowed from a young Washington, D.C. teacher named Hugh M. Browne, the story told of the men aboard a ship at the mouth of the Amazon River who yelled to a friendly vessel that they needed fresh water. The friendly vessel advised them to "cast down your bucket where you are," at which time they realized fresh water was flowing out to them from the Amazon. Etching the story forcefully into the minds of his listeners, Washington advised African-Americans to "cast down their buckets" in skills, industry, and learning, all of which would help elevate them from poverty into wealth and eventually social equality. Completing his analogy, Washington advised whites to cast down their buckets among the millions of African-Americans with whom they shared the South by

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5Ibid, 218.
7Ibid, 212.
8Washington, Up From Slavery, 219.
providing assistance and encouragement wherever possible.

In what has become the most recognizable moment of his entire life, Washington counseled his audience that "in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Like most of the rest of his speech, this particular idea was not a new one, yet the phrase became Washington's trademark and added to the difficulty in analyzing his true purpose in using the phrase. It seems that, by using the analogy, Washington assured southern whites who proposed the 'separate but equal' doctrine that they would receive the fullest cooperation from African-Americans with regard to legislating separation. Historian Rayford Logan even interpreted Washington's assurance to be so overt as to suggest "that Washington's Atlanta Compromise address consoled the consciences of the judges of the Supreme Court who in Plessy v. Ferguson, the following year, wrote into American jurisprudence one of its least defensible doctrines, the constitutionality of equal but separate accommodations..." Interestingly, the emergence of the 'separate but equal' system encouraged African-Americans to create an entire society of their own, including churches, schools, and other institutions, a phenomenon which C. Vann Woodward writes is one "of the most important developments in Negro history."

The next major point of Washington's speech has been variously interpreted

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9Ibid, 221-222.


both by Washington's contemporaries and historians. The statement, "the wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly," if taken out of context, would certainly suggest that the orator was content with secondary status for African-Americans. What many have failed to acknowledge, however, is that Washington completed the statement with a specific charge that progress will require constant struggle. Once again, Washington drew upon his intimate relationship with and understanding of the southern white mind to placate the constant fears among white southerners that northerners would artificially force social progress on the South prematurely. As Washington was fond of pointing out, African-Americans in the South would only enjoy political and social equality and freedom when southern whites were ready to deem it acceptable. In the late nineteenth century, when southern whites were determined to maintain their local control over government, Washington understood realistically that no amount of forcing would make the situation any better.

As one author noted in the Boston Evening Transcript in 1903, Washington was a master at evaluating and thus manipulating race relations in the South. According to Kelly Miller:

Mr. Washington sized up the situation with the certainty and celerity of a genius. He based his policy upon the ruins of the one that had been exploited. He avoided controversial issues, and moved, not along the line of least resistance, but of no resistance at all. He founded his creed upon construction rather than criticism. He urged his race to do the things possible rather than whine and pine over things prohibited. According to his philosophy, it is better to build even upon the shifting sands of expediency than not to build at all, because you cannot secure a granite

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12Washington, Up From Slavery, 223.
In other words, Washington told the whites of the South what they wanted to hear while counting the days until his race achieved full equality, a concept his opponents simply could not and would not accept.

Booker T. Washington received a tremendous ovation for his short speech, and for several days following the event newspapers across the country praised him and his message. Even W.E.B. Du Bois wrote a congratulatory letter, and he went so far as to write the New York Age that Washington's philosophy might represent "a real settlement between whites and blacks in the South, if the South opened to the Negroes the doors of economic opportunity and the Negroes co-operated with the white South in political sympathy." Although many African-Americans felt that Washington's speech was too conciliatory, most white southerners considered him the leader and spokesman of the race, and until his death most whites would view Washington in that role.

The speech in Atlanta is best understood when viewed in context of historical events. As stated earlier, the concept of strict separation between the races was gaining in popularity in the South, and the U.S. Supreme Court would decide only one year later that 'separate but equal' was constitutional. Thus, despite the changing times that allowed Washington to address a mixed audience in Atlanta, white prejudice was as strong as ever in the South. Although most have ignored the presence of the others who shared the podium with Washington at the Atlanta

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Convention, the collection of speakers by no means represented a liberal group of men who were pleased to hear him speak. Exposition organizer I. Garland Penn was forced to go to battle to secure Washington as a speaker, and he had to convince the planning committee that not having a representative speaker for the attending African-Americans would severely hurt the attendance level at the convention.15

Judge Emory Speer, the principal speaker of the day and defender of 'traditional' southern white attitudes, spoke for more than one hour and announced that the "so called 'race question' does not exist . . . Why shall anyone forge a race issue?"16 Speer's speech typified what many white southerners still believed about the African-Americans upon whom they depended for support of the southern economic system, illustrating that Washington was absolutely correct when he told the white members of the audience "nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward."17 President Grover Cleveland, a northern Democrat, expressed his support for Washington and his points after receiving a printed copy of the speech:

Gray Gables, Buzzard's Bay, Mass, October 6, 1895.

Booker T. Washington, Esq.:

My Dear Sir: I thank you for sending me a copy of your address delivered at the Atlanta Exposition.
I thank you with much enthusiasm for making the address. I have


17 Washington, Up From Slavery, 222.
read it with intense interest, and I think the Exposition would be fully justified if it did not do more than furnish the opportunity for its delivery. Your words cannot fail to delight and encourage all who wish well for your race; and if our coloured fellow-citizens do not from your utterances gather new hope and form new determination to gain every valuable advantage offered them by their citizenship, it will be strange indeed.

Yours very truly,
Grover Cleveland.\footnote{Ibid, 227.}

This type of support must have impressed both blacks and whites who opposed Washington, adding more credibility to his newly-found position as leader of the race.

As a result of ringing endorsements from presidents, newspaper editors, and other men and women with significant power and importance, Booker T. Washington found himself at the center of attention in southern race relations, a position which would allow him to centralize and control the African-American community. Still, many of his own race believed Washington had compromised their cause. As he explained to Francis James Grimke in a letter dated September 24, 1895, however, Washington believed he truly had the cause of African-Americans in mind:

First I wanted to be very sure to state the exact truth and of not compromising the race. Then there were some things that I felt should be said to the colored people and some others to the white people; and aside from these considerations I wanted to so deport my self as not to make such an impression as would prevent a similar opportunity being offered to some other colored man in the South.\footnote{Letter from Booker T. Washington to Francis James Grimke dated September 24, 1895 in Louis R. Harlan, ed., The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 4, 1895-1898 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 25.}

The most direct result of Washington’s popularity was exactly what W.E.B. Du Bois
feared: the complete intellectual control of the African-American equality effort by Tuskegee.

In his celebrated biography of Booker T. Washington, Louis Harlan calls him a "minority group boss"\textsuperscript{20} who "gained an easy mastery of the art of patronage politics and used it to reward friends, punish enemies, and strengthen the Tuskegee Machine."\textsuperscript{21} Ironically, Washington had advised members of his race that politics was a poor career, yet he made his fortune and fame in its service.

At this point, a thorough examination of Washington's involvement in political matters becomes necessary, for it was this involvement that illustrates that he was, in fact, working secretly and covertly to gain equality and social standing for his race. By the time Washington had come to truly control local and national politics with regard to African-Americans, W.E.B. Du Bois had come to resent Washington and had begun attacking him vehemently in writing. Despite his resentment, Du Bois seems to have maintained a deep respect for Washington's ability to create the situation which placed an African-American in such a position of power. In his essay "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," Du Bois opens with a glowing list of Washington's achievements, including his ability "to gain the sympathy and cooperation of the various elements comprising the white South,"\textsuperscript{22} and his "work in gaining place and consideration in the North."\textsuperscript{23} Still, Du Bois correctly recognized


\textsuperscript{21}Ibid, 255.


\textsuperscript{23}Ibid, 37.
that different people, both in the South and the North, interpreted Washington’s actions and achievements in different ways. With his vague promises and unclear analogies, Washington was able to win supporters on all sides of an issue. It seems that many southern whites were attracted to Washington simply because they had no idea an African-American could operate with intellectual abilities equal or superior to those of whites, and they believed that Washington agreed with their views on the separation of the races.

The importance of Du Bois’ writing in the analysis of Booker T. Washington illustrates an important point: many historians have made the mistake of recognizing Du Bois’ criticisms about Washington as universal, with reference to his creation of the Tuskegee ‘Machine’ and enjoyment of political power. Claiming that Du Bois’ opinion on these subjects are correct, however, does not automatically make all of his conclusions about Washington true. In fact, Du Bois’ judgment was somewhat clouded by his deep personal resentment of Washington.

Still, the evaluation Du Bois provides in "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" is important simply because it provides a contemporary criticism of Washington made by a well-respected African-American thinker. According to Du Bois, Washington’s support was a ‘cult’ of unquestioning followers. Du Bois also suggests that many of those who followed Washington did so out of fear rather than true support, and that "there is among educated and thoughtful colored men in all parts of the land a feeling of deep regret, sorrow, and apprehension at the wide currency and ascendancy which some of Mr. Washington’s theories have gained."

\[\text{\textsuperscript{24}} \text{Ibid, 39.}\]
Du Bois also criticized Washington for hushing his honest opponents as an attempt to protect his personal power.\textsuperscript{25}

For the most part, Du Bois' assertion that many African-Americans resented Washington for 'giving away' what they viewed as the only rights they had was true. Washington even admitted in his autobiography that his speech in Atlanta led some to feel "that I had been too liberal in my remarks toward the southern whites, and that I had not spoken out strongly enough for what they termed as the 'rights' of the race."\textsuperscript{26} Washington's ability to speak to southern and northern whites on an equal level, however, won the respect of many African-Americans despite his seemingly 'liberal' message. On the other hand, to many blacks, Washington was a mystery; he was a member of their own race who whites accepted into their homes and into their business relationships. Despite the appearance that Washington was willing to sacrifice certain rights and liberties for small successes, many African-Americans believed that Washington's message was the key to reversing the years of poverty and racial discrimination they had endured. For this small hope, Washington received support from those among his race who saw no future in directly resisting white superiority.

The strongest and most justifiable point Du Bois made was what he calls the 'triple paradox' of Washington's career:

1. He is striving nobly to make Negro artisans businessmen and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for working men and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the rights of suffrage.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{26}Washington, \textit{Up from Slavery}, 230.
2. He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civil inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run.

3. He advocates common-school and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning; but neither the Negro common-schools, nor Tuskegee itself, could remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in Negro colleges, or trained by their graduates. 

These three points represent weaknesses in Washington’s philosophy that continued to attract criticism throughout his career. While Washington was greatly concerned with training young African-Americans to make it on their own as he had, he failed to recognize the psychological and societal negatives of being deprived of the right to vote and to operate as an equal part of society. Whatever wealth and status his students might achieve through hard labor and determination, they would never be treated truly as citizens of their country until they enjoyed the right to vote. Washington agreed that voting rights were important, but he did not believe the importance was immediate.

Similarly, Du Bois’ second point demonstrates his competence as a social scientist and contrasts with Washington’s eternal pragmatism. Washington taught his students that they were part of a great race, yet realistically he publicly demonstrated deference toward the white South. With no knowledge of his covert activities, Du Bois could easily attack Washington’s deference, and Washington was unable to defend himself short of revealing his secret activities. Finally, Du Bois’ third point rings only half true. Washington did not depreciate institutions of higher learning at all; he simply chose to teach his students skills that would help them survive rather than ponder the classics.

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The 'triple paradox' indeed presented a difficulty for Washington, and he realized that the only way to keep his movement strong in the South was to completely dominate the African-American effort. To allow his opponents a strong voice against him would surely undermine his power and thus the ability to reach his ultimate goals. To that effect, Washington created and established what became known as the Tuskegee Machine as a vehicle to control political appointments and ensure that the black press maintained support for his institution and his power.
CHAPTER IV

WASHINGTON'S HEGEMONY: THE GROWTH
OF THE TUSKEGEE MACHINE

Booker T. Washington quickly learned that his success as a national leader and African-American pioneer depended almost entirely on keeping himself in a position of power and maintaining control, although somewhat limited, over political appointments of southerners to national positions. To that end, Washington established and cultivated friendly relations with presidents, governors, and nearly any other politician whose positions were tolerable. Through his efforts, Washington, the African-American, was able to enjoy an unprecedented amount of influence over the white man's politics.

Biographer Louis Harlan, who chronicles much of Washington's political and covert activities, mentions actions on Washington's part designed to consolidate power as early as the 1880's. According to Harlan, Washington's rivalry with heads of other African-American schools in Alabama was based on his fear that other schools, particularly the State University for Colored Youths in Marion, would "threaten Tuskegee's student constituency." When a faculty member from the Marion school proposed moving the institution to Montgomery, which was only 40 miles from Tuskegee, Washington quickly moved to counter the proposal.

Washington traveled to Montgomery to ask the legislature for a larger appropriation for Tuskegee. Employing Jesse Duke, an African-American journalist in Montgomery, Washington sought to turn public opinion against the Marion school, openly writing to his trusted friend Warren Logan "my object is to prevent the Marion school from being located here." In an unrelated event, following some comments Duke made in the Montgomery Advertiser about lynching, whites in the area forced him to leave town. Although it had previously supported the school move, white public opinion turned sharply against the idea for fear an African-American school would "breed other incendiaries of Duke's type." Although Washington's original plan failed, the desired results were achieved through Duke's employment.

In another similar event years later, Washington paid lobbyists to secure a federal land grant giving his Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute control over coal lands. The lobbyist, James Nathan Calloway, convinced Alabama governor William C. Oates to write a letter to the Alabama delegation in Congress requesting the grant. After three years of lobbying and numerous financial investments, Congress passed a bill favorable to Washington in 1899.

Despite Washington's newly-developed political prowess, his style and manner of action remained unchanged. An excellent example of Washington's style was

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illustrated by his decision regarding the events of June 8, 1895. On that night, a mob of whites shot Thomas A. Harris, a Tuskegee lawyer, for entertaining a white preacher who was traveling through the town. Harris, an African-American, had passed the Alabama bar and practiced law in Tuskegee, but he obviously forgot what a black man’s position in Alabama in 1895 really was. Although the mob intended only to kill Harris, a white man named John Alexander was injured in the scuffle; Harris’ family dragged him into the woods while the mob helped Alexander.

Seeking a friendly place to receive medical attention, Wiley Harris brought his father to Washington’s house. Ever the "prudent and conservative" African-American, Washington refused to allow Harris to enter his house or receive help at the Tuskegee Institute. This decision outraged both Washington supporters and opponents, and Rev. Francis J. Grimke, a friend of Washington’s, wrote to him expressing his disapproval when he heard of what had taken place. Washington explained to Grimke in a confidential letter:

I helped them to a place of safety and paid the money out of my own pocket for the comfort and treatment of the man while he was sick. Today I have no warmer friends than the man and his son. ... I do not care to publish to the world what I do and should not mention this except for this false representation. I simply chose to help and relieve this man in my own way rather than in a way some man a thousand miles away would have had me do it.⁶

With no way of knowing his secret actions, Washington’s most outspoken critics used the event as proof that he did not, in fact, have the well-being of African-Americans in mind and that his leadership was more destructive to race relations than many

⁵Ibid, 173.

believed.

Perhaps the most ironic quality of Washington's relations with other African-American leaders was the warm friendship he enjoyed with T. Thomas Fortune, equality activist and editor of several militant New York magazines. A biography of Fortune, written by Emma Lou Thornbrough, calls him "the most brilliant Negro journalist of his age," but he was much more than that. Fortune believed strongly in the equality of blacks and whites, the exercise of political rights, and persistent agitation. In fact, Fortune often used his influence in the Negro press to keep tensions high surrounding equality issues. Yet, Fortune and Washington worked together on several occasions, perhaps because "each had some quality or insight the other lacked." Washington's relationship with Fortune was important for several reasons. Because Fortune lived and worked in New York City, he was able to voice a more militant and forceful opinion than would be allowed by whites in the South. Washington was extremely careful not to criticize southern whites while not himself in the South, so using Fortune as his "northern voice" allowed Washington to continually pressure whites on suffrage and equality issues, while distancing himself from that pressure.

Even stranger than his relations with other African-American leaders, Washington maintained friendly relations with many white leaders, including Alabama governor William Calvin Oates, for purposes of influencing political decisions and raising needed funds for his school. This was, in fact, his goal. The

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Booker T. Washington Papers contains many pieces of correspondence between Oates and Washington, many of which provide insight into Washington's character and his political goals. In a letter dated September 7, 1901, Oates wrote to Washington concerning the new state constitution, reporting "under the Suffrage clause, in my opinion, a larger number of your race will qualify and become voters within a few years than is generally apprehended." Only one month later, Oates wrote again, asking Washington to use his influence with President Roosevelt to secure the appointment of a U.S. district judge to replace the recently deceased John Bruce. Oates wrote: "If you could induce the president to appoint a man, a conservative democrat of large influence [,] courage and a high sense of justice you would do the greatest good for your people and the Country. . . . You are unquestionably the ablest man of your race and are doing more for it than any man who has ever lived and I honor you for it and sympathize with you in your efforts."  

Washington's relationship with President Roosevelt became the source of both bitter criticism and deep respect following his dinner at the White House on October 16, 1901. When Roosevelt became president only a month before the historic dinner, Washington's influence increased from merely suggesting policy to providing nominations for national offices to be designated by the president himself. This singular event cemented opinions about both men throughout the country, particularly in the South, while it helped Washington consolidate his power as the

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personal advisor to the president on race relations. Washington had counseled Roosevelt "to support black Republicans against the lily-white Republicans" and "to give high federal office to white southerners of the conservative type" toward the end of the nineteenth century. But neither blacks nor whites suspected the amount of influence the black leader actually enjoyed. Reactions to the dinner meeting were mixed, although "even Washington's severest black critics could only praise the courage of the President for inviting him and his courage for accepting." Nevertheless, many white southerners were outraged by the event, and both Roosevelt and Washington remained mostly silent about the dinner. On several occasions, Roosevelt was forced to defend his position, stating, "I had no thought whatever of anything save of having a chance of showing some little respect to a man whom I cordially esteem as a good citizen and good American. . . . I would not lose my self-respect by fearing to have a man like Booker T. Washington to dinner if it cost me every political friend I have got." Washington showed his characteristic restraint in not commenting on the dinner for nearly a decade; the relationship between the two continued.

Although it gained him support among some Republican whites and African-Americans who saw Washington as their only hope for attaining any benefits from white society, Washington’s relations with whites also caused a great deal of resentment among those of his race who demanded immediate equality. William C.

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12Ibid, 313.

13Ibid, 316.
Ferris, a Yale and Harvard graduate who at the time advocated immediate recognition of civil and social rights for African-Americans, wrote to Washington:

there are many colored people and a growing number of white people who think that you kiss the hand that smites your race too much. You are only a good nigger in the eyes of the South. They like you because you teach the negro to know his place. They only regard you as the the white men's niggers who told their masters when their fellow slaves contemplated running away in the good old Ante Bellum days.¹⁴

Ferris was somewhat indecisive and supported Washington's harshest enemies, including William Trotter and George W. Forbes, until a personal quarrel with Trotter caused him to attempt to ingratiate himself with Washington in 1907.¹⁵ Ferris' letter illustrates the frustrations of many African-American intellectuals.

One of the least well-known but most important aspects of Booker T. Washington's work in improving the status of African-Americans so they would eventually enjoy all the political and civil rights of whites was his involvement in political decision-making, particularly in the fields of suffrage. From early in his career as an educator and leader, Washington worked, mostly covertly, to influence legislation and public opinion to the benefit of African-Americans. In his article titled "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," published in the Journal of Southern History, historian Louis Harlan correctly points out, "surreptitiously, Washington supplied money and leadership for an assault on racially discriminatory laws in the courts. With more success, he employed spies, secret agents, and


provocateurs to countermaneuver against his black militant enemies.\textsuperscript{16} It was this network of spies and agents that worried Washington's critics and strengthened opposition against him.

Washington used a secret network for a number of reasons. First, he was ruthless in his efforts to maintain his personal political machine centered at Tuskegee. As Louis Harlan points out, Washington had two distinct personalities, one for the public and one for himself: "while he smiled and nodded in his public life, like the man in the moon he had his dark side, a secret life in which he could cast off the restraints of conventional morality and conservatism and be himself."\textsuperscript{17} In many ways, Washington’s secret side allowed him to make strides toward political and social equality for African-Americans in ways his opponents could never achieve with conventional resistance.

Even before his direct relationship with Theodore Roosevelt began, Washington was involved in political matters despite his public belief that African-Americans should stay away from politics in general. In April, 1896, Washington wrote to William Boyd Allison, a Republican senator from Iowa: "I am not active in politics and do not expect to be, and have no claim upon your time and attention. I simply write to assure you that I am doing in a rather quiet way whatever I can in connection with our mutual friend, Mr. Clarkson, to bring about your nomination for


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid, 393.
the presidency at the St. Louis Convention." Washington believed that Allison, who had a reputation for racial liberalism, would be an effective and powerful ally if he received the Republican nomination for the presidency.

While it has been widely established that Booker T. Washington maintained no objection to restrictions which prevented the ignorant from voting, so long as the restrictions applied to both races, he secretly worked to challenge suffrage laws that adversely affected African-Americans, the most obvious example of which was the Louisiana grandfather clause. In February, 1900, Washington wrote to Francis Jackson Garrison, the youngest son of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and a Washington supporter: "a number of responsible colored men are now making a systematic effort to have the Louisiana Election Law tested before the United States Supreme Court. It is difficult to get all the cash necessary to pay competent lawyers, and I have thought that perhaps you might like to help us find persons in Boston who would consider it a pleasure to contribute towards this object." Washington also corresponded with Jesse Lawson on the Louisiana test case, directing all the while that his name was not to be used, although assuring his correspondent that he would assist in whatever way possible.

The Louisiana grandfather clause case was a learning experience for Washington. The results of the case were disappointing, but Washington began to

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realize that success in such endeavors would require secret covert activity rather than the committee strategy that had been used in Louisiana; he swore to never again work with a large group of attorneys with a variety of agendas and local sponsors. In subsequent court battles, Washington was more successful, although he always remained behind the scenes and refused to allow his covert activity to take precedence over his objective of educating young African-Americans and representing his race in such a way as to attract support from southern whites.  

Perhaps the most illustrative of Washington's secret political activities was his participation in supporting and sponsoring the Alonzo Bailey case, in which lawyers and activists challenged and defeated Alabama's contract labor law. The law in question effectively forced laborers into peonage for the inability to repay a debt, an action that the U.S. Congress had outlawed in 1867. Although the Alabama law had previously been challenged, never before had such a clear-cut case presented itself, and Washington and others seized the opportunity.

In the early 1900's, particularly in the Cotton Belt areas, it was common for agricultural workers to enter into contracts to secure wage advances. In Alonzo Bailey's case, he signed a one year contract to work at the Scotts Bend Place in Montgomery County, Alabama, in exchange for a $15.00 advance, which was to be repaid at the rate of $1.25 per month. After working for only slightly more than one month, Bailey quit the job and left the farm, which according to Alabama law constituted "prima facie evidence of the intent to injure or defraud his employer."  

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In the Bailey case, a clause in Alabama law known as a "false pretenses" act defined Bailey as a thief:

_Code of Alabama, 1886, Vol. II, Criminal, Sec. 3812._ Same; under contract for performance of act or service.—Any person, who, with intent to injure or defraud his employer, enters into a contract in writing for the performance of any act or service, and thereby obtains money or other personal property from such employer, and with like intent, and without just cause, and without refunding such money, or paying for such property, refuses to perform such act or service, must, on conviction, be punished as if he had stolen it.\(^{23}\)

Thus, Bailey was arrested and jailed on April 6, 1908.\(^{24}\)

Recognizing that Alabama law allowed "any white man, who cares to charge that a Colored man has promised to work for him and has not done so . . . can have the Colored man sent to the chain gang,"\(^{25}\) Washington and others began secretly gathering support, both financial and legal, to fight the law. Washington contacted a team of enthusiastic lawyers to carry the case through the court system while secretly calling on his influential contacts, both in the North and the South. Washington even sent his trusted assistant Ernest T. Attwell to visit Montgomery city court judge William H. Thomas regarding the case.\(^{26}\)

When the Alabama Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the law for the third time in the Bailey case, Washington called on his friends again, this time in preparation for a battle in the U.S. Supreme Court. Showing political prowess,

\(^{23}\)Ibid, 657.

\(^{24}\)Ibid, 658.

\(^{25}\)Ibid, 658.

Washington contacted Oswald Garrison Villard, the editor of the New York *Evening Post*, and U.S. Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte for support. Even President Theodore Roosevelt was kept aware of the events of the case as they occurred. Despite tremendous expense and possible exposure, Washington supported the case, in some instances by appealing directly to wealthy northern philanthropists, to its ultimate success on January 3, 1911. On that date, Justice Charles Evans Hughes delivered the court’s opinion in *Bailey v Alabama*, in which the court decided "that the state may impose voluntary servitude as a punishment for a crime . . . but it may not compel one man to labor for another in payment of a debt, by punishing him as a criminal if he does not perform the service or pay the debt." Effectively, Washington had secretly worked behind the scenes through political ties, favors, and exchanges of information to organize a challenge to a law that adversely affected members of his race. More importantly, the *Bailey* decision set the precedent for several other cases, including the 1914 U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down an Alabama law allowing employers to pay a man’s fine and take him from jail to work as a prisoner, as well as the contract labor laws of Georgia and Florida in 1942 and 1944, respectively.

The fact that no one outside of his intimate circle knew of Booker T. Washington’s participation in the *Bailey* case is significant for several reasons. First, Washington at that time was battling his image as an accommodator and patron to the white man with which his opponents had branded him. Had it become public knowledge that Washington was behind the case, it surely would have enhanced his

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reputation as a leader in the black community. The same event, however, would have jeopardized Washington's ability to influence political appointments and raise money from northern and southern whites who supported the Tuskegee Institute. Washington would thus have been prevented from gaining further concessions for his race in the South. Second, Washington's collaboration with Attorney General Bonaparte existed only because of its confidentiality. Washington often forwarded briefs concerning the case to the attorney general, who was in constant contact with President Roosevelt. Finally, secrecy allowed Washington to maintain his facade as a friend of the white South, an important factor in his overall success.

Like his secret legal and political involvement, Booker T. Washington's determined, almost paranoid desire to maintain control over the African-American community led him to violate basic freedom of the press by manipulating the content within articles and influencing editorial policies of certain publications. In addition, Washington's relationship with T. Thomas Fortune became even more complex as Fortune seemingly compromised his own strong beliefs to protect his friend from critics.

In many ways, Booker T. Washington's relationship with the writers and editors of the black press was the ultimate indication of his determination to not only advance the progress of social equality through the means he proposed, but also to maintain his personal power and prestige. As Louis Harlan pointed out:

> While Washington's staff of secretaries and ghost-writers operated his Tuskegee Machine, at a deeper level of secrecy his confidantes and spies helped him carry on a shadow life in which he was neither a black Christ nor an Uncle Tom but a cunning Brer Rabbit, "born and bred in the brier.

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patch' of tangled American race relations.  

Harlan's observation seems to capture the essence of Washington's character and his involvement in race relations. Indeed, Washington exercised financial and editorial control over many of his critics through subsidization, suggestions, and strong-arm tactics.

Washington was able to gain influence with black magazines and newspapers through a variety of methods. First, many editors and writers were like other African-Americans throughout the country; they supported Washington's work and needed no additional coercion. A strong network of Tuskegee followers existed throughout the profession, and Washington was able to call on many journalistic friends and acquaintances for favors. In many instances, the writers employed at Tuskegee would send out news items, complete with the cost of printing them, to friendly presses, a policy which many of the smaller organizations greatly appreciated. In other cases, Tuskegee would pay for several advertisements in certain publications, purchase large quantities for distribution, or simply provide cash contributions. Whatever the method, August Meier concludes in "Booker T. Washington and the Negro Press," that Washington "subsidized newspapers and magazines in order to silence criticism of himself and his policies, and in effect seriously curtailed freedom of the press."  

Washington's willingness to sacrifice First amendment rights to protect his political machine illustrates clearly the degree to which he felt his philosophy was  

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correct for all African-Americans. Washington did, in fact, silence his critics and use the press to support his own political machine through manipulation of editorial content, suggestion of policy, and some cases outright removal of articles from publications. In the cases of financial manipulation, Washington enjoyed tremendous success. Of the newspapers and magazines dedicated to the causes of African-Americans in the early 1900's, at least five or six received cash contributions from Tuskegee, including the New York Age, the Washington Colored American, the Boston Colored Citizen, the Colored American Magazine, Alexander's Magazine, and possibly the Washington Bee. In fact, Washington was part owner of the New York Age and the Colored American Magazine for a time.31

Perhaps the most revealing situations in which Washington used his influence to control the press were the press responses to the Niagara Movement and his use of the New York Age to answer his critics. Both actions were somewhat questionable in the realm of First Amendment rights, yet Washington seemed to feel the political influence he enjoyed was greater than his support for the ideals of freedom of speech. In the summer of 1905, rumors began to spread regarding the formation of a new group of radical African-Americans which excluded Washington from its ranks. The group, led by W.E.B. Du Bois, formed because of "negative attitudes ranging from unease to enmity"32 toward the Tuskegee Establishment, and Washington was determined to do everything in his power to destroy it.

Washington's secretary Emmett Scott sent Clifford H. Plummer, a member

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of the original radical group formed in Boston, fifty dollars and instructions to spy on the group as it met in Buffalo, New York. The group moved across the border into Niagara Falls, Canada, thus becoming known as the Niagara Movement, and proceeded to organize and develop its declaration of principles. In response to the threat of the Niagara Movement, Plummer convinced the Associated Press not to publicize the meeting, and Washington and Scott "wired all the Negro and white newspapermen they could trust, urging them to ignore the Niagara meeting." Although Washington was ultimately unable to keep the Niagara Movement from gaining popularity and support, he did delay the inevitable long enough to institute a number of other tactics to fight the group, including the use of his political power and influence.

More ironic than Washington’s willingness to put aside the First Amendment for his personal success was his close relationship with T. Thomas Fortune, who advocated unceasing agitation "until the protest shall awake the nation from its indifference." Although their personal friendship was sometimes shaken by extreme differences of opinion, the two recognized they both believed in the same ideals, and they worked together for many years. Although Fortune is not a well-known name in the late twentieth century, many of his actions had a lasting influence on race relations years after his death. As Emma Lou Thornbrough explains in her biography,

Fortune did not invent the term Afro-American, as he freely admitted, but he probably did more to publicize and popularize it during the nineties

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and the first years of this century than any other person. In advocating the term he made it clear that it included all persons of African ancestry and not merely those of mixed blood.\textsuperscript{35}

In this respect and many others, Fortune and Washington held similar positions of pride and respect for their race and its progress in the relatively short amount of time it had enjoyed its freedom.

Outwardly, Fortune earned the reputation of a "militant journalist" despite his insistence on nonviolent action. As Emma Thornbrough points out, Fortune was "the most militant and articulate northern Negro\textsuperscript{36} before the rise of W.E.B. Du Bois because he "hurled defiance at the white South and denounced the federal government for its betrayal of its black citizens.\textsuperscript{37} It seems strange that Fortune would respect Washington and his work considering his extreme opinions, but in light of their relationship, it makes perfect sense. As Washington's confidant, Fortune was aware of all the covert activities in which his friend participated, and he often participated himself, although not as a silent partner. As editor of the New York Age, Fortune defended and interpreted Washington's actions in his influential publication. The result was a partnership in which two men with identical goals but radically different methods could operate, often using the other as a sounding board for new ideas. Fortune even wrote and edited many of the articles and books accredited to Washington.\textsuperscript{38} The collaboration between the two allowed both to work

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 132.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid, 178.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid, 178.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid, 207.
toward the same goals from very different angles; Fortune used his influence in the North to keep resistance to white domination a current issue among African-Americans, while Washington used his influence with southern whites to increase his own political power and thus his ability to help blacks become educated and skilled.

Although opposition to Booker T. Washington had increased steadily by the turn of the century, the Tuskegee Machine managed to perform effective damage control through the press and various other means. The emergence of the Niagara Movement, however, gave the opposition momentum, and the eventual creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910 all but pushed Washington into the background of the African-American equality effort. Before the historic creation of the NAACP, however, several groups operating with goals and methods in opposition to Washington had gained in strength and numbers, thus weakening the influence of Washington's Tuskegee establishment.

The National Afro-American League, the often-forgotten yet first major African-American organization, began in 1887. Ironically, T. Thomas Fortune was the founder and leader of the group, which based its philosophy on the following:

We think that it has been thoroughly demonstrated that the white papers of this country have determined to leave the colored man to fight his own battles .... There is no dodging the issue; we have got to take hold of this problem ourselves, and make so much noise that all the world shall know the wrongs we suffer and our determination to right these wrongs.39

As justification for its existence, Fortune's group listed six major grievances against society: 1) the suppression of voting rights in the South; 2) the existence and acceptance of mob violence and lynching; 3) inequality in distribution of funds

among white and black schools; 4) the demoralizing state of the penitentiary system in the South; 5) the prevalence of discrimination against African-Americans on the railroads; and 6) denial of access to hotels and theaters.  

Although the list of grievances attracted a wide following among African-Americans, including Booker T. Washington, Fortune’s initial statements alluded to the position that the group would use violence, if necessary, to obtain its goals. Fortune would later reject any emphasis on violent uprisings, and the organization attempted to survive despite lack of funds and opposition from whites. Following five years of relative inactivity the group revived in 1898 under the new name of The National Afro-American Council. In this new organization, Booker T. Washington worked as a powerful background figure, and the organization itself evolved into a forum for Washington supporters and opponents to voice their views. Within this new organization grew the seeds of organized opposition to Washington, which would eventually cause the entire African-American movement to split into Du Bois and Washington camps.

Although Fortune and Washington maintained close relations, their friendship began to break down in 1901 after Theodore Roosevelt became president. As Washington’s power and prestige increased, Fortune became more and more dependent on Washington financially. Fortune had met Roosevelt several times in New York, and he was not altogether convinced that the new president considered the civil rights of African-Americans a priority issue. Yet, hoping that with

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*Ibid., 495-496.*

*Ibid., 502-503.*
Washington's influence he would receive an important federal appointment, Fortune ceased criticizing Roosevelt, even re-writing sections of editorials that were not supportive of the administration. Once again, Washington controlled an important and influential member of the black press.

The relationship between Washington and Fortune helped Washington control the black press from the relationship's inception in 1898-1899 until 1907, when Fortune sold his shares of the New York Age to Fred R. Moore, an affiliate of Washington's, and separated himself from the two. The origin of the split went back to the Brownsville riot the previous August and the subsequent reaction in the black press, which Washington sought to control. On August 13, 1906, random shootings in an entertainment area of Brownsville, Texas led black infantry soldiers stationed in the area to retaliate. While the soldiers mistakenly thought a white mob was attacking, the white townspeople assumed the black soldiers were attempting to retaliate for attacks on individual African-Americans. One white man was killed and a police official was wounded; President Roosevelt decided to resolve the matter by dismissing without trial three companies of black soldiers stationed near Brownsville, with the exception of their white officers.

Unable to convince Roosevelt to reverse or even delay the dismissal of the soldiers, Washington determined his relationship with the president was far too valuable to his personal political machine and the future of white-black relations to jeopardize. Thus, he failed to publicly criticize the president's decision, although he

admitted to friends in confidential letters that he was against the dismissal of the troops. Based largely on the Brownsville decision, Fortune asked Washington to sever his ties with Roosevelt, believing that any association with the president could harm the Age. Seeking to protect his personal control over the paper, Washington instructed his assistant Emmett Scott to begin acquiring stock in the New York Age in early 1907, and by the end of that year Scott and Moore owned the majority of the paper. The Age promptly reversed its editorial policy concerning the Brownsville incident, and Washington once again won a battle in his war for control. Fortune separated himself completely from the newspaper and from Washington, fading into virtual retirement and suffering from alcoholism and poor health. In 1911, a healthier Fortune again wrote a series of articles for Washington, in this case specifically criticizing Du Bois and the NAACP.

The relationship Washington enjoyed with Fortune had served Washington well. Through Fortune, Tuskegee had the benefit of using both patronizing and militant tactics to attain better economic, social, and political conditions for blacks. For Washington, however, the relationship was more than just convenient. It seems that Washington may have assisted Fortune both financially and with his massive power network, eventually placing him in a position that would serve Washington best. In fact, it has been pointed out that Washington may have been secretly pleased to have Fortune say some of the things he dared not say. Certainly his friendship with Fortune was useful to him since it would be


considered by Negroes as evidence that he was not as conservative as his critics claimed. On the other hand among whites Fortune’s radicalism served as a useful foil to his conservatism and strengthened Washington’s position in their eyes.47

Thus, the relationship between the two worked to Washington’s advantage in his relations with African-Americans and southern whites.

The desire for complete control was the one characteristic in Washington that W.E.B. Du Bois despised most, and he worked unceasingly to form a network that would resist and rival the power of Washington’s Tuskegee Machine. Like Washington, Du Bois recognized the advantage of maintaining a sympathetic black newspaper; he formed a partnership with some recent Atlanta University graduates in March, 1904 with the purpose of purchasing a printing press. On December 2, 1905, the *Moon Illustrated Weekly* emerged as Du Bois’ own instrument for influencing the thought and actions of the African-American community and criticizing Washington and his followers.48 Corresponding by mail with the second meeting of the Niagara Movement on August 15, 1906, Du Bois extended his rivaling influence into the African-American community through his new publication. Invariably, Du Bois’ increasing power began to limit the influence Washington had over African-American affairs, despite the latter’s obvious favoratism within the Roosevelt presidency and his acceptance among whites, both in the North and the South.


CHAPTER V

WASHINGTON'S WANING INFLUENCE

Following the second national convention of the Afro-American Council in 1899, at which critics of Washington openly expressed their opinions, Washington created in the National Negro Business League an organization which seemed to be designed to draw attention away from W.E.B. Du Bois and other opponents. Despite the backlash of criticism against him for making this strategic move, Washington eventually gained effective control of the Council in 1902. Despite earlier attempts to remain neutral with regard to Washington, Du Bois now chose to align himself with Washington's critics. The National Afro-American Council received little support from the masses despite Booker T. Washington's efforts, and it reached its lowest point in 1905, the same year W.E.B. Du Bois and other Washington opponents called for a newer, more militant organization to fight for racial equality. This new group, called the Niagara Movement, became the most powerful threat to Washington's influence and stature.¹

The Niagara Movement was overwhelmingly an organization founded on protest. In Du Bois' famous "Address to the Country," which was read in his absence on the last night of the second meeting of the movement in August, 1906,² the black

²Ibid, 328.
leader established a powerful five-point resolution demanding quality education and justice under the law. Setting the tone for the Niagara Movement as a whole, Du Bois' address proclaimed:

>We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil and social; and until we get these rights we will never cease to protest and to assail the ears of America. The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone but for all true Americans. It is a fight for ideals, lest this, our common fatherland, false to its founding, become in truth the land of the thief and the home of the Slave—a by-word and a hissing among the nations for its sounding pretensions and pitiful accomplishments.\(^3\)

Washington, of course, was concerned about the threat to his personal power and that of his Tuskegee Machine. In addition to his attempts to control the press and largely ignore the movement altogether, Washington publicly dismissed Du Bois' "Declaration of Principles."

Not unlike the Washington-Du Bois feud that led to the founding of the Niagara Movement, the movement itself became subject to internal polarization as Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter, an even harsher critic of Washington, positioned for a fight to determine control of the group. By the time of the group's August, 1908 meeting in Oberlin, Ohio, Washington had successfully limited the influence the organization would enjoy through manipulation of the black press, and the Du Bois-Trotter conflict had weakened the movement's impact. Washington even commented on the meeting in a letter to the editor of the New York Age, dated September 7, 1908, in which he stated, "If we may judge by the attendance at the recent meeting of the Niagara Movement, from the District of Columbia, we can

\(^3\)Ibid, 330.
safely say that the movement is practically dead."4 Despite his enthusiasm for the failure of the Niagara Movement, Washington would soon learn that opposition to his machine and his control of African-American affairs lacked only the vital ingredient of organization, and once that organization had been achieved, he would be eclipsed.

Sparked by the violence and destruction of a race riot in Springfield, Illinois in the summer of 1908, Mary White Ovington, a white journalist with socialist leanings, William English Walling, a white journalist, and Dr. Henry Moskowitz, an official in the New York Mayor’s office, met in an apartment in New York City and decided to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.5 The small group quickly moved to publicize itself and attract other interested people, including Oswald Garrison Villard, who would later write “The Call,” which explained the organization’s goals and basic beliefs. In this short piece, which was signed by, among others, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, William Lloyd Garrison, and Rev. Francis J. Grimke, Villard wrote:

The Celebration of the Centennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, widespread and grateful as it may be, will fail to justify itself if it takes no note of and makes no recognition of the colored men and women for whom the great Emancipator labored to assure freedom. ... If Mr. Lincoln could revisit this country in the flesh, he would be disheartened and discouraged. He would learn that on January 1, 1909, Georgia had rounded out a new confederacy by disfranchising the Negro, after the manner of all the other Southern States. ... Discrimination once permitted cannot be bridled; recent history in the South shows that in forging chains


5Mary White Ovington, "How the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Began," The Crisis (August, 1914), 185.
for the Negroes the white voters are forging chains for themselves. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand'; this government cannot exist half-slave and half free any better today than it could in 1861. Hence we call on all the believers in democracy to join in a national conference for the discussion of present evils, the voicing of protests, and the renewal of the struggle for civil and political liberty.

In this short but powerful statement, Villard helped revitalize a weakened movement based on protest and struggle. Unfortunately for Booker T. Washington, commitment to protest and struggle all but guaranteed a direct confrontation with Tuskegee, which showed that his political machine was continually losing the respect and support of African-Americans.

Unhappy with the failing Niagara Movement, W.E.B. Du Bois and other leaders joined the newly-found NAACP, and as historian David Levering Lewis points out in his biography of Du Bois, "As much as Villard and other well-meaning white friends of civil rights wanted to spare Booker Washington’s reputation and to continue paying lip service to his program of compromise, Du Bois understood with cool clarity that the success of this new organization necessitated the deflation of the Great Accommodator’s national standing and ultimately the destruction of his machine." Despite Du Bois’ position, Villard made it clear that he did not wish to create an organization that was either pro-Du Bois or pro-Washington, but that it should combine the best ideas of both, while relying largely on organized efforts to defeat segregation and discrimination similar to those Washington had been participating in for years. To prove his point, Villard invited Washington to attend

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7Lewis, 398.
the first conference of the group, and he excluded bitter Washington critics such as William Monroe Trotter. In typical fashion, Washington decided that the best way for his organization to proceed was behind the scenes rather than overtly, and he declined to attend the conference. For the most part, Washington and the NAACP agreed to disagree.

As he had done with the Niagara Movement only five years earlier, Washington used his influence in the press and his network of spies to try to limit the impact of the new organization. Open hostilities between Washington and the new group did not break out, however, until the now famous open letter "To the People of Great Britain and Europe" appeared following Washington's return from a tour of Europe in October, 1910. The letter, which was signed by W.E.B. Du Bois and 31 other prominent African-American leaders, stated "if Mr. Booker T. Washington, or any other person, is giving the impression abroad that the Negro problem in America is in process of satisfactory solution he is giving an impression which is not true." From this point forward, Washington considered the NAACP, and Du Bois in particular, a direct threat to his establishment and his goals.

On December 11, 1910, Washington penned a letter to Oswald Garrison Villard commenting on the circular letter that had recently appeared. In this letter, Washington expressed his true feelings about the African-American effort. Although Washington himself had declined to attend the opening meetings of the NAACP, claiming that his presence might distract from the spirit of true debate, he claimed to respect the cause, and in some cases the methods, the new organization employed.

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In the face of a new, powerful threat, however, Washington never lost sight of his true calling, which he considered to be the education and social equality of his African-American brothers and sisters. In the letter to Villard, Washington wrote:

> When there is so much that is needed to be done in the way of punishing those who are guilty of lynching, of peonage, and seeing that the Negro gets an equitable share of the school fund, and that the law relating to the ballot is enforced in regard to black men and white men, it is difficult to see how people can throw away their time and strength in stirring up strife within the race instead of devoting themselves to bringing about justice to the race as a whole.⁹

Shortly after writing to Villard, on January 20, 1911 Washington wrote to T. Thomas Fortune, who had recently become active in the press again, stating, "I am glad you went for Du Bois in the way that you did,"¹⁰ implying that Fortune should continue blasting Du Bois in the pages of the Negro press. Despite his dedication to the cause of African-American equality, Washington did not intend to relinquish his power and status without a fight.

Despite Washington's public willingness to put away personal bickerings and to work with mutual understanding with regard to the NAACP¹¹, the jealousy and animosity between Washington and Du Bois continued. Du Bois continued his attacks on Washington's programs as weak and ineffective, while Washington hammered back through the press and his network of spies and information

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gatherers. Determined to make Du Bois as uncomfortable as possible, Washington even wrote to Clark Howell, the editor of the Atlanta Constitution, that "it is too bad that an institution like Atlanta University has permitted Dr. Du Bois to go on from year to year stirring up racial strife in the heart of the South."\textsuperscript{12} Regardless of his efforts to draw fire from Du Bois' and Villard's organization, Washington found himself in the position of an aging and increasingly powerless leader who grasped at whatever he could to maintain his status.

The Tuskegee Machine's reaction to the events of March 19, 1911 provide a clear illustration of the lengths to which Washington would go to maintain his personal control. On that night, Washington was severely beaten by a white man in New York City for no apparent reason; the details of the case remain cloudy to the present.\textsuperscript{13} While the assailant, Henry Albert Ulrich, told police he beat Washington because it appeared Washington was attempting to break into his house, the police decided it was unlikely a thief would attempt to enter through the front door, so they entertained changing the charges to stalking two young white women who lived in the building.\textsuperscript{14}

When Washington, suffering from multiple head wounds and a torn ear, finally convinced the police of his true identity, Ulrich was arrested and charged with felonious assault. In the next few days, many questions were raised by reporters concerning Washington's purpose for visiting the building, and Washington's

\textsuperscript{12}Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 371.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid, 379-380.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid, 381-382.
explanations sometimes rambled and often contradicted each other. Rumours then circulated that Washington had been drinking that night, and that he had addressed a white woman with the expression "Hello, sweetheart" upon passing her in the street. All of the stories about the case seemed uncharacteristic of Washington, and thus the case became more clouded with controversy.

In the hearing that followed, both sides told their versions of the story, the charges were reduced from felonious to simple assault, and Ulrich was arraigned. More importantly, messages began arriving from all over the country in support of Washington, and assistant Emmett Scott and friend Charles Anderson both "worked to shift public interest from suspicion of Washington to sympathy with him." Public sympathy for Washington grew so great that even W.E.B. Du Bois wrote an editorial supporting Washington in his predicament, and William Monroe Trotter agreed to suspend his ongoing verbal attacks on Washington until he was able to once again defend himself. Before the trial took place nearly eight months later, Washington's friends and assistants, all part of his influential political machine, spent enormous amounts of time and energy to gather supporting witnesses and discredit the defendant, Henry Ulrich. The trial resulted in the acquittal of Ulrich, and Washington found himself in an increasingly weak position with regard to control of African-American affairs. Although his influence continued for the remaining four years of

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15Ibid, 383.
16Ibid, 384.
17Ibid, 385.
18Ibid, 391.
his life following the beating and subsequent trial, Washington's acceptance in white society was notably affected by the rumors concerning the assault and trial. The effort of his lieutenants to manipulate public sentiment and thus take advantage of the event in Washington's behalf, are typical of the way in which the machine operated.

Booker T. Washington's influence and power slipped away for a variety of reasons, most beyond his control. As August Meier points out in his essay "Booker T. Washington and the Rise of the NAACP," "nothing Washington could have done would have prevented the rise of the NAACP. . . . Washington's prominence and position of leadership had been due to conditions at the turn of the century, when even many Negroes, discouraged at the increasing oppression, thought his program contained some hope." Between the famous speech he gave at the Atlanta conference in 1895 and his death in 1915, Washington experienced an extreme range of power and influence. At his height Washington counseled presidents on political appointments and consulted with white politicians on strategy, while at his lowest point he was abandoned by African-Americans and wealthy whites alike.

For the most part, changing political conditions convinced followers of the black movement that Washington's programs of industrial education and economic advancement would do little good in the face of southern lawmakers who appeared determined to strip African-Americans of any rights and privileges of citizenship they had gained since Reconstruction. With no knowledge of Washington's behind-the-scenes challenges to state laws restrictive of personal rights and freedoms, many

African-Americans deserted their designated "Leader of the Race" for more activist and militant movements. As a further blow, the Wilson administration, beginning in 1913, replaced most of the black officeholders in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere, many of whom owed their office to the efforts of Washington. Stripped of most of his former power and influence, aging and suffering from serious illness, Booker T. Washington died in November, 1915.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of Booker T. Washington's life and death was his unfailing dedication to improving the lives of his fellow African-Americans. While his opponents labeled him a patron of the white man and insisted that he operated only for the maintenance of his school and his personal reputation, Washington worked quietly behind the scenes, so as not to disrupt his secret influence in the courts and various presidential administrations. The very men and women who harshly criticized him, particularly W.E.B. Du Bois and other black members of the NAACP, benefitted greatly from his work and, unfortunately, never fully understood the impact of his covert operations because of the very nature in which Washington acted. In particular, Washington's work in fighting southern laws that denied freedoms to African-Americans benefitted the NAACP and its followers. To date, many African-Americans truly believe that Booker T. Washington was merely an Uncle Tom figure who operated with the interests of the white man in mind for the purpose of personal gain. As one letter to the editor of the New York Times illustrates, by the time Washington's power had fully declined and the NAACP had taken control of the African-American movement, a segment of the black population vehemently turned against the aged leader:

The most prominent Negro in the world today, he is the most pathetic
figure in our national life. Slowly but surely the clouds of a race's indignation are gathering about Booker T. Washington's head and he may well wish to be dead before the storm breaks. For I give it as my most solemn belief that the day will come when Booker Washington's name will be cursed wherever an American Negro sets his foot, and the best that his most sanguine friends can hope for is that posterity will at least temper its judgment of him by conceding that he really and truly believed that the ends justified the means.20

Yet, despite his decline in personal political power, Washington's influence remained, particularly in the South, long after the black leader's death in 1915. In fact, much of the older African-American population felt that their children and grandchildren were asking for too much even into the 1960's when the Civil Rights Movement made sweeping changes in American society. That attitude echoed many of the influences of Washington's philosophy.

In reality, Booker T. Washington was a powerful believer in social equality, justice under the law, and full rights of citizenship. As a southerner born into slavery, Washington fully understood the mindset, economic pressures, and societal demands of southern whites. He also understood the plight of poor blacks, something Du Bois, Villard, and many other Washington critics could not claim. Rather than push against the system in which he lived, Washington chose to outwardly work within a given set of parameters, while secretly participating in more militant and immediate battles out of the public eye, to reach his ultimate goals.

In his years of prominence, Washington was attacked from many directions regarding his views, which many saw as inconsistent with the goal of social equality. With regard to segregation, many African-Americans accused Washington of

approving of the condition simply because he did not often publicly oppose the legal issues involved with segregation. Rather, he chose to center on the fact the segregated areas invariably offered inferior facilities and opportunities to African-Americans. In an article written only two months before his death, Washington described in detail his views on segregation. In his conclusion, Washington stated, "in the long run no individual and no race can succeed which sets itself at war against the common good; for in the gain or loss of one race, all the rest have equal claim."\(^2\) Similarly, Washington answered his critics concerning his stand on suffrage, writing in *Up From Slavery*, "more and more I am convinced that the final solution of the political end of our race problem will be for each state to change the law bearing upon the franchise to make the law apply with absolute honesty, and without opportunity for double dealing or evasion, to both races alike."\(^3\) Later in the same text, Washington expressed his belief that denying the right of suffrage to African-Americans would hurt whites as much as blacks.\(^3\)

Throughout his battle with W.E.B. Du Bois and the NAACP, Booker T. Washington maintained his anonymity in the court cases he supported and the political strategies he arranged, including recommending appointments. In many cases it would have been simple for Washington to blast those critics who accused him of complacency in a time when militant protest was necessary, yet he chose to


\(^3\)Ibid, 86-87.
remain silent and take the abuse heaped upon him by Du Bois and others. For that trait, Washington should be praised. Yet, true innovators in the area of civil and social equality are rarely praised for the characteristics of patience and accommodation. They are praised, rather, for their ability to organize and lead a powerful revolutionary protest movement that inevitably brings about monumental changes in the way society views itself. If Booker T. Washington shared any traits with his contemporaries and those civil rights leaders who followed, the ability to act in a revolutionary manner was not one of them. Yet, Washington brought about advances in peace, trust, and mutual dependence between the races while covertly fighting the very attitudes and institutions typical of those who donated money to his school and his cause. For example, Washington's efforts in the Alonzo Bailey case and other similar courtroom battles made progress toward better treatment of blacks while Washignton himself remained distant from those successes for the benefit of his white sponsors. More importantly, judicial successes laid important groundwork for future court battles that would further advance African-American progress. For that effort, Washington deserves to be added to Cornel West's list of great black leaders and intellectuals, and he deserves a place of honor in African-American history.

Despite intense resistence and opposition to his program of industrial education and economic advancement as the correct method for African-Americans to attain social equality, Booker T. Washington played an important role in the overall equality effort. Even his harshest critics have little choice but to acknowledge the impact Washington made on black/white relations, and even W.E.B. Du Bois recognized the positive results of Washington's efforts on occasion. Following
Washington's death, a number of more militant activists penned articles praising Washington, if for no other reason than to keep the school at Tuskegee strong.

In the December, 1915 edition of The Crisis, Du Bois wrote that Washington deserved "a heavy responsibility for the consummation of Negro disfranchisement, the decline of the Negro college and public school and the firmer establishment of color caste in this land." Du Bois was careful, however, to acknowledge that Washington's death was truly of national consequence, stating, "this is no fit time for recrimination or complaint. Gravely and with bowed head let us receive what this great figure gave of good, silently rejecting all else." Whatever his true feelings, Du Bois was able to admit, albeit after Washington's death, that the 'life's work' of his nemesis had positive results. By 1915, the United States was almost unrecognizable to a southern, black man born in 1856. Many southern laws denying social and political rights to African-Americans had been defeated in the courts due to Washington's organization and funding. Under Washington's leadership, blacks understood that their race was something of which they should be proud. African-Americans all over the country recognized the value of industrial training and schooling to allow for economic opportunity and independence from servitude or government handouts. And, finally, Washington demonstrated to southern whites that African-Americans had the capacity, if given the chance, to become educated, positive forces in society.

For many, Booker T. Washington began as a hero of national status.

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24 Lewis, 502.
25 Ibid. 502.
Ironically, the man who was once revered as the first African-American to speak before a large crowd of blacks and whites in the same room and the first African-American to dine at the White House soon became the man who was seen as selling out social rights and freedoms to protect his own personal political empire. Washington has been wrongly judged and unfairly criticized for years. Far worse, Washington's importance has been historically ignored. In his long reign as leader of the black race in America, Washington performed many important functions and became vital in the movement to achieve social equality for African-Americans. Booker T. Washington must be remembered for his true accomplishments: the education and economic growth of African-Americans, his ability to work within the white-dominated system to achieve real support for the advancement of his race, and the genuine love Washington felt for his race and his home, the South.
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"Booker T. Washington On Our Racial Problem." The Outlook 64 (January 6, 1900): 14-17. Extremely positive article highlighting passages from Washington's speeches concerning goals and observations for the future. The article provides in sight into Washington's beliefs.


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