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# Booker T. Washington and the Historians: How Changing Views on Race Relations, Economics, and Education Shaped Washington Historiography, 1915-2010

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BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND THE HISTORIANS:  
HOW CHANGING VIEWS ON RACE RELATIONS, ECONOMICS, AND  
EDUCATION SHAPED WASHINGTON HISTORIOGRAPHY, 1915-2010

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by

Joshua Thomas Zeringue  
B.A., Christendom College, 2010  
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To Monica, Sam, and Noah.  
Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was twelve years old my father gave me a piece of advice. “Son,” he said, “whenever you read a book, be sure to note when it was written.” Though I did not understand at the time, my father had taught me the most basic principle of historiography. I want to thank him and my mother for having the courage to offer me an excellent homeschool education.

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## ABSTRACT

“Booker T. Washington and the Historians” analyzes the past century of scholarly writings on Booker T. Washington and seeks to describe the major paradigms used to explain his life and work. Between 1915 and 2010 four major paradigms emerged. The hagiographic paradigm, which offered an uncritical and triumphal account, dominated Washington scholarship from 1915 to 1950. In the 1950s the critical paradigm became widely accepted among historians; Washington was viewed as a compromiser with white supremacists and Northern industrialists. In the 1990s and 2000s the educational paradigm, which focused on Washington’s pedagogy and educational achievements, developed as an alternative to the critical paradigm. In the 2000s, the contextual paradigm challenged the critical paradigm, presenting Washington’s activities in the context of the virulent white supremacy of his era. Historians writing within a particular paradigm shared common assumptions about race relations, economics, and education. When these views shifted, new paradigms materialized.

## INTRODUCTION

As November 2015 marks the centennial of the death of Booker T. Washington, a historiographical review of Washington scholarship is timely. In the past century, historians have painted incredibly disparate portraits of Washington. Some viewed him as a savior, the black leader *par excellence*. Others condemned him for selling his race out to white supremacists and greedy industrialists. Sometimes he was characterized as a trenchant conservative, other times as a progressive icon. His pedagogy has alternately been described as outmoded or visionary. Was he a black nationalist or a racial assimilationist? Some historians marveled at his saintly forbearance in the face of criticism; others described him as a thin-skinned, Machiavellian dictator. These debates have raged for a century.

It is the goal of the historiographer not to settle these controversies, but to outline the evolution of these debates, explaining why historians in different eras have come to divergent conclusions regarding the meaning of Washington's life, work, and philosophy. This is a story which adds to our understanding of the progression of ideas in the historical profession in the past century and helps us grow closer to understanding the enigma that is Washington.

Before examining the ways historians have interpreted Washington's leadership, a brief summary of his biography is in order.

Though the exact date of Washington's birth is unknown, it was probably around 1856. The son of an unknown white man and an enslaved woman, he grew up in the slave quarters of a small farm belonging to James Burroughs, near the town of Hale's Ford in southwest Virginia. After emancipation, his mother, Jane, moved the family to Malden, West Virginia, to join her husband, Washington Ferguson, a worker in the salt mines. As an adolescent, Washington developed an appetite for education. He attended school in Malden despite the protestations of his stepfather, who felt Washington would be more useful in the mines. According to Washington's autobiographies, on his first day of school, his teacher asked for his last name; having grown up a slave and thus not knowing the answer, he claims to have deliberately adopted the surname "Washington" in honor of the first United States president.

As a teenager, Washington was afforded more positive contact with whites than most of his peers. At the age of ten or eleven, he entered the employ of a wealthy white family, the Ruffners, as a domestic helper. Later, he traveled 500 miles

to attend the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute in Virginia. The Institute was run by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a former colonel in the United States army, under the auspices of the American Missionary Association (AMA), an organization dedicated to educating blacks in the values of Protestantism and classical liberalism. Later, Washington described Armstrong not only as a mentor, but also as the greatest man he had ever known. While at the Institute, Washington imbibed the values of the AMA and, for the rest of his life, promoted industrial education, racial self-help, practical religion, moral rectitude, entrepreneurship, interracial cooperation, and American democracy.

In 1881, the state legislature of Alabama asked Armstrong to recommend a candidate competent to establish a school for blacks in Tuskegee, Alabama. When Armstrong offered him the position, Washington, who had undertaken several unsuccessful careers since his graduation in 1879, enthusiastically accepted. As principal of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Washington spent the next decade building the school into a “Hampton” for southern blacks.

The funds earmarked by the state of Alabama for the Tuskegee Institute were limited, so Washington spent much of his subsequent career courting northern white philanthropists for donations. In the course of his entreaties, he developed close personal relationships with many of the titans of industry, including John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Julius Rosenwald, and Robert Ogden. Washington was wildly successful; at the height of his career, he served as the intermediary for practically all philanthropic donations to black institutions.

Washington catapulted to national prominence after delivering a famous speech at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta in 1895. The meaning of his speech is one of the most hotly contested aspects of his legacy, but what is certain is that the majority of liberal and moderate whites, as well as most blacks, praised the speech as providing a pragmatic vision of race relations. Only truculent white supremacists complained. Washington emerged as the most influential black leader in America.

In the years following the speech, Washington set about extending his influence until he wielded a virtual monopoly over black cultural and political affairs. Washington published over a dozen popular books promoting his ideology, the most significant being his autobiographies, *The Story of My Life and Work* and *Up from Slavery*. He delivered countless speeches promoting the Tuskegee Institute and his philosophy of race relations. Washington also established numerous organizations with the ostensible purpose of promoting black progress, including the National Negro Business League, the Tuskegee Negro Conference, the Farmer’s Institute, the National Urban League, and others. He traveled the South by train, engaging in “educational tours” that spread the Tuskegee message to millions. He funded newspapers that disseminated his philosophy



across America. Washington consulted with several presidents, most extensively with Theodore Roosevelt, helping them craft their domestic policies on race relations. Washington's popularity even extended across the Atlantic. When he visited England in 1899, Queen Victoria invited him to tea. Educators from Togo, South Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere sought his advice. Although historians have debated whether Washington's efforts benefited blacks, it is unquestionable that Washington captured the imagination of his generation

Washington, however, was not without black critics and competitors, particularly William Monroe Trotter and W.E.B. Du Bois. These men, and others, resented what they saw as Washington's conservative program, his pacifistic approach to race relations, his rejection of the liberal arts, and his monopoly over black leadership. The first organized opposition that emerged to challenge Washington was the Niagara Movement, a protest organization founded in 1905 by Trotter and Du Bois. Though the Niagara Movement was short-lived, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) rose out of it in 1909. The activist agenda of the NAACP served as a formidable challenge to Washington's conciliatory leadership style.

Washington, for his part, expended enormous amounts of time and energy combating the NAACP. He used his control of philanthropic donations to prevent black newspapers and schools from aligning with his opposition. He hired spies and agents to infiltrate NAACP gatherings and uncover scandal in order to discredit his opponents. Though most historians agree that, by the end of his life, Washington began to more openly protest racial injustice, Washington and his opponents never achieved détente.

Washington constantly advised his black followers to eschew political activism, but, behind the scenes, he worked to undermine white supremacy via the political and legal processes. He secretly instigated and funded legal challenges to segregation and disfranchisement. He quietly used his influence over Roosevelt to promote black political appointees. Historians debate whether these efforts led to concrete gains for blacks or merely served as a therapeutic salve to Washington's conscience.

Less is known about Washington's personal life. Over the course of his career, Washington married three times; each of his wives played significant managerial roles at the Tuskegee Institute. He married his first wife, Frannie Smith, in 1882. She bore him a daughter, Portia, before passing away two years after their marriage. A year later he married another member of the Tuskegee faculty, Olivia Davidson. Together, they had two sons, Booker "Baker" T. Washington, Jr., and Ernest Davidson Washington. Olivia died in 1889 and Washington remarried in 1893. Washington and Margaret Murray had

no children and she outlived him by a decade. By most accounts, Washington was an affectionate, if somewhat preoccupied, husband and father.

Washington died on 14 November 1915 at the approximate age of 59, probably of heart failure. With his death, the influence of the Tuskegee Institute waned. His successor, Robert Russa Moton, made peace with the NAACP. Tuskegee ceased to be the nexus of white philanthropy. As a result, Washington's successors served solely as principals of the Institute, though successfully, as the Institute exists to this day.

These are the facts concerning Washington's life and work. The correct interpretation of these facts, however, has been rigorously debated by scholars.

Washington is by no means an obscure character in American history, and much ink has been spilled investigating the effects of his leadership. Because of the volume of material on the subject, it was necessary for the author to establish an appropriate methodology guiding the selection of works to include in this historiographical inquiry.

I began my study by reading the most influential biographies written about Washington, particularly those by Louis Harlan and Robert Norrell. Inspection of their footnotes and bibliographies led me to additional books and articles for consideration. I, in turn, examined the sources of those works, building an ever-increasing bibliography of my own. A search of online databases, such as JSTOR, helped me uncover less frequently cited articles on Washington. I am also indebted to Pero Gaglo Dagbovie; his 2007 article, "Exploring a Century of Historical Scholarship on Booker T. Washington," identified several sources I may have otherwise overlooked. As I delved deeper, it became apparent that the sheer number of materials on Washington required me to be discerning in what to include in this thesis.<sup>1</sup>

Early on, I determined to focus solely on how scholars have written about Washington. Still, it is worth noting that numerous popular historians have written on the topic. There are hagiographies, such as *Then Darkness Fled: The Liberating Wisdom of Booker T. Washington* by Stephen Mansfield, and discerning biographies, like *Booker T. Washington: Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* by Raymond Smock. Historical surveys and textbooks inevitably mention Washington in their treatments of race relations in the progressive era. Comic books intended for children offer celebratory accounts of

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<sup>1</sup>Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "Exploring a Century of Historical Scholarship on Booker T. Washington," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): pp. 239-264.

Washington's life and work, such as *Booker T. Washington: Great American Educator* by Eric Braun and *Booker T. Washington* by Joeming W. Dunn. More recently, articles and blog posts about Washington have proliferated on the internet. To include these works in a historiographical study alongside the writings of scholars would require a rather lengthy book or dissertation. I hypothesize, however, that if such a work were undertaken, the portrait of Washington painted by popular authors would, generally, be more sympathetic than that of the scholars. In his 1973 essay, "What Our Schools Teach about Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois," Leo J. Alilunas concluded that treatments of Washington in school textbooks were largely favorable. Similarly, many of the popular histories I examined were tremendously sympathetic. I suspect this is an overarching trend, though it will be up to future historiographers to demonstrate or disprove this assertion.<sup>2</sup>

By necessity, I also restricted this study to a consideration of scholarly writings that include Washington as a main topic of discussion, excluding works that discuss him incidentally. Dozens of biographies written about Washington's contemporaries, such as Elliot Rudwick's *W.E.B. Du Bois: Propagandist of the Negro Protest*, have something to say about Washington. Furthermore, monographs and surveys treating the progressive era often include references to him. One example is Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, which mentions Washington's career in passing. Another is *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915* by Donald Spivey. Because these and similar works treat Washington in the context of their particular theses and do not offer interpretive contributions to Washington studies, they are not included in this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

Though all influential works on Washington have been considered herein, it was necessary that a few scholarly writings on Washington be omitted. Not all journal articles on Washington are of equal value; some were ignored by later scholars, others offered no new insights, and several merely repeated the arguments of previous writers. I have included several of these essays for illustrative purposes, such as Francis H. Shaw's essay, "Booker T. Washington and the Future of

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<sup>2</sup>Stephen Mansfield, *Then Darkness Flew: The Liberating Wisdom of Booker T. Washington* (Nashville: Cumberland House Publishing, 1999). Raymond Smock, *Booker T. Washington: Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* (Ivan R. Dee, 2009). Eric Braun and Cynthia Martin, *Booker T. Washington: Great American Educator* (Mankato: Capstone Press, 2005). Joeming W. Dunn, author, Chris Allen, illustrator, *Booker T. Washington* (Minnesota: AMDO Publishing, 2008). For examples of internet articles sympathetic to Washington, see Blair L.M. Kelley, "Rethinking Booker T. Washington: The 'Uncle Tom' Characterization of Washington is Simply Unfair," *Ebony*, 1/17/2012, <http://www.ebony.com/news-views/rethinking-booker-t-washington#axzz2uRa0SSpI> (accessed 2/26/2014) and George McKenna, "The Return of Booker T. Washington," *First Things*, May 2009, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/05/the-return-of-booker-t-washington> (accessed 1/14/2014). Leo J. Alilunas, "What Our Schools Teach About Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois," *The Journal of Negro Education* 42, no. 2 (1973): 176-186.

<sup>3</sup>Elliot M. Rudwick, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Propagandist of the Negro Protest* (New York: Atheneum, 1978). Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (Harper and Row, 1944). Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915* (Africa World Press, 1978).

Black Americans,” because, despite their flaws, they demonstrate major trends in Washington scholarship. Others have been omitted, such as Charles R. Larson’s essay, “The Deification of Booker T. Washington,” and Philip S. Foner’s, “Is Booker T. Washington’s Idea Correct?,” lest the body of this work be consumed by redundant argumentation.<sup>4</sup>

Several of the most influential Washington scholars wrote multiple articles on the subject. Louis Harlan, for example, published over twelve scholarly articles on Washington. Robert Norrell wrote at least four. I have generally avoided summarizing these essays when their content overlaps with their authors’ published biographies. I have thus limited myself to including two of Norrell’s essays and three of Harlan’s. This decision has not resulted in the exclusion of any of the authors’ important conclusions.

As will be noted in the third chapter, Louis Harlan published a massive, fourteen-volume compilation of Washington’s papers, titled *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. Though I have commented upon the profound impact Harlan’s volumes had on Washington scholarship, I have not included summations of the commentary offered by Harlan and his co-editors in the volumes. Historians have noted that these commentaries merely repeat the opinions Harlan offered in his articles and biography. To comment further would be repetitive.

Despite this winnowing down of sources, over seventy scholarly biographies, monographs, and articles on Washington were examined in writing this thesis. In my consideration of these works, trends emerged; the paradigms employed by the various historians to explain Washington gradually crystalized.

In this work, the term “paradigm” is frequently employed to describe the ways in which historians working in particular eras interpreted the meaning of Washington’s life and work. By a paradigm, the author means a particular interpretive pattern used to explain the meanings of historical facts. No two historians, of course, apply a paradigm in exactly the same way. A successful paradigm is, by nature, malleable and adaptable, providing a loose interpretive superstructure that allows different historians to explore various topics against the backdrop of shared assumptions. That being said, a coherent

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<sup>4</sup>Francis H. Shaw, “Booker T. Washington and the Future of Black Americans,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1972): 193-209. Charles R. Larson, “The Deification of Booker T. Washington,” *Negro American Literature Forum* 4, no. 4 (1970): 125-126. Philip S. Foner, “Is Booker T. Washington’s Idea Correct?” *The Journal of Negro History* 55, no. 4 (1970): 343-344.

paradigm *does* contain a core set of beliefs and assumptions held by the historians utilizing it. In this way, a paradigm represents the *zeitgeist* of an era.<sup>5</sup>

Some caveats are in order. It must be conceded that some historians produce paradigm-defining works, whereas others simply use the paradigms crafted by others. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that all historians writing during a particular era agree with the dominant paradigm, as previous paradigms survive and counter-paradigms emerge. The concept of paradigm is useful, however, as a generalization of the dominant interpretive trends in a given era.

Over the past century, four major paradigms have defined Washington scholarship: the hagiographic, the critical, the contextual, and the educational paradigms. At the heart of what might be termed “The Washington Question” is the debate over whether or not his approach to race relations benefitted blacks. Each of these paradigms provided an interpretive framework for reaching an answer to this question.

On the surface, “The Washington Question” appears solely concerned with the efficacy of Washington’s vision of race relations. His vision is, of course, judged against the paradigm’s idealized vision of racial progress. Like Washington, the hagiographers believed economic progress underpins all other forms of progress. Contrarily, advocates of the critical paradigm felt that the acquisition of civil rights necessarily precedes economic progress. The educational historians, like the hagiographers, held to an organic vision of progress, though they felt popular education more important than economic development. Historians utilizing the contextual paradigm adopted a more nuanced approach, maintaining that different methods of progress parallel and complement each other. Basing their ideas on conflicting visions, historians guided by divergent paradigms produced profoundly different accounts of Washington’s life and work.

As will be outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, the hagiographic paradigm dominated Washington scholarship from the 1910s through the 1940s. Crafted by black associates of Washington, like Emmett J. Scott and Albon L. Holsey, and white men who agreed with Washington’s philosophy, like Lyman Beecher Stowe, Benjamin Franklin Riley, and Basil

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<sup>5</sup>The use of paradigms in this thesis to describe trends in Washington scholarship is derived from, but differs slightly from, the concept of paradigms as outlined in Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. He described paradigms as an “attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies.” The author maintains that while paradigms are defined by shared assumptions, they are a broad intellectual framework which admit various interpretations. For a discussion of Kuhn’s paradigms, c.f. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 528-529.

Mathews, the hagiographic paradigm offered a triumphal and uncritical presentation of Washington's life and works. These historians repeated the various myths Washington propagated in his writings, treating his autobiographies as holy writ. They assumed, with Washington, that the free market system of his era was an immutable and beneficial element of society. They asserted the superiority of white Anglo-Saxon culture and Christian religion over "Africanism." The hagiographic paradigm described Washington in quasi-Messianic terms.

Though the hagiographic paradigm dominated the era, former opponents of Washington, such as Ida Wells-Barnett and W.E.B. Du Bois, laid the foundation for the critical paradigm that would emerge in the 1950s. Both offered revisionist accounts of their struggles against Washington, presenting him as a man who compromised with white supremacists. In their view, he was a racial traitor who advocated white cultural, economic, and religious chauvinism. In the period following World War II, Du Bois's critique of Washington was widely praised by a new generation of historians highly critical of Washington.

In the period following World War II, the critical paradigm achieved dominance among Washington scholars. The progenitor of this paradigm was C. Vann Woodward; he argued that Washington's ideology represented a compromise between northern industrialists who desired an inexpensive and stable labor force, southern whites who wanted to preserve racial stratification, and blacks who aspired to social and economic progress. The losing party, in Woodward's view, were blacks; Washington's philosophy required them to accommodate themselves to white supremacy, segregation, and a racially stratified socio-economic order. Following Woodward, the most prestigious Washington scholar was August Meier. Meier judiciously exposed Washington's "secret life," both his clandestine, and largely impotent, efforts to effect political reform and his underhanded attempts to discredit his opposition. If Woodward defined Washington as a compromiser, Meier exposed his methods as accommodationist. For this reason, the critical paradigm is, in this thesis, sometimes referred to as the Woodward-Meier paradigm. Historians writing on Washington during the Civil Rights era were profoundly influenced by the critical paradigm as they firmly believed in the necessity of actively protesting for political and legal reform.

The critical paradigm dominated between 1970 and 2000. As historians used this paradigm to explore various aspects of Washington's career, their tone grew increasingly harsh. Louis Harlan led the charge against Washington. His publication of a fourteen-volume compilation of Washington's papers earned him enormous prestige and credibility. Furthermore, both volumes of this Washington biography were awarded the Bancroft Prize. By the end of the 1990s, it appeared that Harlan had enshrined the critical paradigm as dogma.

But every dogmatic system has its heretics. Between 1970 and 2000 a few scholars continued to publish books and essays sympathetic to Washington. Though most simply rehashed the hagiographer's arguments, there were hints that a new paradigm was evolving. Proponents of the educational paradigm felt it incorrect to judge Washington solely on the basis of his lack of political activism, believing that his pedagogy had a beneficial effect on the state of race relations. Educational scholars writing in the 1990s and 2000s largely eschewed consideration of economics. Instead, they honed in on Washington's educational philosophy, which they categorized as progressive in nature. These historians were interested in the nature of Washington's pedagogy and its practical effects on black progress.

In the 2000s, the contextual paradigm gained support. The historians who crafted the contextual paradigm believed the critical paradigm too narrowly focused on Washington's accommodation with white supremacy. Historians like David H. Jackson and Robert J. Norrell were realists, they were less interested in condemning Washington for his failure to protest the socio-economic power structures of his era, than in exploring how he navigated within the constraints of those structures, carving out a space for black progress. Whereas the previous generation of historians condemned Washington as a coward, the contextual paradigm presented him as a shrewd resistance fighter. These historians felt Washington wise for adopting pragmatic, rather than ideological, challenges to white supremacy.

The evolution of these paradigms is the story of Washington historiography. As views on race relations, economics, and education shifted, Washington's story was examined and reexamined. Writings on Washington have been marked by praise and condemnation, sympathy and scorn. Washington historiography is nothing less than a study of the consequences of ideas on the historical profession.

## CHAPTER I: THE HAGIOGRAPHERS, 1910-1950

On 14 November 1915, Booker T. Washington passed away, leaving behind an uncertain legacy. Though his popularity appeared undimmed, a favorable memory was by no means secure. His legacy would be one of the most hotly contested in African American history.

Until the 1950s, however, Washington's friends and admirers dominated the writing of his historical memory. Early biographers, Emmett J. Scott, Lyman Beecher Stowe, and Benjamin Franklin Riley, and later writers, Albon L. Holsey and Basil Mathews, lauded Washington's ideology, whitewashed his flaws, and demonized his black opponents. Some of these hagiographies were embarrassing in their effervescent and incessant praise of Washington.

Washington's contemporary opponents challenged the hagiographers' narrative. They remembered bitterly the ways in which Washington used his influence to prevent their mounting a successful insurgency against his leadership. For example, Washington used his position as President Theodore Roosevelt's advisor on black affairs to ensure that only his supporters were granted political positions. He used his position of favor with white industrialists to ensure that only Washingtonians received philanthropic largesse. However, after his death, Washington's web of influence quickly waned. Robert Moton, a moderate who saw value in both economic progress and political activism, succeeded Washington as the principal of Tuskegee and made peace with his former opponents, particularly with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Still, Moton's détente with the NAACP did not prevent Washington's former opponents, especially W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida Wells-Barnett, from trying to ensure that Washington was remembered as both a megalomaniac and an appeaser of white supremacists. They were the revisionists of their day; they not only opposed Washington's stance on race relations, but they also decried the industrial, capitalist order of the era.

Despite the ardor of the hagiographers and the vitriol of Washington's critics, a few analytical minds attempted to puzzle out the enigma that was Washington. Washington's contemporary, Kelly Miller, analyzed both radicals like Du Bois and conservatives like Washington, searching out the strengths and weakness in their respective schemes for racial progress. Later, Horace Mann Bond demanded that debate concerning the merit of Washington's work be determined objectively by historical and statistical evidence. However, the level-headed analyses of Miller and Bond were routinely ignored by hagiographers and critics who presented Washington's legacy as proof for their particular ideologies.

The dominance of the hagiographic paradigm was due not only to the continuing popularity of Washington's conservative ideology, but also to of the difficulty in finding contrary evidence. Washington was a master propagandist and



produced numerous writings that outlived him. Confounding matters was the highly disordered state in which his papers were maintained until the second half of the twentieth century, making it difficult for historians to adequately source their manuscripts. Washington's papers were not organized in any reasonable fashion until Louis Harlan and several colleagues undertook this daunting task, publishing the fourteen volume *Booker T. Washington Papers* between 1972 and 1988. Before that, historians were limited to sifting through thousands of unorganized boxes of papers. Confronted with this daunting task, most simply relied on Washington's autobiographies, previous hagiographical biographies, or the writings of Washington's contemporary opponents. It is unsurprising, then, that there was little progress in untangling the mystery that was Washington. Thus, the hagiographic paradigm persisted in the historical community through first half of the twentieth century.

#### CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARS ANALYZE WASHINGTON

The writings of W.E.B. Du Bois were the most influential by a Washington contemporary. In his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, a controversial but popular examination of black life in America, Du Bois was the first widely-read black scholar to criticize Washington. In a chapter titled "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" he produced what was, to that date, the most scathing indictment of Washington by a notable black intellectual. He framed the issues in a manner that inspired future generations of critical historians.

In his book, Du Bois consciously rejected the capitalist economic system of his era and censured Washington for his belief in it. He wrote:

By singular insight [Washington] intuitively grasped the spirit of the age which was dominating the North. And so thoroughly did he learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity, that the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities. One wonders what Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi would say to this.

Du Bois felt that Washington's focus on economic advancement "was not wholly original" as the entire nation "was concentrating its energies on Dollars." "This is an age of unusual economic development," Du Bois continued, "and Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life." Du Bois felt that Washington's focus was too "narrow," arguing that spiritual and intellectual development were more important than economic advancement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Kindle e-book edition, 481-484, 497-501, 560-574. Citations refer to locations within the e-book.

Du Bois concluded that because Washington's sole focus was on economic growth, he neglected the pursuit of political rights. In practical terms, he felt that Washington's emphasis translated into an accommodation with white supremacists. Du Bois wrote: "He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run." Du Bois claimed that Washington required blacks to give up three essential elements of citizenship: "First, political power, Second, insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of Negro youth." He perceived the result as wholly negative:

As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred: 1. The disfranchisement of the Negro. 2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro. 3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

Du Bois did not hold Washington wholly responsible for these developments, but argued that "on the whole the distinct impression left by Mr. Washington's propaganda" excused these evils. He moderated this assertion slightly, noting that Washington did send letters of protest to the Louisiana and Alabama state legislatures when they were contemplating disfranchising blacks. Still, Du Bois clearly believed that Washington's leadership was to the net detriment of black Americans.<sup>7</sup>

Du Bois asserted that, unlike previous black leaders, particularly Frederick Douglass, Washington was not the race's leader by virtue of black consensus. Rather, he was "the leader of not one race but of two" because he facilitated compromise between "the South, the North, and the Negro." Du Bois rightly noted that blacks gained the least in this compromise. The idea that Washington's philosophy was a compromise permeated the work of later historians such as C. Vann Woodward and August Meier. Still, Du Bois overstated his case when he asserted that "Mr. Washington has encountered the strongest and most lasting opposition, amounting at times to bitterness" among blacks.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps anticipating Washington's rebuttal, Du Bois conceded that "some of this opposition is . . . mere envy; the disappointment of displaced demagogues," but he declared that "the thinking classes of American Negroes" had every right to criticize Washington. He presented Washington's opponents as patient and charitable:

These same men admire his sincerity of purpose, and are willing to forgive much to honest endeavor which is doing something worth the doing. They cooperate with Mr. Washington as far as they conscientiously can; and, indeed, it is no ordinary tribute to this man's tact and power that, steering as he must between so many diverse interests and opinions, he so largely retains the respect of all.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 579-581, 583-585, 591-592, 646-650.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 515-516, 564-566.

Contrarily, in Du Bois's opinion, Washington hushed "the criticism of honest opponents." "Honest and earnest criticism," Du Bois wrote, "this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society." Similarly, later historians would often debate whether Washington or his opponents were responsible for the breach between their factions. Most placed all the blame on one faction or another. Du Bois was the historian who began this trend.<sup>9</sup>

Also in 1903, Du Bois published an essay, "The Talented Tenth," in which he outlined his vision for black progress in America. This essay implicitly censured Washington's bottom-up program; Du Bois wrote: "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men." He called it "a foolish and mischievous lie" that "with freedom Negro leadership should have begun at the plow and not in the Senate. . . . Unless he have political rights and righteously guarded civic status, he will still remain the poverty-stricken and ignorant plaything of rascals, that he now is." He continued, "Was there ever a nation on God's fair earth civilized from the bottom upward? Never; it is, ever was and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters." This was, of course, a counterfactual claim, as civilization would never have emerged from the Neolithic were it true. Still, anthropologic absurdities aside, the point is that Du Bois felt that Washington's focus on educating the masses of blacks in the trades hindered the emergence of a black intellectual elite.<sup>10</sup>

Du Bois' criticism of the industrial order in "The Talented Tenth" was more scathing than in *The Souls of Black Folk*. "It is industrialism drunk with its vision of success," he declared, "to imagine that its own work can be accomplished without providing for the training of broadly cultured men and women to teach its own teachers, and to teach the teachers of the public schools." He accused Washington of not understanding that this black elite was the secret to Tuskegee's success:

It was Fisk, Atlanta, Howard and Straight, those colleges born of the faith and sacrifice of the abolitionists, that placed in the black schools of the South the 30,000 teachers and more, which some, who depreciate the work of these higher schools, are using to teach their own new experiments. If Hampton, Tuskegee and the hundred other industrial schools prove in the future to be as successful as they deserve to be, then their success in training black artisans for the South, will be due primarily to the white colleges of the North and the black colleges of the South, which trained the teachers who to-day conduct these institutions.

This was what Du Bois meant by "the Talented Tenth," an elite class of blacks who possessed not only an economic, but also a moral vision for progress: "If we make money the object of man-training," he proclaimed, "we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 517-525, 624.

<sup>10</sup>W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," contained in *The Negro Problem*, by Booker T. Washington, et al. (Kindle ebook edition, 2012), 15, 19, 20, 34.

men.” Du Bois outlived Washington by almost half a century and, as will be demonstrated, his animosity only worsened with time.<sup>11</sup>

Kelly Miller, a prominent black intellectual disagreed with Du Bois, though he was not uncritical of Washington. In his 1908 book, *Radicals and Conservatives*, Miller masterfully examined the economic and the activist approaches to black progress, noting the achievements and limitations of both. Miller wrote, “Radical and conservative Negroes agree as to the end in view, but differ as to the most effective means of attaining it.” He concluded that the internecine conflict between Washington and his black detractors was counterproductive, that both approaches were necessary.<sup>12</sup>

Miller placed Washington in the context of the social pressures and values of his era without diminishing his role as a causal agent. Miller accurately noted that Frederick Douglass’ death left a leadership vacuum that Washington filled. However, Miller maintained that both men were products of different eras:

Douglass lived in the day of moral giants; Washington lives in the era of merchant princes. The contemporaries of Douglass emphasized the rights of man; those of Washington, his productive capacity. The age of Douglass acknowledged the sanction of the Golden Rule; that of Washington worships the Rule of *Gold*. That equality of men was constantly dined into Douglass’s ears; Washington hears nothing but the inferiority of the Negro and the dominance of the Saxon. Douglass could hardly receive a hearing today; Washington would have been hooted off the stage a generation ago. Thus all truly useful men must be, in a measure, time-servers; for unless they serve their time, they can scarcely serve at all.

He continued:

Douglass insisted upon rights; Washington insists upon duty. Douglass held up to public scorn the sins of the white man; Washington portrays the faults of his own race. Douglass spoke what he thought the world should hear; Washington speaks only what he feels it is disposed to listen to. Douglass’s conduct was actuated by principle; Washington’s by prudence.

Miller went so far as to call Washington “lamblike, meek and submissive.” “But for Lincoln’s proclamation,” he wrote, “Washington would probably have arisen to esteem and favor in the eyes of his master as a good and faithful servant.”

Despite comparing Washington unfavorably to Douglass, he admitted that Washington did not condemn Douglass’ ideas.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 15, 28.

<sup>12</sup>Kelly Miller, *Radicals and Conservatives: And Other Essays on the Negro in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 25-26.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 21-32, 34. Miller was incorrect on this point. Historian Kevern Verney notes that Washington’s 1911 autobiography, *My Larger Education*, criticized Douglass directly. Washington wrote that Douglass ought to have talked less about suffering and rights because this focus was defensive rather than constructive. Kevern Verney, *The Art of the Possible: Booker T. Washington and Black Leadership in the United States, 1881-1925* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 25-26.

Miller's strongest criticisms of Washington echoed Du Bois'; he felt that Washington's rhetoric presented a compromise between Northern and Southern whites, a compromise that excluded black interests. He believed Washington's rhetorical imprecision allowed Southern whites to believe that he acquiesced to racial subordination. Meanwhile, Northern whites interpreted Washington's words as an attempt to keep the peace; these white were interested in preserving "an era of good feelings" at all costs. Miller was aware that Washington deliberately altered his rhetoric in order to convince various audiences into accepting his program. But Miller did not see this as an admirable quality: "He is deficient in the fearlessness, the self-assertion, the aggressive and heroic spirit necessary to quicken and inspire."<sup>14</sup>

Despite this harsh critique, Miller praised Washington on other counts. He called Tuskegee Institute "a marvelous achievement," adding, "Industrial education has become so intricately interwoven into his policy that his critics are forced into the ridiculous attitude of opposing a form of training essential to the welfare of any people." Though noting that Washington remained largely silent on the value of liberal education, he affirmed that Washington was not fundamentally opposed to it. Also, writing in 1908, Miller correctly saw signs that Washington was becoming more open and active in his protest against white supremacy. Miller did not blame Washington for social trends that were out of his control. He acknowledged that Washington did not cause, nor could he prevent, the rising tide of white supremacy. Still, he noted that "the Tuskegeean's pacific policy serve[s] to relieve the severity of the blow." Miller complimented Washington for resisting the temptation to vanity that arises when dealing with presidents and great men: "His sanity and poise are unsurpassed."<sup>15</sup>

If Miller was critical of the conservative Washington, he was equally critical of black radicals. Miller opined, "It is difficult to found an effective organization on a protest. There is little constructive possibility in negation." The radicals, he maintained, failed to understand that positive accomplishment must underpin the rise of a people. Of Washington's intractable critic, William Monroe Trotter, Miller wrote: "Without clear concrete objectives, such as the anti-slavery promoters had in view, he strikes wildly at whatever or whoever he imagines obscures the rights of the Negro race." Miller castigated Trotter as "equally indifferent to the allurements of culture and the blandishments of business; he has sacrificed a business career which was opening up with large prospects, in order to fight the Washington heresy." Miller had greater respect for Du Bois, though he was not uncritical:

His mind being cast in a weird and fantastic mold, his place is the cloister of the reflective scholar. He lives behind the veil; and whenever he emerges to mingle with the grosser affairs of life we may expect to hear, ever and anon, that sad and bitter wail. . . . His highest service will consist in interpreting to the white people the needs and feelings

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 34-36.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 33-37, 39-40.

of his race in terms of exact knowledge and nice language, rather than as an agitator or promoter of concrete achievement.

Miller characterized the Niagara Movement's rhetoric as "scarcely distinguishable from a wild and fanatic shriek." Still, Miller recognized the need for political agitation and hoped that the Niagara Movement would unite with other organizations in the promotion of civil rights.<sup>16</sup>

Miller ended his treatment of radicals and conservatives by quoting a toast he gave to honor Washington at a banquet. Miller, consciously or not, mimicked Washington's rhetorical style; he began with compliments and ended with thinly-veiled criticisms and calls for improvement. For this reason it is worth reproducing in its entirety:

We have as our guest to-night one who has come up from slavery, up from the coal caverns of West Virginia, struggling up against narrow theories, lack of early education and bias of environment, tactfully expanding the prudential restraints of a delicate and critical situation, rising upon successive steppingstones of past achievements and past mistakes, but ever planting his feet upon higher and higher ground. Sir, you enjoy a degree of concrete achievement and personal distinction excelled by few men now living on this planet. You are not only the foremost man of the Negro race, but one of the foremost men of all the world. We did not give you that "glad eminence" and we cannot take it away, but we would utilize and appropriate it to the good of the race. You have the attention of the white world; you hold the pass-key to the heart of the great white race. Your commanding position, your personal prestige, and the magic influence of your illustrious name entail upon you the responsibility to become the leader of the people, to stand as daysman between us and the great white God, and lay a propitiating hand upon us both. Some have criticised [sic.] in the past, and reserve the right to do so in the future. A noble soul is big enough to invite candid criticism, and eschew sycophantic adulation. Sir, if you will stand upon the granite pedestal of truth and righteousness, and pursue policies that are commensurate with the entire circle of our needs, and which are broad-based upon the people's will, and advocate the fullest opportunity of Negro youth to expand and exploit their faculties, if you will stand as the fearless champion of the Negro's political rights before the law and behind the law, then a united race will rise up and join in gladsome chorus: "Only thou our leader be, And we still will follow thee."<sup>17</sup>

Miller's nuanced approach was little noted in the Washington scholarship of the early half of the twentieth century, dominated as it was by hagiographers. But it is for this reason that Miller's writings are important: he proved the artificiality of a simple accommodationist-activist dichotomy and opened vistas for historians not motivated by ideological partisanship.

#### EARLY HAGIOGRAPHERS

In 1916, Washington's personal assistant of eighteen years, Emmett J. Scott, joined Lyman Beecher Stowe in writing *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization*. The same year a white historian, Benjamin Franklin Riley, published *The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington*. Though the two biographies differed slightly in emphasis, both were

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 28-29, 31.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 40-41

derivative of Washington's autobiographies and were united in their sympathetic treatment. Ironically, in presenting Washington as perennially on the side of the angels, Scott, Stowe, and Riley were forced, willfully or otherwise, to misrepresent Washington. In so doing, they ensured that history would remember Washington through the lens of their biases.

Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe claimed the legitimacy of an authorized biography for *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization*, declaring they were “personally selected” by Washington to undertake the task. Washington, they wrote, “considered us qualified to produce what he wanted: namely, a record of his struggles and achievements at once accurate and readable.” Robert R. Moton, Washington's successor as principal of the Tuskegee Institute, approved their project, writing: “Dr. Washington's career [is here] set forth in a form at once accurate and readable, such as will inspire unborn generations of Negroes and others to love and appreciate all mankind of whatever race or color.”<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, on the surface they seemed uniquely qualified to undertake the task. Lyman Beecher Stowe, the grandson of the famed abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, was a magazine writer and a sociologist. Emmett J. Scott was born in 1873 in Houston, Texas. He attended Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, from 1887 to 1890 before dropping out—he was one of eight children and his parents were unable to support his education. Undaunted, he undertook a successful career as a reporter for the *Houston Post*. In 1894, he founded and served as an associate editor of a black Houston newspaper, the *Texas Freeman*. After Washington's Atlanta speech, Scott wrote numerous laudatory editorials highlighting the Tuskegee Institute. These eventually caught Washington's eye; he promptly hired Scott as his private secretary. From 1897 until Washington's death, Scott served as Washington's personal assistant, confidante, and agent.<sup>19</sup>

Because of Scott's intimate relationship with Washington, the authors felt obliged to assert their scholarly independence, noting that though the first four chapters were written before Washington's death, “he never read them.” Still,

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<sup>18</sup>Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe, *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1916), Kindle e-book edition, location 2. Citations in the foreword and prefaces of the book refer to locations in the ebook, rather than to page numbers none exist for those sections. Citations from chapters refer to ebook page numbers.

<sup>19</sup>“Lyman Beecher Stowe and Emmett J. Scott. Two Noted Writers Collaborating on a New Story,” Indianapolis, *Freeman*, 6/19/1915, available at NewsBank/Readex, America's Historical Newspapers online database, SQN: 12CBF3A9E477A1E0 (accessed 6/9/2015). “Emmett Jay Scott,” *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), available at *Biography in Context*, www.ic.galegroup, Gale document number: GALE|BT2310003888 (accessed 6/9/2015). Sasha Thomas, “Emmett J. Scott,” *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* (Detroit: Gale, 2006), available at *Biography in Context*, www.ic.galegroup, Gale document number: GALE|K3444701132 (accessed 6/9/2015). “Emmett Jay Scott,” *Notable Black American Men, Book II*, eds. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale, 1998), available at *Biography in Context*, www.ic.galegroup, Gale document number: GALE|K1622000409 (accessed 6/9/2015).

despite their declaration of independence, *Builder of a Civilization* was a propaganda piece intended to solidify the triumphalist narrative begun by Washington in *Up from Slavery*, published in 1901. Scott and Stowe thus presented their book as a sequel to *Up from Slavery*, a chronicle of Washington's later years. In fact, because Scott and Stowe believed that Washington's autobiography was historically accurate, they felt no necessity to write about "his childhood, early training, and education."<sup>20</sup>

*Builder of a Civilization* was intended for the consumption of white audiences as evidenced by Theodore Roosevelt's authorship of the preface. The former president repeated many of the stereotypes and myths popular among whites of the Progressive Era. "The enjoyment of rights," he wrote, "should be made conditional upon the performance of duty." Roosevelt presented Washington as more concerned with preparing blacks for the exercise of freedom than with the acquisition of political rights. Being a Social Darwinist, Roosevelt believed that "because the Negro starts at the bottom of the ladder and will never develop the strength to climb even a single rung if he follow the lead of those who dwell only upon their rights and not upon their duties." Roosevelt intimated that blacks were not yet prepared to take an equal place on the stage of American democracy:

No man, White or Black, was more keenly alive than Booker T. Washington to the threat of the South, and to the whole country, and especially to the Black Man himself, contained in the mass of ignorant, propertyless, semi-vicious Black voters, wholly lacking in the character which alone fits a race for self-government, who nevertheless have been given the ballot in certain Southern States.

Ignoring the physical and legal attacks white supremacists launched against blacks, Roosevelt declared that the task before the black man was to rise above his squalor through self-help, thus proving his worthiness to his white neighbors. The only duty of the white race was mentorship, guiding blacks along the path to civilization. Whether Roosevelt accurately repeated Washington's ideas is debatable. What is certain is that, by including Roosevelt's preface, in the eyes of the reader, Scott and Stowe placed their imprimatur, and implicitly Washington's, on the former president's vision of race relations.<sup>21</sup>

In the book's introduction, Scott and Stowe addressed Washington's position as the race's leader. They correctly presented the Atlanta Exposition speech as the catalyst for Washington's ascension to the status of national black leader. Still, they ignored Du Bois and Miller's point, that Washington's popularity was due to his proposal of a compromise

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<sup>20</sup>Scott and Stowe, location 20.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., locations 39, 58. The author of this thesis frequently mentions "myths" such as Social Darwinism, the Social Gospel, Christianity, and the Protestant Ethic. In using the term "myth" the author, in the words of Peter Novick, "implies nothing about the truth or falsity of what is being discussed." The term "myth" is used to describe a set of assumptions held by historical actors or the historians who write about them. Novick, 3.



acceptable to Northern and Southern whites, arguing instead that Washington led by virtue of black consensus. This assumption forced them to downplay the degree of black opposition to Washington that emerged in the years following the speech. They dismissed these critics as “hardly warrant[ing] even passing mention.” While it is true that Washington’s critics were a numerical minority, it was deeply disingenuous of Scott and Stowe to call them irrelevant. Later biographers, both sympathetic and critical, remarked upon the great lengths Washington went to silence his critics. Having served as Washington’s henchman man in these endeavors, Scott was well aware of the time and treasure Washington expended in combating his opponents. If nothing else, Washington’s reaction to his critics belies Scott and Stowe’s dismissal.<sup>22</sup>

When they deigned to comment on Washington’s opponents, the biographers cast aspersions on their motives. At their most charitable, they asserted that the critics were unable to transcend outdated, antebellum modes of thought:

In the days of slavery it was a frequent custom on large plantations to use one of the slaves as a kind of stool pigeon to spy upon the others and report their misdeeds. . . . Hence, it came about that the praise of a white man was apt to throw suspicion upon the racial loyalty of a black man. This habit of mind, like all mental habits, long survived the system and circumstances which occasioned it.

Less charitably, they belittled the “Talented Tenth” as “city dwellers”—a pejorative in Scott and Stowe’s vocabulary—and accused them of inciting racial strife for selfish gain. Furthermore, they presented Washington as generous in his attempts to make peace with his enemies:

In spite of their constant abuse of him Mr. Washington some years ago agreed to confer with the leaders of this faction to see if a program could not be devised through which all could work together instead of at cross purposes. . . . Such a program was adopted, to which, before the conferences were over, all duly and amicably agreed to adhere. Some of the more restless spirits among the leaders of the Talented Tenth soon, however, broke their pledges, repudiated the whole arrangement, and started in as before to denounce Mr. Washington and those who thought and acted with him.

They added, “[Washington’s] sympathies were easily aroused and he was abnormally sensitive, but he never allowed his emotions to get the better of his judgment. He forgave easily and always tried to find excuses for people who wronged, insulted, or injured him.” In Scott and Stowe’s narrative, gentleman Washington constantly reached out to his critics despite their implacable and self-serving hatred of him.<sup>23</sup>

Following their indictment of Washington’s enemies, Scott and Stowe attempted to disprove the assertion that Washington acquiesced to discrimination and injustice. Scott could have revealed multiple examples of Washington’s covert activities to oppose legalized discrimination, having assisted in these projects. But perhaps the times were still too dangerous

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<sup>22</sup>Scott and Stowe, locations 23-24.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 22, 24-25, 302-304.

to reveal the full extent of Washington's activities; Tuskegee might have suffered a backlash. Or perhaps because Washington's death was so recent, the authors feared that exposing his secret activities would make him appear dishonest. Whatever the reason, the few examples they offered in Washington's defense were already public knowledge, leaving later historians the task of unearthing Washington's "secret life." Because Washington's public opposition to white supremacy was limited, Scott and Stowe stretched the evidence thin. They highlighted Washington's vocal denunciation of the disfranchisement constitutions that swept the South in the 1890s. They explained away his failure to secure equal voting rights for blacks:

Owing to the general awakening of intelligent public opinion the convention leaders were forced into the position of driving through the discriminatory amendment not only in the face of the condemnation of the better element throughout the country but even with the disapproval of the better and leading citizens of their own State.

Later, they noted that while Washington was visiting Florida, "two depraved Negroes in Jacksonville committed an atrocious murder." Foreseeing an extrajudicial lynching and wide-spread violence against blacks, Washington's friends urged him to cancel his speaking engagement. He refused. Scott and Stowe recounted what occurred next:

The howls of the infuriated mob on its way to the jail to lynch the accused murderers could be heard in the distance from the hall where Mr. Washington spoke. Without referring in any way to the event which was taking place at the time Mr. Washington, to the alarm of his friends, launched into a fervid denunciation of lynching and ended with an earnest and eloquent appeal for better feeling between the races. Instead of his words breaking up the meeting in a storm of anger and rioting, this audience composed of Southern whites and colored people vigorously applauded his sentiments. Undoubtedly they were applauding not so much the views expressed as the courage shown in expressing them at that place and under those circumstances.

Focused only on Washington's "bravery," Scott and Stowe never revealed the ultimate fate of the accused black men.

Historian David H. Jackson recounted the events that took place in Jacksonville in greater depth in his 2008 book, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy*. While Jackson agreed that Washington conducted himself courageously, he noted that Washington's call for peace did not reach the lynch mob; repeated attempts were made to storm the jail where the accused men were held. Police intervention, not Washington's entreaties, stood between the two men and extrajudicial capital punishment. Furthermore, the authors overstated the effect of Washington's "Railroad Days." These Days were not the sit-ins that would characterize future civil rights protests. Rather, once a year Washington organized a day when his followers presented written appeals for desegregation to railroad officials. The authors saw no contradiction between Washington's personal conduct and the program of the "Railroad Days": "Booker Washington was of course obliged to travel in the South almost constantly and to a great extent at night. He nearly always travelled on a Pullman car, and so when not an interstate passenger usually 'violated' the law of whatever State he happened to be passing through."

Scott and Stowe's examples were hardly proof that Washington's efforts against white supremacy were meaningful or efficacious.<sup>24</sup>

Scott and Stowe turned to Washington's writings in an attempt to prove him a civil rights activist. Unwittingly, they undermined their own case by citing only two of his works, and citing them *ad nauseam*. The first was an article titled "Is the Negro Having a Fair Chance," published in 1912 in *Century Magazine*. In it, Washington explicitly condemned ballot regulations, lynching, discrimination in transportation, and educational discrimination. They also quoted Washington's essay, "My View of Segregation Laws," published posthumously in December 1915, in which "he stated in no uncertain terms his views on the segregation laws which were being passed in the South." Scott and Stowe's methodology was problematic. Both essays were written in the twilight of Washington's life, yet his biographers presented them as representative of his entire career: "In the fully developed man of the last decade of his life we find the same traits and qualities which began to show themselves in those early years of constant struggle and frequent privation." While many later historians agreed that in his later years Washington protested injustice more openly, they have also pointed to a vast corpus of Washington's earlier writings that echoed the pacifist program proposed in Atlanta. But Scott and Stowe lacked a sense of context, making the most flattering of Washington's writings emblematic of his entire career.<sup>25</sup>

Scott and Stowe's reverence for Washington extended to his ideology. They uncritically defended his economic approach to black uplift. Many later historians lambasted Washington for his tacit approval of the *laissez faire* capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> The contrary was true of Scott and Stowe. They cited *Up from Slavery* with approval; Washington wrote:

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 82, 90, 93-94, 100-102. Many historians have chronicled the secret aspects of Booker Washington's career. Louis Harlan, for example, remarked upon Scott's participation at length. C.f. Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 24-25, 87-88, 169, 434-435. Harlan's opinions will be considered in the third chapter of this thesis. For a measured and convincing examination of Washington's secret life, see August Meier's *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966). Also consider Robert Norrell's contextual account: Robert Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2009. Meier's writings will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis and Norrell's will be in the fourth. David H. Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 173-174. Jackson's revisionist account will be considered in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

<sup>25</sup>Scott and Stowe, 40, 81-81, 92, 97-99, 103, 300.

<sup>26</sup>For example, historian Emma Thornbrough wrote, "The views expressed by Washington . . . were so much in harmony with the views expressed by the white philanthropists who supported Tuskegee and other public men of the day that their speeches and writings frequently sound like paraphrases of each other." Emma L. Thornbrough, "Booker T. Washington as Seen by his White Contemporaries," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Apr., 1968), 166-167. C. Vann Woodward wrote:

My experience in getting money for Tuskegee has taught me to have no patience with those people who are always condemning the rich because they are rich, because they do not give more to objects of charity. In the first place, those who are guilty of such sweeping criticisms do not know how many people would be made poor, and how much suffering would result, if wealthy people were to part all at once with any large proportion of their wealth in a way to disorganize and cripple great business enterprises. Then very few people have any idea of the large number of applications for help that rich people are constantly being flooded with. I know wealthy people who receive as many as twenty calls a day for help. More than once, when I have gone into offices of rich men, I have found half a dozen persons waiting to see them, and all come for the same purpose, that of securing money. . . . Very few people have any idea of the amount of money given away by persons who never permit their names to be known. I have often heard persons condemned for not giving away money, who, to my own knowledge, were giving away thousands of dollars every year so quietly that the world knew nothing about it. . . . I have usually proceeded on the principle that persons who possess sense enough to earn money have sense enough to know how to give it away.

Scott and Stowe placed Washington alongside the titans of industry as a constructive force in America. They presented the Negro Business League as a marvelous organization that helped black businessmen enter into the market economy. And since economic improvement cannot come from federal intervention, Scott and Stowe placed the full burden of progress on black shoulders. Whatever the benefits of capitalism may be and while there is merit to the idea that social change begins from the bottom-up, Scott and Stowe repeated Washington's error in presuming that men in the market always act rationally. They expected white supremacists to recognize the ill effects of a segregated economy, ignoring that white supremacy is, at its heart, irrational. Furthermore, Scott and Stowe, like Washington, appeared unaware that the upper echelons of society can actively impede progress at the bottom.<sup>27</sup>

Scott and Stowe's work resonated with sympathetic black newspapers. After publication of the biography, *The Savannah Tribute's* book review stated that the book was "almost autobiographical" because Scott was "so long and intimately . . . associated with Dr. Washington, knowing his thoughts and sharing practically all the experiences of the great educator during the most active years of his life." The *Tribute* praised the biography for instilling a sense of "reverence" towards Washington and for making clear "many of Dr. Washington's services to the Negro and to the country, about which little hitherto has been definitively known." Similarly *The Philadelphia Inquirer* stated, "The real merit of the book is in its revelation of the heart, mind and soul of a great leader of men." In terms of bolstering Washington's reputation among those who already agreed with Washington, Scott and Stowe's book was successful.<sup>28</sup>

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Washington "expressed unfriendliness for labor unions, revolutionary tactics, and socialism, and professed devotion to the laissez-faire theory of government." C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 359. The opinions of both Thornbrough and Woodward will be considered in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>27</sup>Scott and Stowe, 186, 191, 221, 264-266.

<sup>28</sup>"A New Washington Biography," *Savannah Tribune*, 12/23/1916, volume XXXII, issue 16, available at NewsBank/Readex, online database: America's Historical Newspapers, SQN: 11D7778B5F58E318 (accessed 6/9/2015), 3.

Scholars also approved of Scott and Stowe's work. In 1918 Carter G. Woodson, the founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and its publication *The Journal of Negro History*, wrote that the book was "an excellent account of the making of Tuskegee, the leadership of its founder, . . . [and] how he met race prejudice." His only caveat was that the book failed "to establish connection between the work of the educator and the great movements of his time and does not enable the reader to determine for himself the place of the man in history." Woodson's opinion is important not only because he was the second American black to earn a Ph.D.—preceded by W.E.B. Du Bois—but he was also, in the words of the famous historian, August Meier, "virtually single-handedly responsible for establishing Afro-American history as a historical specialty." That such an important figure could write approvingly of Scott and Stowe's panegyric reveals the overwhelming approval Americans still felt towards Washington.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that the American public hungered for heroic tellings of Washington's life is evidenced by the 1916 publication of a second sympathetic biography, *The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington* by Benjamin Franklin Riley. Like Scott and Stowe, Riley tended to wax poetic about the plight of the black man, the good will of whites, and the patience, endurance, and saintly virtue of Washington. Also, like Stowe and Scott, he paid little attention to detail, nuance, historical events, or chronology, preferring instead a romantic narrative. However, *Builder of a Civilization* presented Washington as an activist, whereas Riley presented him as a conservative, an apologist for the status quo. In reaching this conclusion, Riley's work demonstrated how hagiographical treatments can ultimately harm the reputation of its subject.

Born in 1849, Riley wrote his Washington biography towards the end of his career as a historian. A native of Alabama, Riley was a Baptist clergyman who served as the president of Howard College, near Birmingham, Alabama, from 1889-1983. In the subsequent years he held various college and ecclesiastical positions across the South and served as superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League of Texas. His work in the League led him to conclude that liquor was ravaging black families and communities. The titles of some of Riley's other works—*The Baptists in the Building of the Nation* (1922) and *The White Man's Burden* (1910)—reveal that he believed societal problems are fundamentally moral crises. This outlook affected his writing on Washington; though he acknowledged the evil of slavery he was harsh in his assessment of

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"Book of the Day," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10/27/1916, volume 175, issue 119, available at NewsBank/Readex, online database: America's Historical Newspapers SQN: 11626759D626AB68 (accessed 6/9/2015), 10.

<sup>29</sup>Carter G. Woodson, review of *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization*, by Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4, no. 4 (1918): 515-516. W.D. Wright, *Black History and Black Identity: A Call for a New Historiography*, (London: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 34. August Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 1, 289. Novick, 475.

black morals. Ultimately he presented Washington in quasi-Messianic terms, as the moral teacher and leader of a race lacking the virtues requisite for civilization.<sup>30</sup>

In setting the backdrop to Washington's life and work, Riley dismissed black history and culture prior to American slavery as unimportant. Africans, he judged, lacked even a simulacrum of "advanced civilization." He wrote: "Original paganism in the fatherland of the black race, followed by centuries of bondage in a civilized land, left these black people in an anomalous condition." Slavers brought blacks from their original barbarism and "placed in conditions of enlightenment and progress." While Riley condemned slavery, like Washington he recognized "unintentional good" in the black encounter with American civilization: "A once inert race gradually awoke to mental activity even under the sway of protracted servitude. Though "kept in enforced ignorance" by the master class, blacks were afforded some technical training in order to be useful. Thus they were "somewhat ready" to stand in the world when emancipated. While it is sometimes true that unintended good results from great evil, Riley's narrative did more to assuage white consciences than it did to examine the effects of historical sins perpetrated by whites.<sup>31</sup>

Still, Riley believed black progress was inevitable. "To assume that with the relaxation of force and of oversight they would involuntarily turn backward," he wrote, "was to assume that which had never been true of any people under similar conditions." Similarly, he rejected the theory of "the gross mental inferiority of the Negro." However, Riley saw obstacles to black progress. Like Washington, he believed alcohol abuse was endemic in black society: "Denied intoxicants in slavery, the Negro now exulted in the privilege of drink." Furthermore, in Riley's view, the legacy of slavery ensured that blacks lacked any sense of personal responsibility for their own destiny. Riley even asserted that black immorality was a partial explanation for the extrajudicial violence visited on them: "In his ignorance and blundering, his short-sightedness and obtuseness of moral character, all of which were in some part, at least, the fruits of slavery, Negro vice and criminality abounded. This elicited violence on the part of those violently disposed." He believed the solutions for these problems were embodied by Washington. "In the annals of America," wrote Riley, "there is no trophy of democracy that outshines Booker T. Washington."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>"Benjamin Franklin Riley," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale document number: GALE|BT2310004708 (accessed 6/9/2015).

<sup>31</sup>Benjamin Franklin Riley, *The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington* (A. J Cornell Publications, Kindle ebook edition), 113-116, 118-120, 123-126, 129-131, 198. Citations refer to locations within the ebook rather than to page numbers, as no page numbers exist.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 132-133, 151-152, 168-171, 366-368, 382-383, 1106-1113, 1287-1289.

Riley belonged to the romantic historical school that presented great leaders as the prime movers in history. Riley believed that, from an early age, “Providence” prepared Washington to be just such a leader: “God hid his power in a young colored man and set him forward to give expression to the solution.” Washington attended the Hampton Institute with the motivation to acquire skills that would allow him to lead blacks into a promised land. After graduation, some encouraged him to undertake a political career, but Washington rejected these “flatterers” because he believed he could accomplish more for his people outside the realm of politics. Thus in Riley’s telling, a young, but already mission-driven Washington set out to become an educator, thereby fulfilling a divine mandate that would lead blacks to peace and prosperity.<sup>33</sup>

Riley defended Washington’s focus on economic progress and industrial education as the only viable means to end black poverty, praising Washington’s emphasis on economic independence and a widespread land ownership.<sup>34</sup> Riley, however, explicitly endorsed accommodationism. The introduction to *The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington*, written by E.Y. Mullins of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, aptly summed up Riley’s view of Washington:

Washington . . . cherished no illusions as to social equality between the Negroes and the white people of the South. Indeed, the subject of social equality did not interest him. There were other matters of far greater moment. Washington felt that economic independence was the great need of the Negro. He was thoroughly convinced that if the Negro could achieve this, his destiny would take care of itself in other matters.

Even more damning, Riley attempted to prove that Washington did not advocate for equal rights. He wrote:

One portion of the [Atlanta] address was misinterpreted by the press of the South. Allusion was made to the right of the Negro to live in the full enjoyment of his rights. . . . This led Washington to reply . . . that it had been an invariable rule of his to say nothing in the North which he would not say in the South.

He failed to recognize that Washington’s reply was merely an artful—and dishonest—dodge, not an actual disavowal of political rights. Riley continued, “Washington was not indifferent to the political privileges which he wished to see his people enjoy, but there were other considerations which were of far more fundamental value than political rights.” While it is a fair point that economic success is the most satisfying form of progress, it is difficult to envision economic progress being possible without the rule of law protecting the rights to life, liberty, and property. Riley advocated too sharp a segregation between the rule of law and economic progress, and he presented Washington as adhering to this ideology.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 666-673, 1003, 1055-1060.

<sup>34</sup>For example, historian Martin Kilson wrote: “There was in Washington’s accommodationist schema no timetable for the establishment of African American citizenship and human rights parity.” Martin Kilson, “The Washington and Du Bois Leadership Paradigms Reconsidered,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 568 (2000): 303. Kilson’s essay will be examined in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

<sup>35</sup>Riley, 48-51, 1060-1062, 2555-2564.

Like Scott and Stowe, Riley attacked the character of Washington's opponents without presenting their actual arguments to his readers. The critics of the Atlanta Exposition speech were merely "would-be leaders of Washington's own people," suffering "from the sting of envy." Riley added:

Detached passages were severed from their logical connection. . . . A jealous man always finds more than he looks for. How there could have been tortured from that address that which certain persons claimed to find, is amazing. The studied distortion was made the basis of an accusation that Washington was shrewdly pandering to white sentiment in total disregard of the good of the colored race.

Concerning Washington's later critics, Riley did not name them, their concerns, or their accomplishments. He simply dismissed them as irrelevant by pointing to Washington's achievements. Detractors ignored, he asserted, that Washington "wrought a marvelous change in race relationship." Most tellingly, Riley accused Washington's critics of violating democratic principles: "Denounce the whole system, if one may, it is nevertheless the will of the majority, and that is the genius of democracy." In conflating conservatism with democracy, Riley was implicitly admitting that racism, discrimination, and disfranchisement were the status quo, ignoring that, ostensibly at least, the American democratic system has mechanisms allowing for modification. Riley instead presented accommodation and conservatism for its own sake as the ideal—as Washington's ideal—and cast Washington's critics as antidemocratic radicals.<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly, after presenting Washington's accommodation as *an ideal stance*, Riley offered a contradictory argument, stating that the circumstances of the times forced Washington to eschew activism *out of necessity*: "Had he even sought to comply with the implied requirements . . . [he] would have ignobly failed. The vials of wrath would have been unstopped, and Booker T. Washington would have been obliterated, and Tuskegee would not be." As noted previously, many later historians highlighted Washington's covert—and occasionally overt—opposition to white supremacy. Riley was unequivocal in asserting Washington's pacifistic stance. Indeed, Riley commended Washington's restraint:

He could at any time have inflamed his people with a word, and at any moment have precipitated slaughter and blood. But if he had done so, what would have been the result? His race would have been crushed, and the possibility of an upward move would have been delayed indefinitely.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 1493-1497, 1503-1507, 1532-1535, 2320-2329. The one exception to Riley's silence concerning the names and arguments of Washington's critics is a single citation of W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Negro*. C.f. Riley, 1908-1910.



Here Riley was echoing the white myth that blacks perpetually hovered on the cusp of terrible violence. Riley seemed unable to find a *via media* between violent protest and pacifism. Thus, Riley commended Washington for his “preserving a golden silence.”<sup>37</sup>

Since Riley subscribed to the theory that great men move history, it is unsurprising that he portrayed the union between Northern philanthropists and Washington as a constructive force in black society. He wrote: “It is an error to think that men and women of wealth fanatically and surreptitiously poured their money out to Washington. . . . The contributions made to Tuskegee were in no wise more helpful to one race than to the other.” He added,

Those whom Washington drew to his support were not men of hasty and unwise action, nor of a type to be merely sentimentally affected. They were stern business men. The investment made in character at Tuskegee and elsewhere was one as seriously and considerately made as if they were investing in stocks and bonds. Their investments were for returns.

In other words, these businessmen did not assist Washington because they felt moved to charity. Rather, they invested in Tuskegee expecting a financial return. The irony is that this argument would be modified by later historians critical of Washington, who claimed, rather speciously, that the philanthropists funded industrial education in order to create a cheap black labor force ripe for exploitation.<sup>38</sup>

Whereas Scott and Stowe attempted to write a sequel to *Up from Slavery*, Riley uncritically repeated Washington’s narration of his early life. For example, he repeated Washington’s claim that as a young boy employed by the Ruffner family, he got along with no difficulty. Contrarily, later historians who examined Viola Ruffner’s correspondence discovered that the young Washington left their employment several times.<sup>39</sup> Riley’s unadulterated trust in Washington’s narrative is further revealed in his recounting the moments before Washington went onstage to deliver his Atlanta Exposition speech. Riley presents it as fact that “in his room alone [Washington] paced his floor as the brief time passed, went over his speech, and in his dependence fell on his knees and prayed for strength to meet the serious responsibility of the hour.” If Washington was alone in his room, there was no way to corroborate this pious narrative, but Riley’s faith in Washington was complete. Later historians recognized that, being a propaganda piece, *Up from Slavery* was often less than trustworthy. Further, Riley

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<sup>37</sup>Riley, 1117-1118, 1540-1542, 1561-1568, 1939-1932, 2623-2624.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 2843-2847, 2857-2859. This was, for example, Oliver Cox’s thesis. C.f. Oliver C. Cox, “The Leadership of Booker T. Washington,” *Social Forces* 30, no. 1 (1951): 91-97. Cox’s essay will be considered in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>39</sup>For example, Harlan cites Viola Ruffner as saying, “He left me half a dozen times to try his hand at different occupations . . . but he always came back to me.” Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 42.

quoted the entire Atlanta speech, ending that chapter without commentary. He spent an entire chapter chronicling the “marvelous effect[s]” of the speech.<sup>40</sup>

Despite claiming “no disposition to minimize defect” and “faithful fidelity to fact,” Riley constructed a hagiography exonerating Washington of any wrongdoing or miscalculation. He could not have foreseen that his apologia paralleled future attacks leveled against Washington. Riley was so enamored with Washington’s economic approach that he presented political rights as ancillary or irrelevant. Similarly, later critical historians would accuse Washington of not understanding the importance of civil rights and the rule of law. Riley presented the philanthropists as interested only in creating cogs in the wheel of capitalism. Likewise, some historians would argue that Washington collaborated with the robber barons in the establishment of a black proletariat. *The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington* reveals the harm hagiography can do to its subject’s reputation. Riley spun the facts to support a narrative consistent with the biases of his time. When these biases were widely discredited, the “facts,” tied as they were to the biases, appeared damning.<sup>41</sup>

These considerations were not on the mind of Carter G. Woodson, however. In his review in the newly established *The Journal of Negro History* he called Riley’s book “a valuable work which must find its way into every up-to-date library.” Woodson felt that Riley remained true to his promise of sympathy for black Americans and that his treatment of Washington was accurate.<sup>42</sup>

As is evidenced by Woodson’s approval of their works. Scott, Stowe, and Riley were men of their times. They unquestioningly accepted the industrial capitalism of nineteenth century America, believing economic self-help a perennial value. They comfortably assumed the superiority of Western Civilization. These biographers were conservative in their disdain for the political process. They maintained that race relations would improve through economic progress without recourse to the political process. And they made Washington the paragon of these ideologies.

Riley’s mistakes may be excused as he was the first outsider to write a Washington biography and, being white, he was inoculated against the wrath of white supremacy. Emmett Scott, however, deliberately wrote propaganda, choosing to

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<sup>40</sup>Riley, 529, 2124-2126, 2219.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>42</sup>Review of *The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington*, by Benjamin Franklin Riley and *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization*, by Emmett J. Scott, Lyman Beecher Stowe, *The Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 1 (1917): 96-97. The *Journal* does not actually name Woodson as the author of this review. However, significant portions of this review were copied verbatim from Woodson’s 1918 review of *Builder of a Civilization* in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, leading this author to conclude that both reviews belong to Woodson.

conceal those aspects of Washington's life and work that did not fit his preordained narrative. A black residing in the South, he lived under white hegemony but chose to whitewash it in favor of a triumphalist narrative. Both biographies propagated inaccurate ideas about Washington that were used by later historians to attack Washington.

#### WASHINGTON IN LIVING MEMORY

In 1928, Ida Wells-Barnett reflected on her earlier conflict with Booker T. Washington in *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Like Du Bois, she presented Washington as an opponent of political activism, as a man primarily concerned with personal power and the success of the Tuskegee Institute.

Wells-Barnett felt that Washington's encouragement of black entrepreneurship was a cynical attempt to gain white favor and to thereby secure his own position as the race's leader. She maintained that Washington stole the idea of an apolitical body devoted to the promotion of black business from the Afro-American Council, of which she was a member. She wrote:

He had taken a leaf out of our book to organize what would be a nonpolitical body and yet would give him the moral support that he had begun to feel he needed. . . . In his many visits to the North soliciting funds for the aid of Tuskegee, the white people had begun to ask what interest colored people were showing in the work, and what support he was getting from them. Of course he had nothing that he could show until the idea of establishing a business league was born.

Washington founded the National Negro Business League in an attempt to compete with the Council, as he scheduled the League's initial meeting concurrently with a major meeting of the Council in an attempt to poach its members. In Wells-Barnett's telling, Washington established the League not to promote entrepreneurship but to damage the prestige of the Council and curry white favor.<sup>43</sup>

Wells-Barnett believed Washington disparaged militant opposition to racism and white supremacy. She wrote:

Mr. Washington's theory had been that we ought not to spend our time agitating for our rights; that we had better give attention to trying to be first-class people in a jim crow [sic.] car than insisting that the jim crow car should be abolished; that we should spend more time practicing industrial pursuits and getting education to fit us for this work than in going to college and striving for a college education. And of course, fighting for political rights had no place whatsoever in his plans.

Contrarily, the policy of the Afro-American Council was "to denounce the wrongs and injustices which were heaped upon our people, and to use whatever influence we had to help right them." Still, she stopped short of accusing Washington of

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<sup>43</sup>Alfreda M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 264-265.

collaborating with the oppressors, noting that his policy stemmed from his precarious position in the South. So while disagreeing with his platform, Wells-Barnett was willing to place Washington's philosophy within the context of the Southern culture of white supremacy. Interestingly, she and Riley agreed that Washington was opposed to activism, constrained as he was by the danger of white violence.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, Wells-Barnett maintained that Washington's prominence was a liability to black progress in America. His influence weakened the efforts of the NAACP to formulate an effective strategy for black protest. As plans were being made for the conference that resulted in the establishment of the NAACP, Washington's influence prevented many black leaders from attending or joining the movement. Furthermore, Wells-Barnett was constantly forced to explain to certain whites why Washington did not deserve to be her race's leader. In her autobiography, she recounted one such occurrence. A Jewish man asked her if she agreed that Washington was the leader of the race. She replied:

“As to his being our leader, I will answer your question by asking one. Rabbi Hirsch is your leading Jew in Chicago. . . . But I am wondering if you Jews would acclaim him so highly if every time he appeared before a gentile audience he would amuse them by telling stories about Jews burning down their stores to get their insurance?” His face turned very red, and I said, “I am sure you would not, and a great many of us cannot approve Mr. Washington's plan of telling chicken-stealing stories on his own people in order to amuse his audiences and get money for Tuskegee.”

Washington, in her estimate, cast a long shadow, perpetuating racial stereotypes and retarding progress.<sup>45</sup>

In the end, Wells-Barnett endorsed Du Bois' assertion that Washington opposed higher education. She recounted that when *The Souls of Black Folk* was published, she met with several of her colleagues to discuss the book, particularly the chapter on Washington. Most present, she lamented, were critical of Du Bois' view. However, she defended it:

The Barnetts stood almost alone in approving [Du Bois' views] and proceeded to show why. We saw, as perhaps never before, that Mr. Washington's views on industrial education had become an obsession with the white people of this country. We thought it was up to us to show them the sophistry of the reasoning that any one system of education could fit the needs of an entire race; that to sneer at and discourage higher education would mean to rob the race of leaders which it so badly needed; and that all the industrial education in the world could not take the place of manhood.

She claimed to have won the debate: “We had a warm session but came away feeling that we had given them an entirely new view of the situation.” Wells-Barnett affirmed Du Bois' contrived dichotomy between industrial and liberal education.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 322-323, 331.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 281.

While her autobiography was not as widely read as Du Bois' works, and though she expended less energy on attacking Washington, Wells-Barnett ultimately buttressed Du Bois' narrative.

#### A CALL FOR OBJECTIVITY

Horace Mann Bond was the first historian to approach "The Washington Question" from a truly objective perspective. His writings were nuanced and his approach scholarly, though his findings were inconclusive and he remained agnostic to the ultimate value of Washington's work.

Bond was born in 1904 in Nashville, Tennessee, and though he was the grandson of slaves, August Meier called him the "scion of an elite southern family." He received his doctorate from The University of Chicago in 1936 and "embarked upon [a] long and distinguished career as a college administrator." His scholarship focused on the history and theory of education. At various points in his career, Bond served as the president of Fort Valley State College in Georgia and of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, "one of the finest and best endowed of the Negro liberal arts colleges." In Meier's opinion, Bond's second book, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (1939), was "one of the two significant studies by black historians that were infused with an economic interpretation of history." Meier noted that though it "was not widely reviewed," it did become "something of a classic among historians." The book was an expansion of his dissertation. The road to its publication was rocky, no publishing house was interested in the manuscript, assuming there would not be sufficient interest in a scholarly examination of black education to justify the expense of publication. Though Bond had once criticized Carter Woodson for his assertion that blacks with Ph.D.'s "as a rule lose touch with the common people," Woodson nonetheless came to Bond's assistance, acquiring the money from the Rosenwald Fund. Their relationship grew warmer after this episode. The Fund continued to offer Bond financial support for much of his career. In *Negro Education in Alabama* Bond explored the interplay between economic caste and race; his conclusions informed his later study of Washington.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 102-103. Frank E Dobson, Jr., "Bond, Horace Mann," *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first century*, ed. Paul Finkelman, available at *Oxford African American Studies Center*, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0005/e0157> (accessed 6/9/2015). William E. Ward, "Bond, Horace Mann," *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr, available at *Oxford African American Studies Center*, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0002/e0600> (accessed 6/9/2015).

In *Negro Education in Alabama*, Bond sought to describe the Southern caste structure of Washington's era. He maintained that socio-economic forces preceded the state itself; governmental systems emerged to protect the castes that inevitably result from particular socio-economic conditions. Thus, he concluded that the social and economic forces of Washington's era preordained the disfranchisement of the Negro.<sup>48</sup>

Considering the prospects of black education in Alabama from Washington's era to his time of writing, Bond said, "The education of Negroes at public expense in Alabama has depended upon the social and economic utility which this education was thought to have for the class of white persons in control of legislation and finance." Others who focused on class, like Du Bois and later historians such as C. Vann Woodward and Oliver Cox, argued that state intervention can produce a more equitable society. But Bond wrote about castes, not classes; hence he felt that political structures *followed*, rather than *preceded*, socio-economic changes. Reform in America was thus largely dependent on global and national market forces. The final words of his books were not hopeful:

To essay a prophecy of major changes in the immediate future is to anticipate a change in the social and economic order as revolutionary as that catastrophe which, from 1861-1865, destroyed the institution of chattel slavery, and led to the wholly revolutionary acceptance of the principle that Negro children should be educated at public expense.

Writing about black prospects during the Great Depression, Bond was not sanguine about the possibility of change.<sup>49</sup>

Bond's first work on Washington, an essay titled "The Influence of Personalities on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama," was published in 1937 in *The Journal of Negro Education*. That Journal had been founded five years previously by Charles H. Thompson, a personal friend of Bond's. In the essay, Bond argued that Washington allied himself with the Southern "oligarchy." He wrote, "As Washington, in his Atlanta speech, frankly addressed himself to 'the dominant class in the South,' his whole career was bound up with a successful appeal to the sympathies of that class." Unlike Du Bois and Wells-Barnett, Bond made no comment as to the morality of this alliance but felt it a tactical mistake because "when that class lost its political dominance, the Negroes had no friends at court." Still Bond conceded that that perhaps "no other strategy was feasible" for Washington.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (Washington D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1939), 287-290.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 287, 290, 292.

<sup>50</sup>Horace Mann Bond, "The Influence of Personalities on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama, II," *The Journal of Negro Education* 6, no. 2 (1937): 172-173.

Bond also highlighted Washington's contradictions. Concerning Washington's philanthropist friends, he remarked: "In the role of defender of the rich, Washington was quite superficial, both in appraising the nature of criticism directed toward them, and in his answers to that criticism." Bond noted that Washington first applied the term "industrial education" to his program not because it accurately described its content (at least in the early days of the Tuskegee Institute), but because it was an educational theory much in vogue at the time. He thought that by applying the term to the Institute's curriculum he would gain philanthropic support from whites who would have otherwise ignored black education. Unwittingly contradicting the later theory that Washington was a collaborator with northern industrial interests, Bond wrote: "It is probably without significance that the men who contributed most largely to his work at Tuskegee also had, in most instance, large business and industrial interests in Alabama; for they were men who participated in industrial development everywhere in the United States."<sup>51</sup> However, Bond saw a dark side in Washington's attempts to secure philanthropic assistance. Bond believed that state funds were absolutely essential to secure public education for blacks. So while Washington's acquisition of philanthropic funds benefited black education in Macon County, his *local success* led whites to mistakenly conclude that philanthropy, rather than tax dollars, could adequately fund black education *nationally*.<sup>52</sup>

Despite these remarks, Bond retained a healthy skepticism regarding the net benefit or damage done by Washington's activities. Concerning the question of whether Washington improved the economic conditions of blacks he wrote, "Making due allowance for the exaggerations made by Washington and others in justifying the early success of their program, the results after fifty years are somewhat unsatisfactory." Bond believed that actual progress, if there was any, was obscured by Washington's propaganda and could not be statistically confirmed or refuted. Bond hoped that "another generation may evolve more delicate instruments for such appraisal." Regardless, Bond felt that larger societal forces were more important than any one man's activities: "Appraisals of Booker T. Washington may easily fall into the common error of attributing momentous social and economic changes to the impress of a great personality whose life was contemporary with those changes."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Louis Harlan made such an accusation: "However deferential he may have seemed to those whose money or favor he sought, however suave an interracial diplomat, on his own plantation he was masterful. He bestrode the Tuskegee campus like a colossus. He dominated. He ruled with an even temper but with a steady will to bend every other will to his purpose and vision. . . . When he was at his best, the vision transcended the method and gave nobility to his efforts to end the slovenliness that was a heritage from slavery and poverty. At his worst he was paternalistic and even dictatorial in the manner of the planters and business tycoons for whom he always reserved his highest public flattery." Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, 42.

<sup>52</sup>Bond, "The Influence of Personalities on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama, II," 175, 178-181, 186.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 181, 184, 186-187.

Despite his balanced tone, Bond intended his writings to provide solutions and he was personally committed to political activism. While president at Lincoln, Bond openly supported Pan-Africanism and the desegregation of schools. He headed the research team compiling historical documentation used to discredit segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*. After his retirement, and before his death in 1972, Bond exerted his energies promoting the political career of his son Julian, who he hoped would enact reform. But writing during the Depression, during the heyday of Jim Crow, Bond felt it necessary to separate his activism from his scholarship. Later historians, it should be noted, would feel no such compunction.<sup>54</sup>

#### W.E.B. DU BOIS ON THE TUSKEGEE MACHINE

“Few men in an open society get to set the terms for the historical memory of their avowed enemy,” wrote historian Robert Norrell in 2008, “but W.E.B. Du Bois was one who did.”<sup>55</sup> Du Bois outlived Booker T. Washington by forty-eight years, affording him ample time to historicize his opposition to the principal of Tuskegee. In 1940, long after Washington’s death, Du Bois published *Dusk of Dawn*, sections of which reexamined his conflict with Washington. Regarding his criticisms in *The Souls of Black Folk*, he stated, “As I read that statement now, a generation later, I am satisfied with it. I see no word that I would change.” Du Bois repeated the charge that Washington’s leadership harmed black higher education. While he admitted that industrial training and higher education were “not absolutely contradictory” pursuits, and though he recognized that Washington was not wholly opposed to higher education, he claimed that Washington “did minimize its importance, and discouraged the philanthropic support of higher education.”<sup>56</sup>

Du Bois also added to his complaints against Washington. In *Dusk of Dawn* Du Bois used the term “Tuskegee Machine” to describe the web of influence that Washington cast across America. This power structure, helmed though it was by Washington, “was largely encouraged and given financial aid through certain white groups and individuals in the North.” Their motives were mercenary:

They were capitalists and employers. . . . [They] believed that the Negro problem could not remain a matter of philanthropy. It must be a matter of business. These Negroes were not to be encouraged as voters in the new democracy, nor were they to be left at the mercy of the reactionary South. They were good laborers and they might be better. They could become a strong labor force and properly guided they would restrain the unbridled demands of white labor, born of the Northern labor unions and now spreading to the South.

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<sup>54</sup>Dobson, “Bond, Horace Mann.”

<sup>55</sup>Norrell, *Up from History*, 426.

<sup>56</sup>W.E.B. Du Bois, *Writings* (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc., 1986), 605, 612.



Du Bois asserted that Washington used the power given him by his white benefactors to punish those who dissented from his program of accommodation and economic self-help: “The Negro intelligentsia was to be suppressed and hammered into conformity. . . . Things came to such a pass that when any Negro complained or advocated a course of action, he was silenced with the remark that Mr. Washington did not agree with this.” Du Bois stated that he took no pleasure in assuming the role of Washington’s lead opponent, but he felt that Washington’s monopoly on black thought was deadly.<sup>57</sup>

In conclusion, Du Bois asserted that his opposition to Washington “was more than opposition to a program of education. It was opposition to a system and that system was part of the economic development of the United States at the time.” He called this system “Empire,” describing it as “the domination of white Europe over black Africa and yellow Asia, through political power built on the economic control of labor, income and ideas. The echo of this industrial imperialism in America was the expulsion of black men from American democracy, their subjection to caste control and wage slavery.” While there is merit to the claim that America was on the path to empire, it is important to remember that by this time Du Bois had embraced Marxian socialism, despite the fact that a mere handful of his fellow American historians made use of Marxist categories in the 1930s. In *Dusk of Dawn*, he wrote, “Marx was one of the greatest men of modern times.” If Scott, Stowe, and Riley were apologists for the free market, Du Bois was its nemesis:

Modern business enterprise organized for private profit was throttling democratic government, choking art and literature and leading work and industry into a dangerous paradox by increasing the production of things for sale and yet decreasing even more rapidly the number of persons able to buy and the amount of money they could spend; thus throwing industry into periodic convulsions.

It is thus unsurprising that Du Bois felt it imperative to destroy the credibility of the conservative-minded Washington as a historical race leader.<sup>58</sup>

#### POST-WORLD WAR II HAGIOGRAPHERS

In 1948, Albon L. Holsey published an article titled “Public Relations Institutions of Booker T. Washington” in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*. Though Holsey relied heavily and unashamedly on Washington’s *My Larger Education* and Scott and Stowe’s *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization*, he offered some insights into Washington’s “public relations

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 606-608.

<sup>58</sup>Du Bois, *Writings*, 609, 623-624, 765, 775. Novick, 248-249, n. 71 on p. 429.

activities,” which he saw it as truly innovative. Holsey argued that understanding Washington’s “public relations institutions” was the key to interpreting his life and work.<sup>59</sup>

Born in 1883, in Athens, Georgia, Albon L. Holsey believed that slavery left blacks bereft of business skills. After his graduation from Atlanta University, he spent his career working with various organizations such as the National Negro Business League and the Colored Merchant’s Association in an effort to teach blacks entrepreneurial skills. In 1914, he joined the Tuskegee staff and served as Emmett J. Scott’s secretary, bringing him in close contact with Washington himself. After Washington’s death, Holsey served as Robert R. Moton’s secretary. As Tuskegee’s second president, Moton helped normalize relations between the Institute and the NAACP. Holsey remained at Tuskegee for thirty-six years. Afterwards, he became the business manager of *Crisis*, while Du Bois was general editor.<sup>60</sup> So while Holsey’s writings on Washington were firmly within the hagiographic tradition, it would be unfair to accuse him of simply being Emmett Scott’s errand boy.

Whereas Riley and Du Bois suggested that monetary assistance given to Tuskegee was a self-interested attempt by the industrialists to secure a stable labor base, like Scott and Stowe, Holsey saw Washington as appealing to a “philanthropic public,” that is, a public truly interested in ameliorating the plight of Southern blacks. Washington’s pursuit of donations led him to hone his public relations skills. Holsey quoted Washington: “These people [our donors] have a right, as a plain matter of business, to ask what are the results of this aid they have been giving.” Washington felt it his responsibility to prove their investment well spent. Hence, while later historians, like Louis Harlan, presented Washington’s micromanagement of the Tuskegee Institute as megalomania, Holsey agreed with Riley, viewing Washington’s involvement in the minutiae of life at Tuskegee as an attempt to deliver what he promised when he accepted donations. Holsey noted that Washington told his donors that his students were “earnest, ambitious, and hard-working.” Holsey continued: “To him [that statement] was a promissory note to the public, which he sought in every possible way to pay through useful lives of the school’s graduates.” Conversely, Washington made the Institute’s principles clear to his students, requiring them to act in a manner befitting their status as recipients of the philanthropists’ largesse. Holsey quoted Washington: “We have to go through the process of ‘weeding out’ among the students. . . . We are compelled to get rid of every student here who is weak in mind, weak in morals, or weak in industry.” Holsey saw this as prudent leadership and did not believe statements of this sort were callous

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<sup>59</sup>Albon L. Holsey, “Public Relations Institutions of Booker T. Washington,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948): 227.

<sup>60</sup>“Albon L. Holsey,” *Notable Black American Men, Book II*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale, 2006), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale document number: GALE|K1622000644 (accessed 6/9/2015).

or mercenary. Balancing on the razor's edge, Washington managed to "keep faith with his philanthropic public" while simultaneously providing a high caliber education in morality and industrial skills to his students.<sup>61</sup>

Though Holsey had less to say concerning the discrimination and violence blacks faced, like Scott and Stowe he mentioned these conditions in order to prove the efficacy of Washington's public relations campaign. He saw the Atlanta speech not as an accommodation or a compromise, but as a momentous victory for blacks: "The Atlanta address was mainly a plea for tolerance, and *probably* had considerable effect in promoting better relations between the two races." Like other hagiographers who praised the speech, Holsey did not demonstrate that conditions were bettered because of it. In the end, Holsey's essay was a largely an addendum to Scott and Stowe's work.<sup>62</sup>

Basil Mathews' biography, *Booker T. Washington: Educator and Interracial Interpreter* (1948), "reads more like a eulogy than an objective biography," wrote Osborn Smallwood, one of Mathews' contemporary reviewers. Bertram Woodruff, another reviewer, pointed to another flaw: "In his attempt to present an authoritative record of Washington's life, Mr. Mathews fails. He either did not take the time to complete the exhausting labor of establishing the facts of Washington's life, or he assumed, all too wrongly, that Washington's data in *Up From Slavery* were accurate." Indeed, Mathews treated *Up from Slavery* and Scott and Stowe's *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization* as holy writ.<sup>63</sup>

Still, despite these flaws, Mathews wrote the first book-length Washington biography not written by a Washington contemporary. Mathews also deserves credit for using new sources. He wrote the book after receiving the blessing of "the authorities at Tuskegee" and getting their promise of cooperation. Tuskegee granted him access to the tens of thousands of unfiled documents that would later be donated to the Library of Congress. Furthermore, Mathews undertook "leisurely interviews with unnumbered persons who were closely in touch with Washington."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, even his critic, Smallwood, commended Mathews for his use of "a wealth of original material, such as letters, memoranda, and personal interviews."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Holsey, 228-231.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 233-234. Emphasis added in quotation.

<sup>63</sup>Osborn T. Smallwood, review of *Booker T. Washington: Educator and Interracial Interpreter*, by Basil Mathews, *The Journal of Negro Education* 18, no. 2 (1949): 149. Bertram L. Woodruff, review of *Booker T. Washington: Educator and Interracial Interpreter*, by Basil Mathews, *Phylon (1940-1956)* 10, no. 1 (1949): 73. Basil Mathews *Booker T. Washington: Educator and Interracial Interpreter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), viii, 148, 224-225.

<sup>64</sup>Mathews, vii-viii.

<sup>65</sup>Smallwood, 148.

Unfortunately, Mathews' hagiographic narrative eclipsed the originality of his sources. Mathews repeated many of the Lost Cause myths when establishing the historical backdrop for Washington's life. Enslaved blacks, he wrote, felt a "feudal loyalty" to their masters, despite their craving for freedom. "While never losing sight of the fact that slavery in itself is fundamentally evil," he wrote,

it is possible to assess certain elements in its administration which challenged those responsible for the welfare of workers and their families. . . . The normal planter cared for the physical well-being of his slaves at least as well as he did that of his horses. The slaveowners bitterly affirmed that this was more than the northern industrialist at that time could claim. . . . The aged slave was cared for when he was too feeble to continue work, which, again, was more than the northern industrialist could claim. Furthermore, all the relatives of slaves on a well-run humane plantation received care in sickness. Crude and inadequate though this was, northern capitalism did not then even do as much as that for its workers.

Christianity appealed to slaves because their "will to be free made the Bible [an] ideal book." However, there was danger in the desire for freedom. After Emancipation, blacks suddenly lost "exterior controls" and lacked the "inner discipline" to succeed economically and morally. Thus Mathews argued that the sharecropping system, while undeniably an "evil economic system," prevented "chaos and lawlessness." The effect of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, he wrote, "was to give the vote to all the illiterate densely ignorant ex-slaves without any effort being made either to limit the vote of white and colored alike by literacy and other qualifications, or to provide the education which would in the long run give them the capacity to exercise judgment in voting." "Moral chaos" exacerbated this situation. Mathews correctly noted that the master class "destroyed the closely-knit family ties and discipline of tribal Africa," though his conclusion was suspect: "Therefore the Negroes in those areas were at that time largely careless with regard to the chastity of young girls and the responsibility of a father toward his offspring." These conditions conspired to keep blacks in a "dungeon of ignorance." Mathews saw Washington as the herald of a sorely needed "Second Emancipation."<sup>66</sup>

Mathews attempted to demonstrate how Washington's early experiences shaped his later ideas and activities. As a small boy watching his mother struggle to support the family, Washington felt the insecurity of freedom. "Free—yes; but to do what?" asked Mathews. "By what means was she to support life, to sustain a home, to bring up her children? How was she to feed and clothe their bodies, to train their minds, to launch them into life? She was free; but she possessed no skill beyond that of simple cookery." A curiosity of Mathews' book is that more so than any of Washington's other major biographers, he was extremely uncharitable towards Booker's stepfather, Washington Ferguson: "He was a thriftless man,

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<sup>66</sup>Mathews, 9, 15-16, 19, 22, 28, 31, 166-167.

with no strength of character or skill of hand that would fit him to support a home or guide the children.” Mathews asserted that Ferguson usurped the labor of his stepsons; he forbade Washington from attending school not because the family was in a perpetual state of financial crisis, but because he “had discovered the boy’s financial value and made him earn every possible cent at the saltworks.” Mathews posited that Washington was profoundly affected by his family’s financial insecurity and suggested that his shiftless stepfather provided an example of how *not* to improve. Washington, however, escaped the cycle of ignorance and poverty by attending the Hampton Institute. Having transcended his people’s malaise, Washington was uniquely qualified to lead blacks to a Second Emancipation.<sup>67</sup>

Mathews was a Washington partisan—he believed economic self-help would bring about this Second Emancipation. He cited the Atlanta Exposition speech in its entirety and instead of analyzing it, he focused on the “blaze of national fame which the Atlanta speech directed upon Booker Washington.” Mathews echoed Washington, stating that the Atlanta speech “pointed along the way that he pursued unswervingly throughout his life.” He defended Washington’s belief that growth must proceed organically: “No Presidential declaration could effect that freedom from want and debt, from economic serfdom.” For Mathews, this conservative view was philosophical dogma: “Booker Washington arrived by his own route at the same truth that gripped Plato when the Greek philosopher declared that political constitutions grow upwards from roots in the lives of men.” Like Washington, Mathews believed that the organic development of black business would encourage “interdependence” between the races.<sup>68</sup>

According to Mathews, Washington’s leadership style focused on building bridges rather than opening chasms between the races. He called this process “interracial interpretation.” To his credit, Mathews exhibited greater awareness of Washington’s rhetorical strategies than previous hagiographers:

Addressing himself to the white section of the audience he would cite examples of the way in which they had assisted his race to make more progress in half a century than any other race had done. As they glowed with satisfaction he would ask why this achievement should be marred by unjust discrimination in education, the denial of justice in courts, mob violence, and economic exploitation. Turning to the Negro group he made them swell with pride at the steps in progress made since the Civil War and Emancipation, and then lamented the blots on that record due to indolence, shiftlessness, vice, and unreliability. He would then rally each group to put its shoulder to the wheel of progress for the sake of both races and for the advancement of their nation as a whole.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 21, 34, 36, 65.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 85-93, 167, 199, 205, 333.

Still, Mathews repeated a myth that would later be definitively debunked by historians, saying that “in the business of interpretation he never said anything to one group . . . that he would not say to any other audience.”<sup>69</sup>

Mathews approved of Washington’s “acceptance of social separation” and his refusal to lobby openly for civil rights. For example, after he graduated from the Hampton Institute, many blacks encouraged Washington to undertake a political career. Mathews believed that their demand proved “that white fears of educated Negroes developing into agitators were not entirely unfounded.” Mathews commended Washington for eschewing a political career and defended the older Washington’s ostensibly apolitical stance. Furthermore, Mathews’ bias against black political involvement emerged in his comparison of the leadership styles of Washington and Frederick Douglass. Douglass was an “apostle of freedom” but not an “advocate of a coherent program or policy of education or sustained social action.” While Douglass was “the rugged, passionate Elijah,” Washington was “the more patient, persistent, and persuasive Elisha.” The fact that Mathews so easily dismissed the accomplishments of Douglass reveals the degree to which he thought any black involvement in politics was futile. Writing in 1948, Mathews, like Bond, might have examined the state of black progress in America and realized that Washington’s prudential disavowal of civil liberties had brought, at best, mixed results.<sup>70</sup>

Mathews had little sympathy for Washington’s critics. Ever the Washington apologist, he responded to their claim that Washington acquiesced to injustice: “His published and unpublished speeches suggest, however, that he did, face to face with white southern audiences, expose them to penetrating challenges, although not to bitter denunciation.” Mathews presented the Niagara Movement as nothing more than “a direct attack upon Booker Washington’s program.” Without citing examples, he stated, “Not infrequently men who had bitterly assailed Washington came to more favorable conclusions on deeper reflection based on fuller knowledge.” More accurately, Mathews refuted the accusation that Washington was opposed to liberal education.<sup>71</sup>

There was one exception to Mathews’ claim that Washington was apolitical. Later in the book, Mathews attempted to prove Washington’s critics wrong when they asserted that Washington opposed activism:

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 199-200, 202-203. In 1974, historian Lawrence F. Friedman listed the prominent historians who debunked this myth: “Scholars like August Meier, Louis R. Harlan, Emma Lou Thornbrough, and Donald J. Calista have begun to analyze these seeming contradictions and ambiguities and have offered clear explanations for this pattern. . . . They insist that Washington had to say different things to different people.” He was “shrewd and expedient.” Lawrence F. Friedman, “Life ‘In the Lion’s Mouth’: Another Look at Booker T. Washington,” *The Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 4 (1974): 343.

<sup>70</sup>Mathews, 68, 91-92, 94, 219, 325-326.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 204, 269, 282, 298.

The record of Washington's persistent pressure upon Federal executives and state legislatures, as well as his public speeches and open letters attacking Jim Crow accommodation, and revealing the injustice of race discrimination in relation to the ballot box, together with the fact that he was responsible for securing government office for a greater number of leading Negroes of integrity than any other man of his time, shows the crude falsity of this charge.

This passage contradicted Mathews' earlier remarks. This discrepancy is due to the fact that Mathews was an unabashed Washington apologist.<sup>72</sup>

Because he equated any engagement in the political process with radical activism, Mathews downplayed Washington's political activities. A single, unremarkable chapter is dedicated to the topic, despite political activity being a major facet of Washington's later work—he served as President Theodore Roosevelt's unofficial advisor on all matters black, after all. Rather than analyzing Washington's successes or failures in the political arena, like Scott and Stowe, Mathews instead celebrated Washington's association with "great men" like Roosevelt and Taft, asserting that their cooperation was "constant and constructive." Washington, he wrote, always offered impartial advice to these leaders. Mathews failed entirely to mention the Brownsville affair. Roosevelt dishonorably discharged several black soldiers stationed at the garrison in Brownsville, Texas, because one of them had been implicated in a local shooting incident. Though Roosevelt refused to grant the soldiers a fair trial, and though he certainly punished the innocent along with the guilty, Washington refused to openly criticize the President.<sup>73</sup>

Having argued earlier that Washington's upbringing prepared him to lead black Americans, Mathews examined W.E.B. Du Bois' background and concluded that he was particularly unqualified to criticize Washington. Growing up, racial discrimination was unknown to Du Bois. His first exposure to the virulence of Southern racism was at age 17 when he enrolled at Fisk University in Tennessee. However, because of his travels abroad, Du Bois' "spiritual home remained the cosmopolitan culture of European cities and universities."<sup>74</sup> Mathews then provided a long Manichean list contrasting the virtuous and wise Washington with the vicious and imprudent Du Bois.<sup>75</sup> Mathews also anachronistically inserted Du Bois' later socialism into his earlier debates with Washington, Du Bois, he said, believed that "the capitalistic industrial North was accumulating vast profits by using the cheap labor of the cotton- and tobacco-growing South as an economically dependent, quasi-colonial empire to feed the markets of the world" and Du Bois felt Washington collaborated with them in an effort to secure funds for his pet projects. Mathews sought Du Bois' imprimatur in presenting his findings: "Dr. Du Bois, in

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 284.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 228, 230-231.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 276.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 277.

correspondence with the author in 1947, said that he had not modified his judgment on Booker Washington in the intervening thirty years.” As Mathews’ book contains no footnotes, it is unclear whether Du Bois read passages from Mathews’ manuscript in advance or merely corresponded casually with Mathews. It is unlikely that Du Bois was aware of Mathews’ criticisms; he would hardly have approved of Mathews’ interpretation.<sup>76</sup>

Mathews also examined Washington’s micromanagement of the Tuskegee Institute. Sifting through Washington’s papers, he found many “little notes sent by the Principal to his faculty with regards to tiny details as well as to general policy.” He added, “The perusal of a pile of these notes leaves an almost terrifying sense of omnipresence.” Some later historians saw these memos as evidence that Washington was a petty dictator in his own domain. Mathews, however, defended the practice. First, he claimed that Washington was attempting to aid his students in every way possible. Also, he was concerned “that the fame of Tuskegee should be unsullied by any just criticism or disparagement” by visitors. Most tellingly, Mathews wrote that Tuskegee was composed of “young men and women from primitive backgrounds to whom impersonal regulations were meaningless but who responded with alacrity to personal direction from a revered leader.”<sup>77</sup>

In the book’s final chapter, Mathews offered a few mild criticisms. Washington failed to foresee that black and white relations would “become closer in trade unions than in any other area of life in the South.” Also, Washington’s focus on Southern development proved to be futile as the industrial North, rather than the agrarian South, evolved into the epicenter of black entrepreneurship. Surprisingly, considering his apologia for the economic means to black uplift and his condemnation of political activism, Mathews admitted that black economic progress did not engender interdependence, but rather enkindled white animosity. This ought to have been a major criticism of Washington’s program, but Mathews mentioned it only in passing, after having spent much of the book promoting Washington’s economic philosophy. Mathews also noted that discrimination still prevailed in matters of marriage and gender relations. While these caveats were mere footnotes at the end of a glowing narrative, it is worth noting that Mathews was the first hagiographer to offer any criticisms of Washington.<sup>78</sup>

But despite these qualifications, Mathews ended his biography by claiming that history vindicated Washington. Segregation laws were weakening. History was showing that the “dividing line . . . [was] not between white and black” but between those blacks and whites who believed in cooperation and those who did not.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 276-277, 279-280.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 153-154, 163.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 317, 320, 322.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 324-325.



Throughout the book, Mathews consciously focused on personality rather than social forces, arguing that ideas shape history, and ideas originate in the minds of great men.<sup>80</sup> While there is merit to the maxim that “ideas have consequences,” Mathews’ biography did little to demonstrate this point. Instead of portraying the cause-and-effect relationship of an historical actor and historical change, Mathews offered yet another hagiographical treatment which portrayed Washington as perennially on the side of the angels.

## EVALUATION

As the first half of the twentieth century passed, America underwent a transformation. After the New Deal and the Second World War, Americans became increasingly comfortable with centralized government action and Keynesian economics. Black participation in the World War, the gross spectacle of Nazi racism, and the desegregation of the American military by Harry Truman inspired an increasing number of Americans to reconsider their prejudices. Thus, contrary to the older Washingtonian ethos, civil rights advocates began actively protesting at the federal level, not only for equal treatment under the law, but also for economic equality. As Washington passed out of living memory, the ideologies that inspired the hagiographers waned, making way for authentic scholarly works to emerge. A new explosion of interest in Washington was on the horizon.

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., xvi-xvii.

## CHAPTER II: THE EMERGENCE OF THE CRITICAL PARADIGM, 1950-1970

In 1957, John Hope Franklin, a prominent African American historian, stated, “The writing of the history of the Negro in the United States has come into its own.” Franklin was pleased that the historical profession had progressed to a point where many historians, white and black, Northern and Southern, explored the history of blacks in America. The growing interest in black history in the 1950s and 1960s is apparent in a survey of the scholarly books and articles published on Booker T. Washington.<sup>81</sup>

The 1950s saw the publication of the first critical biography on Washington, Samuel Spencer’s *Booker T. Washington and the Negro’s Place in American Life*, as well as paradigm-defining works by C. Vann Woodward and August Meier. Spencer was the first historian to place Washington’s philosophy within the context of the Protestant Ethic and Social Darwinism. Woodward and Meier convincingly argued that Washington owed his popularity to both his eloquent expression of the myths of his era and his presentation of industrial education as a compromise that, ostensibly, pleased and reconciled three competing groups: Northern whites, Southern whites, and blacks. August Meier’s study of Washington culminated in his 1966 work, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, arguably the most influential scholarly work on Washington in the twentieth century.

The critical paradigm established by Woodward and Meier informed Washington scholarship in the 1960s. As the Civil Rights movement gained traction, many historians adopted a more ideological tone, using their studies to promote activism. These historians were unsparing in their criticism of Washington’s philosophy. Emma Lou Thornbrough built on Spencer’s ideas, arguing that his devotion to capitalism, the Protestant Ethic, and Social Darwinism damaged black progress in America. Oliver Cox considered industrial education and the capitalist system as artifacts of racial and class stratification in America. Other scholars, like Jane Gottschalk, maintained that Washington should have realized that rapid industrialization rendered his vision of the black entrepreneur outmoded. As they grew more critical of Washington, historians also came to view his contemporary opponents favorably, as the progenitors of the Civil Rights movement. Historians like Elliot Rudwick delivered sympathetic accounts of the NAACP’s origins. Other historians, like Daniel Walden, lost their sense of balance in their condemnation of Washington. The common themes in their writings were suspicion towards capitalism and a belief in the necessity of political activism.

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<sup>81</sup>August Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 151.

Still, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Washington's laissez-faire, apolitical ideology retained its defenders. These apologists appeared increasingly desperate; they resorted to crude neo-hagiography rather than scholarly analysis. Some, like Naren Tambe, defended the efficacy of industrial education. Others, like Donald J. Calista, asserted that protest-minded historians made the mistake of judging Washington by the standards of their own era. Calista also argued Washington's accommodationism was nothing more than a tactical response to the pressure society placed on blacks. Too often these sympathetic authors paid excessive attention to Washington's autobiographies and ignored recent scholarship. As a whole they failed to address the critical paradigm.

However, overall consensus shifted to favor the new, critical paradigm. New views on Washington were informed by a growing societal acceptance of blacks, an awareness of racism and injustice, and demands for political reform.

#### RACE AND CLASS ANALYSIS APPLIED TO WASHINGTON STUDIES

Comer Vann Woodward was born in 1908. A white teenager living in the small town of Vanndale, Arkansas, on one occasion he watched a lynch mob assemble. On another, he heard his pastor commend the KKK, after the Klan, in their full regalia, made a monetary donation in his church. After he came of age, while studying at Emory University, he campaigned to desegregate school dances. Growing increasingly affronted by bigotry, Woodward courted communism for a time. During the Great Depression, while pursuing his M.A. at Columbia University, he embraced atheism and began associating with high-profile Marxists, including Langston Hughes and Du Bois. He visited the Soviet Union. Later, Woodward headed the committee that defended Angelo Herndon, a black communist sentenced to death for inciting insurrection. However, as historian Peter Novick points out, Woodward grew disenchanted "with what he regarded as opportunistic and manipulative behavior" of the communists. Writing in 1986, August Meier summarized Woodward's intellectual development: "During these years of doctoral study [Woodward] . . . became a left-wing New Dealer, fusing his moral concern about economic and racial inequalities with a Beardian (rather than a Marxist) analysis. At the same time he retained his high respect for the Marxist Du Bois." After Woodward received his doctorate from the University of North Carolina in 1937, as a public intellectual, he continued to promote racial justice. In 1940, he testified before a congressional committee, supporting a bill to outlaw lynching. In 1954, he worked with Thurgood Marshall, then the chief counsel for the NAACP, to compile research used in the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* case. His support for the political left continued; he led a team of historians in researching the history of presidential corruption during the Watergate scandal. Having lived a full life and having produced myriad books, articles, and monographs, Woodward's writings on Washington

seem, in perspective, a tiny blip in a prestigious career. Still, Woodward stands with August Meier and, later, Louis Harlan, as one of the three most influential twentieth century writers on Washington.<sup>82</sup>

Woodward's famous 1951 book, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, was centered on the concept of the "New South." "The New South, according to [C. Vann] Woodward, was less influenced by the Confederates and Radicals than by the Redeemers," wrote Roman J. Zorn in a review of Woodward's book. Zorn concisely summarized the central theme of Woodward's book: "The [Redeemers], who were converts to the Yankee gospel of industrialism, entered into collaboration with Northern conservative businessmen" in remaking the South. For his part, Woodward described the New South ideology as marked by "forthright recantation" of past Southern society and Lost Cause myths. Its proponents exhibited "a hopeful nationalism suggesting that the lately disaffected South was at last one in faith with the country—or would be as soon as a few more bonds were sold, another appropriation passed, the depression was ended, or the new railroad was complete."<sup>83</sup>

The thirteenth chapter of *Origins of the New South* dealt with Washington's philosophy and was titled "The Atlanta Compromise." Woodward examined Washington in the context of the New South ideology, concluding that Washington's acceptance of the Redeemer's myths lead him down a path counterproductive to black progress. Woodward opened the chapter by discussing the increasing white violence against blacks and the concurrent disfranchisement movements in the state governments in the 1890s. Woodward characterized the era as a time

when the hope born of Reconstruction had all but died for the Negro, when disfranchisement blocked his political advance and the caste system closed the door to integration in the white world, when the North had abandoned him to the South and the South was yielding to the clamor of her extremists.

Woodward concluded that these crushing difficulties set the stage for a new kind of black leader: "The defiant spirit of the old Negro leaders of emancipation and Reconstruction appeared increasingly quixotic under these circumstances."<sup>84</sup>

According to Woodward, Washington stepped into the leadership gap and "framed the *modus vivendi* of race relations in the New South." Not only was Washington the leader of blacks, but as the crafter of "The Atlanta Compromise,"

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<sup>82</sup>"Comer Vann Woodward," *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, (Detroit: Gale, 1998), available at Biography in Context, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale Document number: GALE|K1631007067 (accessed 6/9/2015). Novick, 228. Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 111-112. Brian B. Carpenter, "C. Vann Woodward," *Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives, Thematic Series: The 1960s*, eds. William L. O'Neill and Kenneth T. Jackson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale document number: GALE|K3436600654 (accessed 6/9/2015).

<sup>83</sup>Roman J. Zorn, review of *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, by C. Vann Woodward, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1953): 77. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), ix.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 351-352, 356-357.

“he was also a leader of white opinion with a national following, and he propounded not merely an educational theory but a social philosophy.” Woodward viewed the Atlanta speech in a critical light because Washington traded “renunciation for concession” and played “sentiment against interest.” In the speech, Washington said, “I love the South.” Woodward believed the Tuskegeean was clearly referring to the New South. Like the Redeemers, Washington eschewed federal intervention in Southern affairs and “instead of appealing to the agitators and doctrinaires [Washington] sought out the very types of men whom Southern whites were trying to interest in the development of Southern industry.” Also, like the Redeemers, Washington claimed that black labor would ameliorate the industrialist’s labor problems. Washington advocated the New South ideology by preaching “a gospel of conservatism, patience, and material progress” to blacks, convincing them that the assistance of “upper-class Southern whites and wealthy Northern capitalists . . . offered more hope than agitation and protest.” In short, Washington believed material progress would come to the South, and to blacks, through the industrialized North. According to Woodward, the Atlanta Compromise guaranteed Washington’s ascension to popular leadership because he presented a compromise that seemingly harmonized the interests of Southern whites, Northern capitalists, and blacks.<sup>85</sup>

Though Woodward admitted it difficultly to imagine an alternate strategy Washington might have pursued, he still felt that Washington’s scheme retarded black progress. For example, Washington preached “the businessman’s gospel of free enterprise, competition, and *laissez faire*,” to the National Business League. The problem with this, according to Woodward, was that

Washington’s individualistic doctrine never took into account the realities of mass production, industrial integration, financial combination, and monopoly. Since the Negro capitalist was nearly always a small capitalist, he was among the first to suffer and the last to rally under the new pressures. He was largely confined to petty trade and a declining proportion of that.

In Woodward’s final assessment, Washington’s faith in capitalism was understandable in the context of his time, though nonetheless deleterious to black progress.<sup>86</sup>

A contemporary reviewer, W. M. Brewer, congratulated Woodward and compared his analysis to Charles Beard’s famous work on the Constitutional Convention of 1787. If Woodward’s writings resembled Charles Beard’s, Oliver Cox suggested Karl Marx.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 356-360.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 364, 366.

<sup>87</sup>W. M. Brewer, review of *Origins of the New South 1877-1913*, by C. Vann Woodward, *The Journal of Negro History* 37, no. 2 (1952): 205.

Oliver Cromwell Cox was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 1901. In 1919, he immigrated to the United States to pursue a career in higher education. Ten years later he graduated from Northwestern University with a law degree, an impressive feat for a young African America at that time. Shortly thereafter he contracted polio which left him paralyzed. Feeling his disability precluded the practice of law, Cox began graduate studies in economics at the University of Chicago. Although he studied under Frank Hyneman Knight, one of the founders of the free market Chicago School of economics, Cox adopted socialism. Though Cox denied being a Marxist, his work evidenced a heavy reliance on dialectical materialism and class struggle. In fact, Cox grew so suspicious of the validity of economics as a science, that he switched to studying sociology. His goal as a sociologist was to explain the origins of the Great Depression. He earned a Ph.D. in the discipline in 1938. Cox openly criticized liberal academics who he believed more likely to acquiesce to conservative demands than to advocate black rights. Perhaps because of his views, Cox was unable to find work at a predominately white university or college; in 1944, he was hired, somewhat ironically, by the Tuskegee Institute. While working at Tuskegee he wrote *Caste, Class, and Race*. In this work he criticized Gunnar Myrdal's assertion that racism was a particularly American dilemma; he felt that race and class exploitation underpin all capitalist economies. Cox left Tuskegee in 1949 and three years later published an article, "The Leadership of Booker Washington," in *Social Forces*.<sup>88</sup>

Unsurprisingly, considering his background, in his article Cox was outspoken in his scathing criticisms of Washington. He argued that the very definition of leadership excluded Washington:

The genuine leader is not one who merely concedes or admits the injustice of his people's cause; to the contrary, he is the most ardent advocate of it. . . . Thus a genuine leader among Negroes may be considered as one who takes up the common cause of the Negro people and makes a significant appeal to them to follow his program in the resolution of that cause.

Thus, because of his supposed capitulation to white supremacy, neither Washington's leadership of the Tuskegee Institute nor his "sponsoring of certain social or exploitative services among the Negroes" qualified him as a black leader. Cox seized upon the term "collaborator" to define Washington's role. Like Woodward, Cox believed industrial interests sought black labor for "free-market exploitation." However, he disagreed with Woodward's claim that Washington was a "compromise leader." Rather, Washington was a collaborator, "an active advocate of the purposes of the dominant group" and his leadership depended "entirely upon that power." Cox maintained that Washington benefitted personally from his

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<sup>88</sup>Sholomo B. Levy, "Cox, Oliver Cromwell," *African American National Biography*, edited by Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., edited by and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, available at *Oxford African American Studies Center*, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e4512> (accessed 6/10/2015).

collaboration: “The financing of his project and the arrangement of a financially secure life for himself provided the essential *quid pro quo* in his collaboration.”<sup>89</sup>

Cox rooted Washington’s supposed collaborative impulse in his upbringing. Ignoring Kelly Miller’s overall favorable attitude towards Washington, Cox cited Miller’s harshest criticism: “But for Lincoln’s proclamation, Washington would probably have arisen to esteem and favor in the eyes of his master as a good and faithful servant.” Cox expounded in his own words: “On the pre-Civil War plantation talented black men tended to become principally either discontented bondsmen with ideas of escape and revolt, or trusted slaves. Washington’s slavery experience seems to have conditioned him to the latter type of personality.” Washington’s family, he added, lacked the “insurrectionary tradition” that inspired so many other blacks. Cox’s conclusions were the harshest from a scholar to that date.<sup>90</sup>

Cox confused *means* with *ends*. The black leader, he asserted, promotes the common cause of blacks; he defined that cause as “the acquisition of full civil rights.” However, civil rights are not the end goal of racial progress; rather, they serve as a *means* to social harmony and economic prosperity. Du Bois understood this nuance. While he believed Washington’s means—accommodation—counterproductive to these ends, he did not doubt that Washington wanted to see blacks prosper. But because Cox treated the means, civil rights, as the ultimate end, he viewed Washington as actually opposed to black progress, rather than seeing him as a tragic failure, as Du Bois did.<sup>91</sup>

Still, Cox raised an important and previously unexamined question. The hagiographers and many later sympathetic historians excused Washington’s failings by pointing out that he was constrained by the conditions of his time. Cox disagreed: “It has been commonly averred that Washington’s leadership may be ‘justified’ if his ‘times’ are taken into consideration. By a like assumption, however, the manner of action of virtually all persons and all things may be explained away.” Cox was correct. In excusing Washington as a creature of his time, many sympathetic biographers unwittingly negated the elements of choice and vision that make an individual heroic. Still, if the hagiographers undertook a hero-making quest, Cox can be accused of presenting Washington as an arch-villain.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Oliver C. Cox, “The Leadership of Booker T. Washington,” *Social Forces* 30, no. 1 (1951): 91-93, 95-96.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

Oliver Cox and C. Vann Woodward were the first scholars to examine Washington's ideology in light of the intersection of class and race. Their writings were emblematic of the ways in which Marxist categories were adopted and modified by American historians in the 1950s. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois explained Marx's appeal:

Marx was one of the greatest men of modern times in that he put his finger squarely upon our difficulties when he said that economic foundations, the way in which men earn their living, are the determining factors in the development of civilization, in literature, religion, and the basic pattern of culture.

Du Bois fully embraced Marxism by the time of his emigration. But as Peter Novick argues in *That Noble Dream*, most American historians who used Marxist categories were primarily "Americanists" who were "heterodox" in that they rejected the mechanistic determinism of Marx's historical dialectic, though they often adopted Marx's "overall model of society and of historical change." That is, they accepted "the centrality of modes of production, and of class struggle," though their application of these categories was more "ambiguous" and malleable than that of international Marxists. These new left historians were more interested in "celebratory accounts of struggle and resistance," in telling tales of " 'the people' versus 'the interests,' " than in Marxian dogmatism. This particularly American bastardization of Marxism permeated Woodward and Cox's writings on Washington.<sup>93</sup>

Still, there were significant differences in the ways Woodward and Cox applied this modified Marxist tradition to Washington's story. Both writers used class to explain the tensions between the North, the South, and blacks. Both criticized Washington for siding against the interests of his class and race. They differed, however, in that Woodward argued that Washington's stance was the only option available to him, while Cox's tale was morally charged, presenting Washington as siding with the antagonists in the struggle between the weak and the strong. Both wrote, at least in part, to bolster civil rights activism in their time. Woodward, however, maintained a level, objective tone, allowing the facts to speak for him, while Cox came across as an apologist.

The differences in their tone accounts for the fact that that while Woodward's arguments profoundly influenced later Washington scholars, Cox's were only cited a few times, largely by sympathetic historians who used Cox as an easily refuted straw man. Because Woodward resembled Beard in his level tone and objective analysis, his work resonated with Washington scholars. Cox's vitriolic tone and his explicit appeal to activism alienated the majority of scholars who were wary of full-blooded Marxism. Notably, in terms of Washington's scholarship, Woodward's book and Cox's article were important landmarks in the transition from hagiography to left-leaning scholarship.

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<sup>93</sup>Du Bois, *Writings*, 775. Novick, 421-422.



## AUGUST MEIER'S EARLY ESSAYS ON WASHINGTON, 1953-1954

More so than any other historian writing between 1950 and 2000, August Meier offered a commonly accepted, definitive treatment of Booker T. Washington. He was the first to reveal Washington's "secret life." This facet of Washington's career was forever after considered incontrovertible by both sympathetic and hostile historians. Meier's scholarship also set the standard for investigating the motivations behind Washington's rhetorical prevarications. Though Meier's most influential work on Washington, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, was published in 1966, he began writing essays on Washington during first half of the 1950s.

Meier was born in 1923 into a family from Newark, New Jersey, that he described as of "a mixed Gentile-Jewish background." His parents were "democratic socialists turned New Dealers" from whom he "absorbed a concern for social justice that, colored by his sense of ethnic marginality, intersected with the increasing salience of the racial issue that marked the World War II period." In 1953, while pursuing his doctorate at Columbia University, Meier published his first major article on Washington, "Booker T. Washington and the Negro Press," in *The Journal of Negro History*. The journal's founder, Carter G. Woodson intended it to be a venue for blacks to write their own history. Though Meier was white, the journal rewarded his deep sympathy with blacks and his solid scholarship by publishing his insightful essay. The most refreshing feature of Meier's work was his use of the Washington Papers and newspapers as primary sources to develop his thesis.<sup>94</sup>

In this essay Meier examined "the most sensationalist charge leveled at Booker T. Washington, . . . that he subsidized newspapers and magazines in order to silence criticism of himself and his policies, and in effect seriously curtailed freedom of the press." While examining Washington's papers (recently donated by the Tuskegee Institute to the Library of Congress) Meier discovered that Washington exercised "far-reaching influence among Negro editors and publishers" but concluded that he was more tolerant of disagreement than critical historians assumed. Meier also considered the claim that Washington was an accommodationist and found it simplistic. He discovered that Washington engaged in "certain highly secret efforts against segregation and disfranchisement," resulting in an apparent contradiction between his

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<sup>94</sup>Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 144-145. Novick, 475.

rhetorical accommodationism and his actual deeds. Meier concluded: “His felicitous manner of expression decidedly masked the protest content of his thought.”<sup>95</sup>

Meier discovered that many of the black magazines and newspapers owned or subsidized by Washington openly protested against white supremacy. Black publications such as the *Colored American Magazine*, the *Washington Colored-American*, the *St. Paul and Chicago Appeal*, the *Indianapolis Freeman*, and the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder* failed to “adopt an accommodating tone toward the white south.” Meier offered two hypotheses to explain the seeming disconnect between Washington’s apolitical rhetoric and the activism of newspapers he funded. Washington, he wrote, may have secretly approved of their militant messages or he may have recognized the necessity of working with people with whom he disagreed. Meier synthesized these hypotheses, arguing that “the evidence indicated that Washington saw some value in agitation and protest, and was willing to let his supporters use these techniques *as long as they supported him personally*.” Furthermore, because he could not “exercise a dictatorial policy in regard to the Negro press,” Washington compromised in order to maintain its support. These observations led Meier to conclude that calling Washington an accommodationist was a simplification. Washington, concluded Meier, engaged in “certain highly secret efforts against segregation and disfranchisement.” This seminal observation would become a major theme in Meier’s work as he began to uncover Washington’s “secret life.”<sup>96</sup>

In 1954 Meier published a second essay titled “Booker T. Washington and the Rise of the NAACP” in *The Crisis*. *The Crisis* was the NAACP’s official journal, founded in 1910 by Du Bois, but Meier nonetheless retained the scholarly and objective tone that characterized his previous article. In this essay, Meier investigated the origins of Washington’s bitter conflict with his critics, a struggle that resulted in the formation of the NAACP. Meier argued that Washington opposed activism for two reasons. First, he worried that the political protests of men like William Monroe Trotter and Du Bois would incite white animosity and thereby undermine his economic and educational program. Meier’s second point expounded upon the thesis of his previous essay—that Washington tolerated disagreement *only* when those disagreeing did not threaten his leadership. He elaborated:

He never questioned the sincerity or good will of the ‘better class’ of southern whites, or of the northern industrialists . . . or of Presidents Roosevelt and Taft . . . but he found it almost impossible to credit the integrity of his liberal critics, who were more interested in the advancement of colored people than many of his supporters.

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<sup>95</sup>August Meier, “Booker T. Washington and the Negro Press: With Special Reference to the *Colored American Magazine*,” *The Journal of Negro History* 38, no. 1 (1953): 67, 77, 79.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 77, 79, 83-84, 88. Emphasis added in second quote.

“His papers lead one to suspect,” Meier concluded, “that, subconsciously at least, he feared the loss of his own ascendancy.”<sup>97</sup>

Also in 1954, Meier’s article, “Booker T. Washington and the Town of Mound Bayou,” appeared in *Phylon*. Though W.E.B. Du Bois founded the journal in 1940, it is worth noting that *Phylon* was not a Du Boisian propaganda outlet; one of its original editors was Horace Mann Bond, and his interpretation of Washington’s legacy diverged significantly from Du Bois’s. In this article, Meier considered the question Bond raised: Was Washington’s economic program efficacious? Meier answered in the negative.<sup>98</sup>

Meier examined the town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, as a test case for Washington’s economic philosophy. Founded by Isiah T. Montgomery and Charles Banks, the town’s fathers sought to establish a Washingtonian utopia based on “the ideology of economic advancement, self-help, and racial solidarity.” There was an “all-Negro community” and several of the town leaders even extolled the benefits of self-segregation. Meier analyzed the state of Mound Bayou’s economy during the age of Washington and found it incredibly dismal. “Behind [a] façade of prosperity and success,” he wrote, “there lay a story of vicissitudes and indeed ultimate failure, even with the whole-hearted support of Tuskegee and the substantial aid of northern philanthropy.” Evidence of Mound Bayou’s decline was obvious in Washington’s correspondence, which documented “so clearly the gulf between ideology and practice at Mound Bayou.” Meier’s implicit conclusion was damning: Washington must have been aware that despite Mound Bayou’s extraordinary commitment to his philosophy, and despite substantial subsidies from Tuskegee and northern philanthropists, the experimental town was an economic failure.<sup>99</sup>

Meier’s early work painted a picture of Washington that was deeply human. The Tuskegeean was sometimes tolerant, sometimes petty; he obstinately ignored observable evidence that undermined his apolitical prescriptions. Meier’s work on Washington had just begun.

#### THE FIRST CRITICAL WASHINGTON BIOGRAPHY

Though historian Samuel R. Spencer admitted that Mathews’ biography was “a product of painstaking research” and the best Washington biography written to date, he correctly noted that “Mathews’ book quite frankly is written by a

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<sup>97</sup>August Meier, “Booker T. Washington and the Rise of the NAACP,” *Crisis* 61, no.2 (1954): 70-71, 123.

<sup>98</sup>Helen Houston, “Phylon,” *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* (2006), available at *Encyclopedia.com*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3444701008/phylon.html> (accessed 5/25/2015).

<sup>99</sup>August Meier, “Booker T. Washington and the Town of Mound Bayou,” *Phylon (1940-1956)* 15, no. 4 (1954): 396-397, 400-401.

Washington admirer with the approval of authorities at Tuskegee.”<sup>100</sup> Spencer sought to write a more nuanced biography. His book, *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life* (1955), is noteworthy not because it introduced new facts, but because Spencer placed Washington's philosophy within the context of ideologies popular at the turn of the century.

Spencer's research paralleled that of Mathews's. One of Spencer's contemporary reviewers rightly noted: Spencer's "retelling [of *Up from Slavery*], like that of others, dilutes most of the luster, charm, and drama of Washington's own words."<sup>101</sup> Like Mathews, Spencer examined the unorganized Booker T. Washington papers.<sup>102</sup> *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life* contained no footnotes, so it is difficult to determine how and when the papers corroborated Spencer's conclusions. The fact that Mathews and Spencer arrived at strikingly disparate conclusions from examining the same collection highlights the difficulties inherent in distilling an argument from such a vast, unorganized body of papers.

While Mathews ascribed to the "great man" theory of historical causality, Spencer focused on the social forces that influenced Washington. For example, social forces on the local level infected Washington with the freeman's enthusiasm for education. Young Booker admired elder blacks who were literate and wanted to emulate them: "Young as he was, education had for Booker a utilitarian purpose: to make life more endurable." Forces on the national level also shaped young Washington. Though "the Negro was not primarily responsible" for it, Spencer admitted that the politics of the Reconstruction era were marked by "venality and corruption." This made a career in politics appear "odious" to Washington. According to Spencer, these circumstances explained Washington's future emphasis on education and his criticism of political protest.<sup>103</sup>

Spencer noted that Washington's mentors, teachers, and employers shared a common ideology: the Protestant Ethic. From Viola Ruffner, Washington learned the "dignity of labor." From Samuel Armstrong, he gained "a fine sense of integrity, a heaping measure of courage and determination, a buoyant optimism, a practical utilitarianism, and a firm self-discipline. With them came the deep-seated faith in laissez-faire individualism characteristic of the age." Of Chapman,

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<sup>100</sup>Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 206.

<sup>101</sup>Herbert J. Doherty, review of *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life*, by Samuel R. Spencer, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (1955): 580.

<sup>102</sup>Spencer, 203-205.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 8, 20-22.

Ruffner, and Washington's other white mentors, Spencer said, "All these persons had in common high integrity, a robust individualism, a strictly conventional outlook on moral problems, a strong humanitarianism, and a deep loyalty to the Protestant Ethic of selflessness and service." Because of their influence, in later life Washington made common cause with Northern industrialists; like them, "he hewed . . . to the conservative line in politics, religion, and economics. He accepted their gospel of wealth."<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, according to Spencer, many of Washington's white contemporaries, Armstrong in particular, united their belief in self-help and free markets with a paternalistic racism. Washington inherited this attitude from Armstrong: "Having accepted the social Darwinism of the time, he was convinced that progress for the Negro must come 'through no process of artificial forcing, but through the natural law of evolution.' " Thus, Washington "accepted the corollary doctrine of inevitable progress. 'Progress, progress is the law of God,' he exclaimed, 'and under Him it is going to be the Negro's guiding star in this country.' "<sup>105</sup> Most previous historians simply accepted Washington's pro-capitalist ideology as an intrinsic facet of human society. Spencer contextualized laissez-faire individualism as a transient ideology.

In Spencer's telling, Washington assimilated the Protestant Ethic and built his program for black uplift around it. Hence, Washington advocated industrial education, which Spencer defined as "of a strictly utilitarian nature designed to prepare the student for a gainful occupation in agriculture or trade." Although some later critics claimed that Washington usurped the labor of his students Spencer disagreed; Washington was willing to overlook sloppy workmanship so students could gain much needed experience.<sup>106</sup> Spencer maintained that Washington intended to use industrial education to instill the Protestant Ethic in his students; he believed these values would be of incalculable benefit to them.<sup>107</sup>

Though Spencer did not cite *Origins of the New South*, his interpretation of the Atlanta Exposition speech was a simplified version of Woodward's. "The Atlanta speech," Spencer wrote, "was an obvious attempt to strike a practical bargain which would protect the Negro's effort to find economic security." Washington believed that by promising social separation, whites would allow blacks to carve out their own economic space, "not only in agriculture but in the cotton mills and other industrial plants which were rising in the 'New South.' " According to Spencer, Washington felt he was only

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 38-39, 49, 116.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>106</sup>Historian Donald Spivey writes, "Students at Hampton spent most of their time engaged in menial labor outside the classroom." Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 20.

<sup>107</sup>Spencer, 52, 75.

sacrificing what was already unobtainable, social equality. Consequently, Spencer characterized Washington's gambit as "common-sense."<sup>108</sup>

Although Spencer was not as critical of Washington's economic emphasis as some later historians, he felt that Washington misunderstood the economic conditions of his time. Spencer began by accurately presenting Washington's opinion:

Washington was convinced that the Negro must prove himself, must demonstrate tangibly and concretely that he was worthy of the blessings of liberty. He must destroy the stereotype which years of slavery had fixed in the minds of even his friends and eliminate each of the negative slave characteristics which still clung to him. He must substitute efficiency for the slipshod work of slavery days, responsibility for irresponsibility, knowledge for ignorance and superstition, accepted moral standards for the amorality of the slave quarters. The blame of the Negro's shortcomings was academic; the shortcomings were real and had to be remedied.

But Spencer felt that Washington's understanding of economics applied more to the days of Benjamin Franklin than to his own era. Again, Spencer echoed Woodward: "He had geared his program to the training of craftsmen and small entrepreneurs, whereas twentieth century industry demanded labor for the mass-production jobs of the assembly line." Furthermore, Spencer argued that subsequent history disproved the assertion that economic interdependence leads to political equality.<sup>109</sup>

While admitting that the Atlanta speech was well-intended, Spencer pointed to the chinks in Washington's rhetorical armor. Because the "white South [was] thoroughly conditioned in its ideas about the Negro by the master-slave relationship and the experience of Reconstruction," Washington's ambiguity was a misguided and counterproductive strategy:

Washington occasionally had a tendency to ambiguity at points where ambiguity was least desirable; consequently the Southern white man was able to interpret his program in such a way as to accept more than Washington meant to offer, and to miss entirely the fact that a *quid pro quo* was involved. For example, the statement that 'it is more important that we be prepared to vote than that we vote' could easily be stretched to mean that Washington had no great objection to disfranchisement of the Negro.

Spencer offered a second example: "Finally, the white man could place a very loose construction on the phrase 'in all things purely social.' As increasing segregation laws were to show, the Negro was to find the two races 'as separate as the fingers' in many areas which were not 'purely social' at all."<sup>110</sup>

Spencer considered the tensions between Washington and his critics with equal nuance. He was critical of Du Bois:

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 51, 197-198.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 104-105.

Washington was a practical realist, interested primarily in attaining tangible goals; Du Bois was a romantic, willing and eager to fight for principle even if the battle cost him his life. . . . Though Du Bois as an intellectual liked to deal with ideas, while Washington preferred men and things, Du Bois was by far the more emotional. Washington was first and last an American, Du Bois first and last a Negro. Washington possessed a genuine humility and an ability to identify himself with the common man; Du Bois was imperious, egocentric, aloof. To Du Bois, Washington's faith in man and God was somewhat naïve.<sup>111</sup>

Still, Spencer noted that Washington scorned intellectuals because many opposed his industrial education and lambasted "his disavowal of political remedies." Spencer added that the critics had a point. Their concerns

sprang from a sincere and significant disagreement on the approach to advancement for the Negro, but mainly they feared that the ascendancy of the 'Tuskegee Machine,' as Du Bois called it, had given Washington a power over Negro affairs which should not be vested in any individual.

Indeed, Spencer agreed that Washington exercised the "near-absolute control over Negro political affairs which Du Bois attributed to him." Also, "he controlled the outlets of Northern philanthropy to such an extent that little or no money went to liberal-arts institutions." While the hagiographers portrayed Washington as a black Moses, Spencer calls him a "benevolent despot" whose "monopoly of leadership prevented those with a different point of view from working effectively in their own way while he continued to work in his."<sup>112</sup>

In the final analysis, Spencer was charitable to Washington, saying "The entire human family benefited from the life of such a man as Booker T. Washington." Spencer ultimately excused Washington's accommodationism and economic focus, "To criticize his methods is to make the facile assumption that he had some choice in the matter." Spencer failed to consider Cox's dilemma: Why consider a man who is merely a product of his time heroic?<sup>113</sup>

Spencer's work was the first to connect Washington's philosophy to the Protestant Ethic and Social Darwinism. With increasing frequency in the postwar era, historians attributed these philosophies to previous historical characters. In the years following the Second World War, "the single most important intellectual influence" on historians from the social sciences was, according to Peter Novick, Max Weber. In his famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber explained capitalism as a product of the Puritan values of hard work, frugality, and independence. Novick argues that for American historians writing in the 1950s, during the outset of the Cold War, Weber's negative explanation for the origins of capitalism served as an alternative to Marxism. Time and again historians writing after Spencer—including those who

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 151-152.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 140, 151-152, 161-162, 167, 199.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 200-201.

also accepted Woodward's Beardian analysis—cast Washington as a proponent of the Protestant Ethic.<sup>114</sup> Washington's rhetorical emphasis on thrift, hard-work, and practical education made this explanation compelling. Less plausibly, historians writing in the 1950s began to associate capitalism in the Progressive Era with Social Darwinism. Spencer was the first of many to accuse Washington of accepting the idea of evolutionary struggle as the engine of progress. While Spencer, obviously, was not responsible for the popularity of Social Darwinism and the Protestant Ethic as historical explanations, he was the first to introduce them into Washington scholarship.<sup>115</sup>

One of Spencer's contemporary reviewers stated that though *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life* was "similar in scope" to Basil Mathew's biography, it was "somewhat less discursive."<sup>116</sup> This author disagrees. While not as well documented, and though shorter, Spencer's book helped dispel the hagiographic fog surrounding the life and times of Booker T. Washington. While Mathews applauded Washington, Spencer crafted a critical examination. Whether he succeeded or not is perhaps less important than the fact that his was the first major biography to step outside the Washington mythology.

#### THE CRITICAL PARADIGM EXPLORED

Meier's 1955 essay, "Toward a Reinterpretation of Booker T. Washington," published in *The Journal of Southern History*, clearly outlined the trajectory of his future research on Washington. Meier noted that the centenary of Washington's birth had passed largely unnoticed. He believed this was because the 1950s were a time "of increasing racial integration and of growing recognition of the Negro's constitutional rights," and Washington, "was associated with a policy of compromise and conciliation." Having examined Washington's correspondence, Meier felt this was an inaccurate and unfair evaluation.<sup>117</sup>

Meier argued that critical historians remained largely unaware that, despite Washington's claims to the contrary, he was deeply involved in the political process. Previous acknowledgement of Washington's political involvement was limited to his role as Roosevelt's counselor on matters of black appointments. However, in Washington's papers Meier discovered

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<sup>114</sup>For example, Jane Gottschalk and John P. Flynn held this opinion. Their works are considered later in this chapter.

<sup>115</sup>Novick, 383.

<sup>116</sup>George B. Tindall, review of *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life*, by Samuel R. Spencer, *The Journal of Southern History* 21, no. 4 (1955): 555.

<sup>117</sup>August Meier, "Toward a Reinterpretation of Booker T. Washington," *The Journal of Southern History* 23, no. 2 (1957): 220.



that countless politicians wrote to the Tuskegee Institute asking for favors. Turning to Washington's more covert activity, Meier chronicled Washington's heretofore unacknowledged political activity on behalf of Republican candidates during presidential campaigns. Washington was responsible for "recommending (and blackballing) campaign workers and newspaper subsidies, handling the Negro press, advising on how to deal with racial issues, and influencing prominent Negroes." Washington faced myriad possible pitfalls in exercising and maintaining his political power; "his correspondence teems with material on the struggle." Meier proved that far from being apolitical, Washington actually invested time and treasure in the arena of politics.<sup>118</sup>

Meier's conclusion to the essay presaged his later writings. He wrote:

In spite of his placatory tone and his outward emphasis upon economic development as the solution to the race problem, Washington was surreptitiously engaged in undermining the American race system by a direct attack upon disfranchisement and segregation. . . . In spite of his strictures against political activity, he was a powerful politician in his own right. The picture that emerges from Washington's correspondence is distinctly at variance with the ingratiating mask he presented to the world.<sup>119</sup>

Meier would expand upon the theme of Washington's secret life in his later book, *Negro Thought in America* (considered later in this chapter). His arguments were so compelling that few later historians would contest them. Critical historians like Louis Harlan would point to Washington's "secret life" as evidence of Washington's megalomania and hypocrisy. Sympathetic biographers like Robert J. Norrell used Washington's covert activities as evidence that he behaved more like a shrewd fox than the raging lion that activists demanded. Regardless of bias, a serious Washington scholar could not—and cannot—ignore Meier's cogent arguments. Indeed, his work served as the baseline for debates over Washington for more than half a century.

In his 1960 essay, "The Contemporary Opposition to the Political and Educational Ideas of Booker T. Washington," published in *The Journal of Negro History*, Daniel Walden offered a laundry list of Washington's sins and shortcomings through the eyes of his opponents. He argued that Washington was inspired by the New South myths. In the 1890s, Walden wrote, "There was a movement afoot to characterize the Southerner as a new type of man, a new generation who could now be counted on to treat the Negro fairly." Accepting this narrative, Washington assumed that black progress would change the hearts of white supremacists. In this regard, Washington believed politics was "the science of the predictable;" in other

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 222-225.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 226-227.

words, he was certain that if blacks behaved a certain way, civil rights would inevitably follow. Walden indicated that because Washington's opponents understood this a grave miscalculation, they offered "vigorous criticism" of the Tuskegeean.<sup>120</sup>

Walden's essay attempted to invoke sympathy for Washington's opponents. He called William Monroe Trotter "a very brilliant scholar, . . . a man obsessed with an idea, the idea that, as citizens, colored people deserve the same opportunities as whites, and these equal rights could be 'secured only by persistent manly agitation, untempered by compromise.'" He completely ignored the fact that many of Trotter's contemporaries, like Kelly Miller, found Trotter's rhetoric and conduct bellicose and obnoxious. Furthermore, Walden minimized Trotter's behavior during the infamous "Boston Riot." Trotter instigated the riot in 1903 while Washington attempted to deliver a speech in Boston. In Walden's simplified telling, the riot began because Washington ignored and marginalized Trotter's faction when they attempted to ask questions. In reality, Washington's critics shouted over him, preventing the delivery of his speech. Walden also ignored the fact that, before the riot began, Trotter's allies sprinkled cyan pepper on the podium in a deliberate—and successful—attempt to inflict sneezing attacks on Washington and his fellow speakers. Despite the fact that Trotter resorted to violence, Walden presented the riot as a consciousness raising event: "Large numbers of people of both races were shocked at this first, open expression by Negroes of opposition to their leader." He neglected to mention that most people, black and white, were shocked that the riot resulted in a stabbing. In his quest to find anti-Washington heroes, Walden glossed over the violence Trotter instigated and the scandal it caused.<sup>121</sup>

Walden also praised W.E.B. Du Bois, saying "Of the many voices that were raised [against Washington], none was more effective than that of William E. Burghardt DuBois." He called Du Bois' chapter "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" a "brilliant essay." He then dedicated a large portion of his article to summarizing Du Bois's arguments. He felt Du Bois correct in holding Washington responsible for disfranchisement, civil subordination, and the withholding of tax dollars from black schools. He cited Du Bois' words in *Dusk of Dawn* with approval: "We must lay on the soul of this man 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."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Daniel Walden, "The Contemporary Opposition to the Political and Educational Ideas of Booker T. Washington," *The Journal of Negro History* 45, no. 2 (1960): 104, 106-107.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 109, 111, 114.

After examining Trotter, Du Bois, and other Washington critics like Rev. Charles Morris, Walden concluded, “The mass of evidence that has been weighed seems to damn the Negro’s greatest leader since Douglass.” He acknowledged the argument that Washington worked for black advancement behind the scenes, but he did not feel this excused the damage done. His only concession was to favorably quote John Hope Franklin, who said, ‘What Washington did for the Negro was useful when he did it. He helped to produce tolerance for the Negro, but at too great a price.’ ” While Walden accurately presented the opinions of Washington’s critics, his essay failed to present Washington’s side. Walden’s essay was clearly written to inspire activism and to disparage conservative approaches to attaining civil rights.<sup>123</sup>

Elliot M. Rudwick, Assistant Professor of Social Welfare at Florida State University, also analyzed the struggle between Washington and his opposition. In his 1960 article, “Booker T. Washington’s Relations with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People” which appeared in *The Journal of Negro Education*, Rudwick presented Washington’s response to his critics as self-interested. Still, unlike Walden, he saw value in both economic and political approaches to black progress. Though Rudwick did not cite the recent works of Woodward, Meier, or Spencer, his thesis was supported by numerous primary sources, including the papers of Washington, Oswald Villard, Du Bois, and others involved in the controversy between the Washington faction and the NAACP.

Whereas early hagiographers presented Washington as patiently showering his critics with olive branches, Rudwick argued that Washington resisted *their* friendly overtures. He noted that Oswald Garrison Villard, the founder of the NAACP, attempted to remain on amicable terms with Washington, even when this required keeping Du Bois on a tight leash. According to Rudwick, Washington resisted cooperation for two reasons. First, Washington was upset by their “publicized conclusion that the right to vote determined the Negroes’ treatment in all other institutions of American society, including economic.” Secondly, Washington sought to protect his position as race leader; having served as “the intermediary through which funds were channeled for certain approved institutions, [he] may have felt that his powerful influence and prestige were threatened by the new organization.” Rudwick described the “veiled and not-so-veiled methods [Washington used] to recapture those who might have been thinking of deserting to the ‘opposition crowd.’ ” After years spent attempting to

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 112.

placate Washington, Villard realized that Washington's refusal to cooperate signaled wealthy whites to withhold support of the organization. In Rudwick's telling, this realization inspired Villard to allow Du Bois a belated counterattack.<sup>124</sup>

Rudwick suggested that cooperation rather than competition between the factions would have benefited black progress. He placed the blame for this failure on Washington:

Throughout his last years, Washington . . . used his power to try to harass and even defeat the DuBois-NAACP group which demanded his ultimate equality goals immediately. The Tuskegeean did not work out a division of labor pact which would have marked off for each group its spheres of influence. Such a concordat might have increased the pressure for social change, and certainly would have eliminated much of the wasted effort spent in waging this intra-racial leadership struggle.<sup>125</sup>

Later historians, like Robert Norrell, questioned whether Washington deserves blame for the rift that developed between his critics and himself. While Norrell acknowledged Washington's imperfections, he felt both sides erred in not making peace. But, the debate over responsibility aside, Rudwick's essay served to convincingly refute of the hagiographers' assertion that Washington maintained saintly forbearance in the face of malicious criticism.

Five years after his first published essay on Washington, August Meier added to his thoughts in "Negro Class Structure and Ideology in the Age of Booker T. Washington" in *Phylon*. In the tradition of Woodward, Meier reflected on the intersection of class and race in the early 1900s, examining how people in different categories reacted to Washington's philosophy.

Meier contextualized the varying levels of support for Washington according to racial, class, and sectional status. In the North, during the second half of the nineteenth century, black entrepreneurs catered largely to white customers. It naturally followed that they formed the "upper stratum" of black society. However, by 1900, increasing racism and technological industrialization forced many of these individuals out of business. Thus, after 1890 and especially after the turn of the century, the remaining "Negro bourgeoisie" focused on black markets. So, far from being an original idea, the "racial chauvinism in business" that Washington preached to the National Business League merely reflected socio-economic realities. The collapse of the old upper class of blacks who serviced white customers explains why Washington's strongest

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<sup>124</sup>Elliot M. Rudwick, "Booker T. Washington's Relations with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," *The Journal of Negro Education* 29, no. 2 (1960): 134-135, 139, 142.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 134.

supporters in the North were the upwardly mobile members of the black “middle class” who were, for the most part, sympathetic to Washington’s apparent support for black economic nationalism.<sup>126</sup>

Meier offered a caveat: Washington’s rhetoric was slippery. Sometimes, as when he spoke to the League, he promoted black economic nationalism. On other occasions, he argued that black participation in the greater market economy would lead to racial interdependence and a gradual erosion of racial tension. Meier explained this disparate rhetoric in terms of the sectional differences of Washington’s audiences. While black entrepreneurs in the North were marketing their skills solely to blacks, in the South their black counterparts continued to service whites. Meier thus explained one of Washington’s rhetorical contradictions in terms of his response to sectional differences.<sup>127</sup>

Several conclusions were implicit in Meier’s arguments. Far from appealing to all blacks, Washington’s economic nationalism largely appealed to northern black entrepreneurs. He won their approval not because his philosophy was original, but because he “appropriated the symbols of American individualism and social Darwinism to explain and rationalize their social role.” Finally, because many of these individuals rose from the middle to the upper class by the 1920s, it can be assumed that the philosophy they shared with Washington was of personal benefit to them, if not to the race as a whole. However, it is doubtful whether blacks in the South benefited similarly from Washington’s advocacy of economic interdependence. Meier concluded that, in any case, Washington’s economic program of uplift only benefited a minority of blacks.<sup>128</sup>

Of the articles on Washington published in *The Journal of Negro History*, Donald J. Calista’s 1964 essay, “Booker T. Washington: Another Look,” was the most sympathetic to that date. He felt that historians writing after 1915 placed too much blame on Washington because they “refused to accept responsibility for their own generation’s failure to eradicate racial strife.” He maintained that Washington’s philosophy was a response to the hardships Southern blacks faced during the Progressive Era, arguing that if historians would examine Washington in the context of his times, they would realize that “there was a drastic difference between Washington’s public pronouncements and his private activity.” Believing that

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<sup>126</sup>August Meier, “Negro Class Structure and Ideology in the Age of Booker T. Washington,” *Phylon* 23, no. 3 (1962): 259-260.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 625.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 226.

Washington should not be judged by later standards, he attempted to place Washington's philosophy within the context of the era.<sup>129</sup>

In the age of Washington, Calista wrote, "despair gripped the nation," and "at the very bottom of the economic heap Negroes suffered most and miserably." The failure of Reconstruction, the collapse of Populism, and the Republican Party's abandonment of blacks left them without political recourse or leadership. Calista maintained that having experienced these events, Washington concluded that reform must come from within, not from the upper echelons in Washington D.C. Washington rose to prominence because his timing in presenting his bottom-up philosophy was impeccable; at the time of the Atlanta speech, Americans, and blacks in particular, were pining for just such a solution. According to Calista, the Atlanta speech "provided a vehicle for Negroes to maintain their basic faith in American democracy," allowing them the ability to boast that they were at least "in a bargaining position with the white world in the 1890's." Calista explained away the controversial points in the speech as a strategic gambit; "Washington fancied himself a tactician," he wrote, while men like Du Bois "possessed a trait of tactlessness."<sup>130</sup>

Calista also believed that when societal conditions changed towards the end of his life, Washington adapted, increasingly advocating militant opposition to white supremacy. Calista wrote: "When the South viciously broke its half of a gentleman's agreement Washington tore into the region's faithlessness. Death cut him down before his full strength could be marshaled against the South."<sup>131</sup>

Rather than being an accommodator, Calista believed that Washington prudently responded to societal conditions in the era that historian Rayford Logan called the nadir of the free blacks' experience in America. Still, Calista was not a Washington ideologue. In fact, he anticipated the major historiographic question that would emerge in the twenty-first century: Was Washington's philosophy a prudent response to the time, or was he indeed an accommodationist?

In her 1966 essay in *Phylon*, "The Rhetorical Strategy of Booker T. Washington," Jane Gottschalk analyzed Washington's "Sunday Evening Talks" to his students at Tuskegee. Samuel Spencer's influence on Gottschalk's thought was unmistakable; she explained Washington in terms of the Protestant Ethic and Social Darwinism and cited Spencer's

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<sup>129</sup>Donald J. Calista, "Booker T. Washington: Another Look," *The Journal of Negro History* 49, no. 4 (1964): 240.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, 242-243, 245-246, 248, 253.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 255.

biography as proof. She concluded that Washington's advocacy of these values and his paternalistic tone led his students astray. Gottschalk noted that Washington spoke to the student body every Sunday evening in an attempt to teach them the virtues of individualism, hard work, and self-help. She associated these values with Social Darwinism because Washington presented competition in the marketplace as beneficial. Gottschalk was suspicious of capitalism, stating that Washington "underestimated . . . the results of competition—which can include fear and anxiety instead of approval toward a race that has not competed before."<sup>132</sup>

Gottschalk also criticized the "overall paternal" manner Washington adopted when preaching to his students. She wrote that in his Sunday Evening talks, "There are none of the humorous anecdotes . . . or the telling metaphors characteristic of his other public utterances. A father does not entertain when he is counseling, and direct admonition of a practical nature does not warrant figurative language." Like an overbearing and ambitious father, Washington placed the "emotional responsibility" on his students "to do something for their individual future and the future of their race." Gottschalk felt Washington's admonition was not a realistic demand, but an unbearable emotional pressure.<sup>133</sup>

Gottschalk herself came across as patronizing to Washington's students. She wrote that his rhetoric appealed to them because they were "unsophisticated youth of the rural South who were without a cultural heritage that included independence and education." Washington's "persuasion," she continued, "was directed to those who had neither good birth nor wealth and who could only aspire to have it." Despite their voluntary association with the Tuskegee Institute, and without discussing the accomplishments of any Tuskegee alumni, Gottschalk implied that in their ignorance, they followed Washington blindly.<sup>134</sup>

Gottschalk's essay was openly ideological. She cast Washington as a crass materialist who stifled the nobler, more human, longings of his students: "The economic emphasis of Washington's Sunday evening talks . . . ignored the aspirational and idealistic qualities of youth. . . . Yet strong desire is characteristic of youth, and honor and ideals frequently mean more to them than money." In her condemnation of industrial education, she echoed Du Bois. She wrote: "Washington might have added motivation that was stronger and goals that were more idealistic. . . . Stronger than a goal of

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<sup>132</sup>Jane Gottschalk, "The Rhetorical Strategy of Booker T. Washington," *Phylon* 27, no. 4 (1966): 390, 395.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 391-393.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 393, 395.

gaining the respect of white people is that of self-respect as a human being.” Gottschalk missed Washington’s point, that it is hard to make a philosopher or artist out of a starving person.<sup>135</sup>

By the end of 1960, several articles on Washington had appeared in journals devoted to black history. The tone in these essays varied from the heated, like Walden and Gottschalk’s article, to the objective, like Meier and Rudwick’s articles. However, all contained an implicit appeal for a political struggle for civil rights.

Calista alone offered sympathetic argument. His of the dismal conditions under which Washington operated raised a cogent challenge to the critical paradigm. Interestingly, in the years between Calista’s writing and the turn of the century, historians spent little time investigating these constraints. However, Calista should be credited for anticipating by fifty years the major historiographic challenge that would be launched against the critical paradigm by historians such as David Jackson, Robert Norrell, and Michael Bieze.

That an article was published in a particular journal did not necessarily predict the tone that article would adopt. *The Journal of Negro History* published Walden’s scathing essay but it also published Meier’s article on Washington’s relationship with the black press (arguably Meier’s most sympathetic essay) and Calista’s contextual essay. Similarly, though Meier’s essay on Washington and the NAACP was published in the NAACP’s journal, *The Crisis*, and though his other essays appeared in *Phylon*, a publication founded by Du Bois, there was no loss of academic rigor. White-dominated journals too began to show interest in Washington scholarship. Meier’s compelling reinterpretation of Washington earned him publication in the prestigious *Journal of Southern History*. But regardless of tone or venue of publication, all these essays were united in their rejection of hagiographic stereotypes and their advocating open political protest for civil rights, an approach which differed markedly from Washington’s.

#### AUGUST MEIER DEFINES THE CRITICAL PARADIGM

In 1966, The University of Michigan Press published August Meier’s *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* which analyzed the cultural, political, and social milieu in black America. The book spent significant time expanding upon his previous writings on Washington. An updated version of the doctoral dissertation he submitted to Columbia University, in

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 395.



terms of Washington scholarship, Meier's research was more comprehensive than that of any other scholar to that date. Whereas Spencer failed to provide even rudimentary citations, Meier consulted around twelve hundred titles, examined Washington's papers in the Library of Congress, made use of newspapers, and consulted hundreds of books and pamphlets written during the period. Furthermore, Meier interviewed Du Bois, who offered "recollections of individuals and events." As George B. Tindall, a contemporary reviewer, remarked in *The Journal of Southern History*, "No brief summary can do justice to the diversity of information presented by Professor Meier, much of it new." Because Meier's work evidenced a deep understanding of black thought, some uninformed readers assumed the author was black.<sup>136</sup>

Meier began by examining how postwar social thought affected black mindsets. Black thinkers and leaders during Reconstruction, he noted, were devoted to both civil rights and economic advancement via entrepreneurship. They "absorbed well the regnant American economic myth," that progress would proceed from the bottom up. However, after the Compromise of 1877, because whites embraced a "new imperialism" and Social Darwinism, Southern blacks faced increasing discrimination, including segregated schools, railroads, and facilities; inequitable administration of the law; a corrupt convict lease system; and lynchings.<sup>137</sup>

Meier also discussed Woodward's thesis, stating that the sectional relations of the era were characterized by a spirit of "reconciliation and nationalism." This exacerbated the plight of blacks, Meier wrote, because Northerners began ignoring Southern treatment of blacks in order to keep the peace. Many "even came to justify it." The alliance between the North and South resulted in rapid industrialization, and this "New South" left blacks behind: "Northern capitalists, allied with and dominating Southern industry, not only found Negro votes unnecessary, but were interested in securing a stable, semiskilled labor force with which to exploit Southern resources and develop Southern industry." Most blacks were thus forced into "menial occupations," often agricultural in nature. Still, blacks largely followed the ideological trends of their era. The majority accepted the "economic, materialistic, laissez-faire, and Social Darwinist cast of late nineteenth-century American thought," Meier said. They adopted this "gospel of wealth" and strove to "successfully [run] the race of Social Darwinist competition." Hence, in the 1880s and 1890s, the acceptance of competition led to an overall resurgence of black cultural nationalism, although, Meier noted, blacks were never completely ethnocentric or absolutely separatist. Most, like

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<sup>136</sup>August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), vii, 280-282. George B. Tindall, review of *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington*, by August Meier, *The Journal of Southern History* 30, no. 2 (1964): 236. Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 298.

<sup>137</sup>Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, 15-16, 19-20, 22.

Washington, believed that economic and moral development would prove prejudice unfounded and facilitate eventual assimilation into white American culture. Others believed assimilation impossible and embraced a form of cultural pluralism that maintained that the various races could contribute in different ways to America, so long as all were afforded equal justice under the law. However, even the cultural pluralists, while sometimes advocating “voluntary” segregation, campaigned against legal segregation. Meier concluded that, though many blacks argued for the prudential suspension of the pursuit of political rights, none believed that civil rights should be permanently curtailed. He noted that the protest tradition survived, as was demonstrated by black national and state conventions and by “universal protest against lynchings and other forms of mass violence.”<sup>138</sup>

Meier incorporated his conclusions concerning black social thought into the debate over the meaning of Washington’s work and ideas. He suggested that Washington’s popularity was not due to original thought, but to his ability to channel the cultural *zeitgeist*. For this reason, Meier criticized the “commonly believed” notion that Washington was the progenitor of industrial education in America.<sup>139</sup> Meier noted that, prior to Washington, the idea of industrial education originated with European educational theorists such as Pestalozzi and Fellenberg and gained popularity in postwar America because of its harmony with the Protestant Ethic. Meier added that industrial education was an imprecise concept, “as to both its content and purpose,” thereby defying easy categorization and leading to misunderstandings and caricatures concerning its nature. For example, some historians felt industrial education part of the robber barons’ conspiracy to produce a subordinate black labor force. Meier maintained that while this was the motive of some white leaders, others honestly believed industrial education would uplift and enrich the laboring classes. Washington certainly viewed it in light of the second theory. Furthermore, Meier pointed out that most Americans, Washington included, believed that both industrial and liberal education were valuable. He maintained that ideological conflict between the two schools of educational theory arose because they competed for state and philanthropic funds. Meier concluded that, in his promotion of industrial education, Washington followed, rather than set, the ideological trends of the era.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 20-24, 41, 51, 53, 69, 71-72, 82, 170-171.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 95. Meier was, perhaps, overstating his case when he used the phrase “commonly believed,” as H.L. Swint, a reviewer in *The Journal of Negro Education* and a professor at Vanderbilt University, pointed out. Swint noted that the historical community was well aware that “the manual-labor college” was already popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. H. L. Swint, review of *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington*, by August Meier, *The Journal of Negro Education* 35, no. 1 (1966): 73.

<sup>140</sup>Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, 85-86, 89-90, 95, 97.

Echoing Woodward, Meier maintained that industrial education appealed to blacks because it facilitated a compromise that afforded them room to develop during the nadir in their history. Industrial education, Washington and many others believed, “would buy Southern good will and Northern philanthropy” while carving out an economic space in which blacks could develop monetarily and morally in preparation for full assimilation into American society. Northern capitalists praised Washington’s “Compromise of 1895” because they “felt a sense of *noblesse oblige* and wanted a supply of trained labor available for the industrialization of the South.” Conservative white Southerners felt that industrial education maintained a barrier between the social strata. Washington’s Atlanta speech and his subsequent work earned near-universal acclaim because it promised a solution without sacrificing the aspirations of the three competing claims. Meier, however, saw a dark side in the Atlanta compromise: Washington too often “appealed to the highest sentiments and motives of whites” while brushing over “their prejudices and injustices.” He simultaneously blamed blacks for their economic and moral status.<sup>141</sup>

Because Washington’s philosophy was based on compromise, Meier felt the accommodationist label appropriate. However, he argued that Washington’s compromise was not without purpose. Meier returned to the theme of his 1957 essay, that Washington secretly opposed racial injustice. He chronicled the ways in which Washington opposed disfranchisement legislation and racially prejudiced state constitutional amendments, how he secretly funded efforts against railroad segregation, and how he doled out patronage. Meier presented Washington’s accommodationism as both an attempt to carve out a sphere for black economic development and as a façade to cover his secret opposition to end discrimination.<sup>142</sup>

Also, as in his earlier essay on Washington’s relationship with the black press, Meier argued that Washington maintained his power by serving as the intermediary between philanthropists and the black recipients of their charity. Not only did his monetary control grant him leverage over newspapers, but it also ensured his influence over churches and schools. This partially explained Washington’s extensive influence over black affairs: “Office seekers and money-hungry newspapers, schools that need funds, ministers” convinced “themselves of [his] correctness—in order to ensure their own success.” Others experienced “a sort of ideological opportunism,” accepting any solution that purported to ameliorate blacks’ plight. Still, Meier suggested that Samuel Spencer went too far in calling Washington a “benevolent despot.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 93, 99, 101, 105-106, 117.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 110-113.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 114-115, 166-167.

Meier criticized Washington's treatment of his black opponents. He chronicled Washington's tactics, including his use of spies to undermine his enemies. As in his earlier essay, "Booker T. Washington and the Rise of the NAACP," Meier noted that Washington extended more charity to fair-weather friends such as Theodore Roosevelt and Robert C. Ogden than to blacks who shared his ultimate goals, such as Du Bois. Meier concluded: "It would appear to this author that a large part of Washington's motivation was his desire for power." He added a caveat, stating that a desire for power does not necessarily denote "insecurity or hypocrisy." "It is usually hard to distinguish where altruism ends and self-interest begins," he added. Meier also offered sympathy to Washington's opponents. He maintained that the work of these "prominent liberals" resulted in the creation of the NAACP, "the most effective organization yet established for the agitation of Negro rights." Understandably, Meier stated, the impetus behind their organizing was "resentment" over Washington's immense power and discouragement with the lack of success during the years that his ideology reigned. "The reform spirit of the Progressive Era" made Washington's decline and the ascendance of the protestors inexorable. Meier concluded that Washington's solutions appeared increasingly outmoded as the political and cultural climate swung in the direction of open protest in the late 1900s and early 1910s. Hence, nothing Washington could have done would have prevented the rise of his opposition.<sup>144</sup>

Meier also expanded on the economic criticisms of Washington he offered in his essay on Mound Bayou. Unlike Gottschalk, Meier admitted that most of Tuskegee's alumni succeeded economically. He denied, however, that Washington's philosophy resulted in similar success across black America. In fact, while industrial education was in vogue, overall black participation in the economy and net wealth declined. This was because, Meier explained, industrial education equipped blacks with "skills that were being outmoded by the progress of the industrial revolution and preparing them for lives as small individualistic entrepreneurs at a time when the philosophy of economic individualism was becoming obsolete." Furthermore, despite their embrace of competition, Hampton and Tuskegee failed to offer blacks the requisite skills "for effective competition in an industrial age." Another vain hope was Washington's expectation that black success would temper white supremacy; rather, racism gained ground, thereby depriving blacks of white customers. Coupled with the fact that white unions squeezed out blacks, Washington's claims of economic progress were illusory.<sup>145</sup>

Contemporary reviewers thought *Negro Thought in America* an excellent work. Though all agreed with Meier's analysis, they disagreed on how his narrative applied to the current Civil Rights struggle. George Tindall was one of the

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 115-116, 165-166, 184.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 93, 163, 166.

more sympathetic reviewers; from his reading of Meier's book he concluded that "out of their very separation [from white society and politics], American Negroes had painfully evolved a nascent sense of solidarity, self-help, and self-realization." Tindall added, "The style, unfortunately, is somewhat stiff." Charles Walker Thomas's review in *The Journal of Negro History* approved of the work but admitted, "All in all, the book presents a dismal outlook. But this is not unusual for cultural history in a world in which the incidence of social and political evil is what is in ours." He added, "One bright note of hope [in the book] should not be overlooked: the recognition accorded the emergence of the N.A.A.C.P." Other reviewers wished for a more inspiring narrative. H. L. Swint, who was otherwise laudatory, wrote in *The Journal of Negro Education*: "His account is a matter-of-fact recital. . . . The drama, the heat, the tensions of this important era are missing. I do not advocate polemical pyrotechnics, but it seems to be that Dr. Meier . . . failed to take advantage of the dramatic, yet very sound, material available to him."<sup>146</sup>

While all these reviewers valued Meier's content and analysis, they clearly desired, at least to one degree or another, an inspiring, dramatic tale, useful in the age of Civil Rights. Meier, on the other hand, looked back on *Negro Thought in America* in 1986 and said that he deliberately adopted "a dispassionate stance and consciously compartmentalized his careers as activist and scholar, believing that the historian's task was to analyze and understand the past rather than make value judgments about it." Thus he felt compelled "to deal in a neutral way with both Du Bois, whom he admired, and with Booker T. Washington, whom he did not."<sup>147</sup>

The wide acceptance of the critical paradigm strongly suggests that Meier was successful in this venture. Until the contextual paradigm emerged in the 2000s, the majority of Washington scholars accepted the idea that Washington's philosophy represented a compromise between blacks, Southern whites, and Northern industrialists. This compromise, they agreed, originated in a widespread acceptance of the regnant New South ideology and its accompanying capitalist ethos. Furthermore, subsequent scholars accepted that Washington's secret life was primarily a self-interested attempt to preserve his personal power and prestige. Meier, more than any other scholar, shaped the course of Washington scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>146</sup>Tindall, 237. Charles Walker Thomas, review of *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, by August Meier, *The Journal of Negro History* 49, no. 4 (1964): 280. Swint, 74.

<sup>147</sup>Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 283.

## THE OBSOLESCENCE OF THE HAGIOGRAPHIC PARADIGM

In the years immediately following the release of Meier's work, the arguments of Washington apologists appeared increasingly idiosyncratic and absurd as the Woodward-Meier paradigm came to dominate Washington scholarship.

"Booker T. Washington's autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, and Gandhi's autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, are, in my opinion, the finest expression of the triumph of the human spirit," wrote Naren Tambe in his 1967 essay, "Booker T. Washington and Mahatma Gandhi as Educationists," in the *Peabody Journal of Education*. A decade earlier, Oliver Cox argued that Washington collaborated with an "occupying force." Tambe reached the opposite conclusion, stating that Washington, like Gandhi, orchestrated a peaceful resistance to an oppressive regime.<sup>148</sup>

Tambe wrote that the situation blacks faced after Reconstruction resembled the Indians' relationship with colonial England: "British rule in India had completely shattered the economic system and the Indians had lost their social soul." Forced to deal with upper classes that hindered economic and political development, both Washington and Gandhi were genius in their promotion of "individual and social education" as a possible solution for the oppressed masses. Tambe highlighted similarities in their educational programs: "Gandhi and Washington both de-emphasized bookish education and stressed practical education to meet individual and social needs. Gandhi talked of 'craft-centered' education."<sup>149</sup>

Though Tambe may be excused for neglecting to consider *Negro Thought in America* as it was published shortly before his essay, he demonstrated no awareness of other previous scholarship. Woodward's book and Meier's earlier essays argued that Washington's popularity resulted from his ability to vocalize popular myths such as the Social Gospel, the Protestant Ethic, and industrial education. Ignoring these considerations, Tambe argued that Washington, like Gandhi, was a "great educational rebel." Like Scott and Stowe, Tambe quoted Washington's famous "separate as the fingers" metaphor, and concluded, quite counterintuitively and with no explanation, that this quote proves Washington "firmly believed in cooperation between the two races." Tambe further asserted that Washington's pragmatic philosophy directly influenced the thinking of John Dewey; this was a dubious proposition with little evidence to back it, so Tambe was reduced to citing an obscure essay written by a Washington sympathizer as proof.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Naren Tambe, "Booker T. Washington and Mahatma Gandhi as Educationists," *Peabody Journal of Education* 45, no. 2 (1967): 94.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 96-97.

Both Cox and Tambe compared the American system to colonial domination though they disagreed about Washington's place within this social order. Cox called Washington a collaborator; Tambe concluded that great educators and leaders "like Washington and Gandhi do not belong to one nation, they belong to humanity."<sup>151</sup> Had Tambe struck a less triumphal tone, and engaged in scholarly research—his essay's "bibliography" contained only nine sources—he might have offered valuable insights into colonial power structures and their racial analogies in American society. However, the essay was a virtual canonization of Washington.

In her 1968 essay in *The Journal of Negro History*, "Booker T. Washington as Seen by his White Contemporaries," Emma Thornbrough attempted to determine whether Washington's prescriptions for black uplift were efficacious not by examining Washington's intent, as many previous historians had, but by analyzing how his words were received by white audiences. Her conclusions were unforgiving.<sup>152</sup>

Emma Lou Thornbrough was born in 1913 in Indianapolis and completed her doctorate in 1946 at the University of Michigan. She earned the distinction of being "the first white woman to publish a scholarly monograph in black history and to devote her scholarly career to this specialty." Thornbrough eventually joined the NAACP. Writing in 1986, August Meier suggested that her minority status as a woman in a male-dominated profession afforded her sympathy for oppressed minorities, particularly blacks.<sup>153</sup>

In her essay, Thornbrough subscribed to the critical paradigm, arguing that Washington's popularity resulted from his ability to verbalize the myths of the era and to present a compromise that satisfied the aspirations of both Northern and Southern whites. Because both sections were able to join in support of Washington, residual tension from the Civil War receded, at least to some degree. In Thornbrough's telling, in the North Washington's philosophy harmonized so closely with the ideology of white philanthropists "that their speeches and writings frequently sound like paraphrases of each other." Many in the North believed that Washington's program was preparing blacks for greater integration into American society. Meanwhile, Southerners interpreted Washington to mean that "the Negro's salvation lay in hard work, remaining in the South, acquiring property, and abstaining from aspirations to political or social equality." These Southerners saw him as

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>152</sup>Emma L. Thornbrough, "Booker T. Washington as Seen by his White Contemporaries," *The Journal of Negro History* 53, no. 2 (1968), 161.

<sup>153</sup>Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 149-150.

essentially conservative, interested in preserving the *status quo*. (Thornbrough noted that some Southern white supremacists, Thomas Dixon for example, agreed with the Northerners' conclusion that Washington desired racial integration. This was their reason for rejecting his compromise and for their vitriolic attacks on him.) Despite these disparate interpretations, Thornbrough highlighted the aspects of Washington's rhetoric that appealed to whites of both sections. For example, both Northerners and Southerners appreciated Washington's earthy charm and his common-sense anecdotes, and both applauded his apparent devaluation of black political participation. Thornbrough concluded that Washington successfully assuaged the guilty consciences of whites of both sections, exonerating them from any sense of responsibility, while placing the burden of finding solutions on black shoulders.<sup>154</sup>

To this point, Thornbrough's essay was merely a restatement of Woodward and Meier's arguments. However, Thornbrough was less willing to adopt Meier's conclusion that Washington covertly opposed white supremacy. While she admitted that he "consistently condemned lynching and mob violence," she added a caveat: "His criticism of whites was always phrased in conciliatory tones and so sandwiched in between other passages that both whites and Negroes tended to overlook it." Indeed, his tepid response to racial injustice won him favor with many whites who were uninterested in crusading for civil rights. Remember, the point of Thornbrough's essay was to analyze Washington through the eyes of his white contemporaries. To her, Washington's covert challenges to racism were less important than the fact that his rhetoric constantly reaffirmed prejudice in his white audience, largely rendering his covert activities impotent and insignificant. Furthermore, while Meier was unwilling to accuse Washington of being disingenuous, Thornbrough intimated that Washington's accommodation benefited him personally, gaining him power and prestige. Thornbrough ended her essay with a tale intended to illustrate this point:

At a World Sunday School convention which was held in Washington, D.C. in 1910, Negro American delegates were barred from participating in a parade, and Negro delegates from Washington were not seated on the floor of the convention. But, according to a newspaper account, 'all the wrinkles' arising over this unpleasantness were 'smoothed out' when the convention voted to confer a life membership on Booker T. Washington. . . . And, so far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no record that Washington demurred in any way over accepting the honor or that he raised any questions over the treatment of Negro delegates.

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<sup>154</sup>Thornbrough, 163, 166-169, 178, 181.



Thornbrough concluded that because most whites of the era were uninterested in black progress, and because they generally viewed Washington as, in the words of Andrew Carnegie, “the combined Moses and Joshua of his people,” Washington’s alliance with them was a betrayal of blacks.<sup>155</sup>

There remained, however, historians who disputed Thornbrough’s judgment. While pursuing his Ph.D. at the University of Denver, in 1969 John P. Flynn published an article titled “Booker T. Washington: Uncle Tom or Wooden Horse” in *The Journal of Negro History*. As the title suggests, Flynn investigated whether Washington compromised with or secretly opposed white supremacy.

Flynn began by—inaccurately—critiquing previous Washington scholarship. He accused his predecessors of placing Washington only in the context of “prevalent Black Codes and Jim Crow laws,” while failing to explain him in terms of “the phenomena of the Protestant Ethic and Social Darwinism.” This erroneous historiographical conclusions was almost certainly the result of Flynn’s unbalanced bibliography; he cited several surveys on social thought, black history, and the Protestant Ethic, but only referenced four Washington scholars. Furthermore, Flynn drew heavily and unapologetically on Meier, and incorrectly credited Meier, rather than Spencer, for bringing the Protestant Ethic and Social Darwinism into the debate. Flynn’s arguments suffered egregiously because of these oversights.<sup>156</sup>

Flynn sought to determine whether Washington was a “wooden horse”—a metaphorical Trojan horse who cleverly ingratiated himself with prominent whites in order to sway their racial thinking—or an “uncle tom”—a self-interested accommodationist. Since Meier believed that Washington espoused the Protestant Ethic “as a means, not as an end in itself,” Flynn interpreted him to mean that Washington was a “wooden horse” However, Flynn denied that Meier had settled the debate once and for all. He asserted the impossibility of determining whether Washington “assumed the uncle tom posture in order to exploit the advantages of Darwinist wealth or, as with the wooden horse consideration, he cleverly rolled the legions in on the enemy in the nighttime and awaited future victory.” Still, he conceded that Washington’s means, conciliation and

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 161-162, 175, 182.

<sup>156</sup>John P. Flynn, “Booker T. Washington: Uncle Tom or Wooden Horse,” *The Journal of Negro History* 54, no. 3 (1969): 264-265, 272-273.

accommodation, were probably not geared towards “uncle tom objectives” but rather towards encouraging black success through the inculcation of the Protestant Ethic and Social Darwinism.<sup>157</sup>

Despite this concession, Flynn’s was not a sympathetic conclusion. He lamented the fact that minorities “are still subjected to the invidious comparisons of Social Darwinism and the supra-cultural mandates of the Protestant ethic.” Thus he concluded that whether or not Washington was an Uncle Tom, Washington’s means—promotion of capitalism and the Protestant Ethic—were detrimental to black uplift. This was a necessary conclusion as Flynn equated capitalism with “the Social Darwinist adoration of competition.” Flynn concluded that it mattered little whether Washington was an Uncle Tom or a wooden horse. Either way, his ideology was damaging to black solidarity and the ultimate goal of integration.<sup>158</sup>

Consideration of the three essays published in scholarly journals in the last half of the 1960s reveals the degree to which Woodward and Meier influenced the terms of the debate. Tambe’s triumphalist comparison of Washington and Ghandi demonstrates that while the critical-minded scholars were crafting increasingly complex criticisms and utilizing new categories such as the Protestant Ethic and Social Darwinism, sympathetic scholars had little new to offer and remained mired in hagiography. Their treatments now appeared laughably outmoded and stale. Both Thornbrough and Flynn took Meier’s arguments for granted, and while they offered some modifications of his thesis, they were content to debate Washington on Meier’s terms. Also, apparent in both their works was the skepticism of capitalism and the focus on political protest of their era.

## EVALUATION

For several reasons the years from 1950 to 1970 saw the refutation of hagiographic treatments of Washington’s life and work.

First, there was a major shift in economic thought. Following the Great Depression and the Second World War, historians and the general public divorced themselves from the earlier acceptance of capitalism. Moderates accepted Keynesian management of the economy by the central government. Writers like Woodward no longer accepted capitalism as

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<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 267, 271.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 266, 271.

desirable. And, as is seen in the writings of individuals like Cox, some intellectuals were influenced by the more radical economic theory of Marx. To this generation of scholars, Washington's faith in free markets appeared hopelessly naive.

Furthermore, having seen the collapse of economic prosperity in the early days of the Depression, this generation placed little faith in bottom-up progress, turning instead to the federal intervention. Black activists and intellectuals and sympathetic whites turned their energies to rallying the federal government for their rights. Thus, Washington's belief in organic development appeared not only misguided, but also a major factor in the long delay of civil rights.

So, between 1950 and 1970 the critical paradigm emerged and dominated Washington scholarship. In economic terms, Washington was viewed as a creature of the laissez-faire economy of his day, a man who naïvely believed in the promises of the Protestant Ethic and accepted the prejudices of Social Darwinism. His accommodation came to be seen as a response to rampant white supremacy; though the verdict was still out on whether this accommodation was beneficial to blacks, most historians suggested it was not. Woodward and Meier successfully argued that Washington's popularity was due not to original genius but to his ability to articulate a compromise between Northerners, Southerners, and blacks.

In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the critical paradigm remained ascendant. Sympathetic historians tried in vain to resuscitate Washington's reputation. Emma Lou Thornbrough's work foreshadowed the way that critical historians grew more scathing in their application of the paradigms. While she adopted the Woodward-Meier explanation for Washington's activities, she went a step further, arguing that Washington actually harmed black progress. This *modus operandi* was adopted by Louis Harlan in his "definitive," and extraordinarily scathing, two-volume biography on Washington. By the end of the 1990s, Harlan's emotionally loaded expansion of the critical paradigm would define Washington's historical memory.

### CHAPTER III: WASHINGTON ON TRIAL, 1970-2000

The Civil Rights movement fundamentally transformed how American scholars wrote about black history. As August Meier pointed out in *Black History and the Historical Profession*, historians writing in the late 1960s and 1970s “found it impossible to sustain a racially prejudiced outlook if they wanted acceptance as intellectuals.” Stated more positively, Pero Dagbovie, a specialist in black history and American historiography, pointed to the “serious academic intrigue and excitement” regarding black history during this period. And as Meier argued, the Civil Rights movement inspired historians to adopt a more activist stance in their scholarship. This was a symptom of what he described as a general “ideological shift to the left,” which resulted in an intellectual awakening “to the whole question of social and economic injustice.” Because civil rights had been won through political activism, historians felt compelled to both prove their ideological commitment to the activist strategies that guided the Civil Rights movement and to protect the gains made.<sup>159</sup>

With this ethos guiding historians in the post-movement era, to them Washington’s philosophy appeared hopelessly outmoded. His conservative economic prescriptions and conciliatory approach to race relations seemed the antithesis of the Civil Rights movements. Historians writing in the 1970s through the 1990s largely accepted the critical paradigm as definitive, though they grew more scathing in their denunciations of Washington. They presented his accommodation not as a tragic mistake, but as a willful attempt to secure his own leadership position, regardless of its effect on black progress. Leading this charge was Louis R. Harlan, who achieved enormous prestige for his role in compiling the fourteen published volumes of *The Booker T. Washington Papers* and for producing a penetrating two-volume biography on Washington. If Woodward and Meier dominated Washington scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s, the remainder of the twentieth century belonged to Harlan. Though he did not construct a new paradigm, he applied the Woodward-Meier paradigm to Washington’s biography and loaded his writings with moral denunciations. Following Harlan’s lead, contemporary historians came to view Washington not just as a tragic failure, but as an enemy of black social and economic progress.

The 1970s and 1980s, according to Peter Novick, were also a time in which the historical profession underwent a period of fragmentation and specialization as historians began exploring their topics in diverse ways. This specialization affected Washington scholarship. For example, though the critical paradigm continued to dominate, a counter-paradigm emerged in seminal form; scholars specialized in educational history began writing about Washington’s educational

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<sup>159</sup>Meier, *Black History and the American Historical Profession*, 180, 193, 199. Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *African American History Reconsidered* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 6.

philosophy. Historians like Alfred Young and Virginia Lantz Denton were less concerned with Washington's political activities than with his educational philosophy and the effects of his pedagogy. Other educational scholars, like James Anderson, demurred, arguing that Washington's educational program had a detrimental effect on black progress. The writings of Young and Denton presaged the educational paradigm that would emerge in the twenty-first century.<sup>160</sup>

The educational historians wrote from within the historical profession, but scholars from other disciplines also turned their attention to Washington. This too was symptomatic of the specialization of the era; Novick writes, "The expansion of history into new realms inevitably involved historians crossing disciplinary boundaries, and members of other disciplines proved no more respectful of historians' territorial claims than historians were of theirs." Because of the influence Washington's autobiographies, it was natural that literary scholars like Raymond Hedin, Roger Breshahan, and David Howard-Pitney turned their attention to his writings. But while the educational scholars largely rejected the critical paradigm, the work of the literary scholars complemented and built upon that paradigm.<sup>161</sup>

Despite the favorable writings of the educational scholars, by the end of the 1990s, a consensus concerning the meaning of Washington's approach to race relations emerged. This consensus accepted the critical paradigm, viewing Washington as a compromiser who accommodated himself to white supremacy and the defunct capitalist system of the age. It also accepted Harlan's argument that Washington, unconcerned with ideology and reform, focused solely on protecting his personal power and prestige. Washington's legacy was placed on trial in the post-Civil Rights era, and the historical community rendered a guilty verdict, finding his actions indefensible.

#### LOUIS HARLAN AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

If the historical community served as the jury in Washington's trial, Louis R. Harlan acted as the prosecuting attorney. Harlan wrote extensively on Washington between 1970 and 2000. He did not construct any new categories for understanding Washington, as Woodward had. Nor was he the first to expose Washington's secret life; Meier had accomplished that. Harlan, however, built upon their works, incorporating their observations into a biographical narrative. Unlike Woodward and Meier, who adopted a level and objective tone whatever their biases may have been, Harlan's writings offered biting condemnations of Washington. Despite his harsh and sometimes injudicious style, Harlan's mastery of the available primary sources on Washington earned him recognition as the foremost Washington scholar of his generation.

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<sup>160</sup>Novick, 580-581.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 584.

Louis Rudolph Harlan was born in 1922 in West Point, Mississippi. During World War II, he enlisted in the Navy, serving as an ensign aboard an amphibious troop carrier during the Allied invasion of Normandy. In his autobiography, *Coming of Age in World War II*, Harlan recalled harboring passively racist attitudes towards blacks during this period of his life. After the war, Harlan entered academia, earning his M.A. in history at Vanderbilt University in 1948 and his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University in 1955. While pursuing his degrees, Harlan overcame his prejudices and adopted a more progressive world view. Harlan attributed this, in part, to C. Vann Woodward, under whom he studied at Johns Hopkins. While enrolled there he also attended a guest lecture by John Hope Franklin. During a post-lecture tête-à-tête, the famous black historian encouraged Harlan to concentrate in Southern history and race relations. That conversation set Harlan on the path that led him to become the leading Washington scholar of his generation. Also in the 1950s, Harlan joined the NAACP and accepted a leadership role in the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. When Martin Luther King, Jr. marched for civil rights in Montgomery, Harlan was present. During this period he began studying Washington, an undertaking that would span three decades. Harlan learned that, before his death in 1955, historian Marquis James had intended to write a definitive biography on Booker T. Washington. Harlan adopted the project. His final product was a two-volume biography on Washington. Each volume received the Bancroft Prize, in 1973 and 1984, respectively. During the same period, Harlan and his co-editor, Raymond Smock, condensed the Washington papers in the Library of Congress into a fourteen volume collection, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. The volumes were published intermittently between 1972 and 1989. Due to his mastery of the source materials and the prolific volume of his writings on Washington, the majority of Harlan's peers recognized him as the most prestigious Washington scholar of the later portion of the twentieth century.<sup>162</sup>

"Perhaps psychoanalysis or role psychology would solve Washington's behavioral riddle, if we could only put him on the couch." Harlan wrote in his 1970 essay, "Booker T. Washington in Biographical Perspective," published in *The American Historical Review*. He contended that there was no coherent ideology underlying Washington's apparent

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<sup>162</sup>"All At Sea: Coming of Age in World War II," *Publishers Weekly* 2/26/1996, available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale Document Number: GALE|A18029326 (accessed 9/9/2015). "Louis R. Harlan," *Contemporary Authors Online* (Detroit: Gale, 2010), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale Document Number: GALE|H1000042389 (accessed 9/9/2015). William Grimes, "Louis Harlan, Historian of Booker T. Washington, Dies at 87," *The New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/30/books/30harlan.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/30/books/30harlan.html?_r=1), 29 Jan. 2010 (accessed 9/9/2015). Matt Schudel, "Louis R. Harlan, 87; Pulitzer-winning Historian of Race Relations," *The Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/28/AR2010012803812.html>, 29 Jan. 2010 (accessed 9/9/2015).

contradictions. The best explanation, he believed, was to be found in Washington's psychological makeup. He elaborated in the caustic tone that characterized his voluminous work on Washington:

If we could remove those layers of secrecy as one peels an onion, perhaps at the center of Booker T. Washington's being would be revealed a person single-mindedly concerned with power, a minotaur, a lion, fox, or Br'er Rabbit, some frightened little man like the Wizard of Oz, or, as in the case of the onion, nothing, a personality disintegrated by the frenzied activity of being all things to all men in a multifaceted society.

Harlan proposed that biographical perspective was the missing key to unlocking the mystery that was Washington.<sup>163</sup>

Harlan's essay began with a historiographic critique, arguing that "in the current vogue of black history Booker T. Washington has been a figure to ignore rather than to grapple with, an anomaly, an embarrassment." He added that Washington was too "complex and enigmatic" a figure to be comprehended by most historians. Harlan's suggestion that Washington was ignored by the historical community was false; historians in the 1960s wrote about him prolifically. Perhaps Harlan was merely trying to justify the relevance of his study. Or perhaps he had not yet mastered the scholarly literature on Washington; the only Washington scholars he acknowledged in his footnotes were Spencer, Woodward, and Meier.<sup>164</sup>

Harlan examined Washington's early life in order to discern how his upbringing shaped his psychology. When Washington was a young boy, his mother was a house servant, and house servants, Harlan claimed, "identified themselves in attitude as well as mutual interest with the master and his family." As a result, house servants, like Washington, had a "softer life and better food" than other slaves. Furthermore, Harlan asserted that because Washington was raised on a small farm rather than a plantation, he "never experienced slavery in its harshest forms." In his autobiographies Washington had described the hardships he endured as a slave. He slept on a dirt floor, lacked proper clothing, did not know his father, and witnessed his uncle's scourging. Harlan dismissed these vignettes, asserting that "Washington probably exaggerated the hardness of his early life . . . in conformity with a literary convention of the success-story genre." Because Washington supposedly experienced slavery in its mildest form, Harlan concluded that, throughout this life, he associated his interests with those of whites. However, Harlan also believed that slavery begat Washington's most ignoble character traits; his habit of secrecy, his shameless self-promotion, and his ruthlessness towards his enemies were traits common to slaves who were forced to compete to survive. Harlan failed to explain why Washington's position as a house slave insulated him from the

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<sup>163</sup>Louis R. Harlan, "Booker T. Washington in Biographical Perspective," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 6 (1970): 1586.

<sup>164</sup>Harlan, "Booker T. Washington in Biographical Perspective," 1581, 1587.

hardships of slavery but not from the negative character traits those hardships too often produced. Throughout his writings, Harlan tended to overemphasize Washington's vices while dismissing his virtues.<sup>165</sup>

Harlan believed that Washington's postbellum relationships with whites taught him precisely the wrong lesson, that "the white paternalist was the black man's only friend." He described Viola Ruffner as a geographically dislocated "New England do-gooder" who threw her "frustrated energies" into training Washington. Unaware that Washington fled their employment several times, Harlan asserted that Washington "lived a thoroughly easy life" with the Ruffners.<sup>166</sup> Similarly, Harlan cast Samuel Armstrong as "the great white father for whom Washington had long been searching." From Armstrong a naïve young Washington imbibed the Protestant Ethic, an ideology which Harlan characterized as an amalgam of cultural, racial, and religious chauvinism. Because of his indoctrination in the dominant social creed, an adult Washington treated powerful white paternalists, like William H. Baldwin, Jr. and Theodore Roosevelt, with a fawning deference.<sup>167</sup>

As a corollary, Harlan added that, like the proverbial house slave, Washington lorded his privileged relationship with whites over other blacks. Harlan described "Boss Washington's" school as "the Tuskegee plantation." He chided Washington for refusing to adequately delegate his authority. The Tuskegee faculty, he noted, dreaded Washington's critical eye and his condescending and imperious memos. On a grander scale, Washington presented himself as a surrogate father to *all* Southern blacks. The "peasant conservatism" he foisted on them paralleled the conservatism of the antebellum master class. Harlan added that because Northern blacks were less likely to be influenced by Washington's conservative ideology, he used his control of philanthropic monies to maintain hegemony over Northern race relations. Harlan's presented Washington as an Uncle Tom writ large.<sup>168</sup>

In the course of his career writing on Washington, Harlan sometimes overstated his case. For example, in his 1970 essay, Harlan evidenced startling confusion on basic Constitutional principles. In his attempt to denigrate Washington, Harlan noted that in 1887 the Tuskegean asked a newspaper editor, Hiram H. Thweatt, to either tone down his radical rhetoric or suspend publication. Harlan accused Washington of "a rather sweeping abandonment of the First Amendment guarantee of free speech." Obviously, the First Amendment was intended to prevent the *federal government* from stifling speech.

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<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 1587-1588, 1595.

<sup>166</sup>To his credit, Harlan corrected this inaccuracy in the first volume of his Washington biography.

<sup>167</sup>Harlan, "Booker T. Washington in Biographical Perspective," 1588-1590, 1598-1599.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 1582, 1584-1585.



Washington's request for silence or discretion, however tasteless, misguided, or coercive it may have been, did not violate the First Amendment.<sup>169</sup>

Harlan's next published work on Washington, "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," appeared a year later in *The Journal of Southern History*. As in his earlier essay, he failed to engage with previous research on Washington, though he did cite August Meier and Emma Lou Thornbough. His essay did cite, however, a remarkable number of primary sources, largely drawn from Washington's correspondence. Though the tone of "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington" was less severe, Harlan's thesis was that Washington, "like the man in the moon . . . had his dark side, a secret life in which he could cast off the restraints of conventional morality . . . and be himself."<sup>170</sup>

Like Woodward, Harlan believed that Washington's Atlanta speech circumscribed his ability to speak or act publically on behalf of blacks. The speech, he wrote, "offered both races a negotiated peace," a peace that "was never actually consummated." After delivering the speech, Washington was forever forced to maintain the appearance that he was upholding the black end of the compromise; thus he always limited his public opinions to those whites would approve.<sup>171</sup>

Harlan agreed with Meier that, despite his compromise, Washington covertly challenged white supremacy. Washington, for example, pleaded with state conventions to reject disfranchisement amendments to their constitutions. But, Harlan added, after they were passed, Washington refused to openly challenge the amendments. Still, Washington *did* travel clandestinely to New Orleans to assist black leaders in launching a test case against a grandfather clause in the Louisiana constitution that allowed poor whites to vote, but not blacks. Similarly, Washington secretly collaborated in a test case challenging an Alabama law prohibiting blacks from serving on juries. In 1902, he funded W.E.B. Du Bois's case against Georgia's railroad discrimination law. Washington also financed the Alonzo Bailey case, which challenged the system of peonage, to its successful conclusion in the Supreme Court. Washington acted aggressively, albeit behind the scenes, to challenge railroad segregation. He met with the president of the Pullman Railroad Company, Robert Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's son, in order to protest segregated train cars. Harlan believed, however, that these hesitant challenges to injustice were belied by Washington's corrupt and self-serving accommodation with white supremacy.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 1593-1594.

<sup>170</sup>Louis R. Harlan, "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 3 (1971): 393, 396, 409.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 393-395.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 396-397, 399-400, 402.

Harlan maintained that Washington expended an inordinate amount of energy fighting his black critics. “[Washington’s] secret actions against his Negro opponents,” he wrote, “showed little forbearance and drew less from the teachings of Jesus than from those of Machiavelli.” Washington responded to his opponents harshly because he viewed “Negro criticism through a distorted personal lens.” His critics, Washington believed, were motivated by jealousy and malice, so he had no qualms about “using ruthless means to retain his power.” On numerous occasions, Washington employed spies, such as Melvin J. Chisum and Clifford H. Plummer, to infiltrate his opponents’ gatherings. Washington even instructed these lackeys to obtain scandalous materials on his opponents; one agent pored over the Atlanta tax records in an attempt to prove that Du Bois failed to pay his poll tax. Because these spies were largely unsuccessful, Washington modified his tactics. He conspired to destroy William Monroe Trotter by suing him for libel. However, Washington desired to keep his name out of the press, so for months he and Emmett Scott scoured newspapers for evidence that Trotter had libeled *someone*. Eventually, Washington convinced William Pickens, a black student at Yale, to sue Trotter; Washington subsidized the case, though, in the end, it had little effect on Trotter. Harlan also revealed a startling episode in which Washington attempted to destroy white liberals who made common cause with his black enemies. A group known as the “Cosmopolitan Club” hosted biracial dinners in New York in order to reinforce solidarity. Though the Club usually met in private, on one occasion they dined at a public restaurant in New York City. Halfway through the meal, reporters burst in and began photographing the diners. The next day, the notoriously racist *New York American* reported: “Social equality and intermarriage between the races were advocated last night at a banquet.” Harlan pointed to convincing evidence that Washington tipped off the reporters. Washington subjected well-meaning whites and his fellow blacks to the vitriol of white supremacists in order to further his own agenda. Harlan demonstrated that far from being the patient and forgiving character presented by the hagiographers, Washington was a man obsessed with preserving his personal power and privilege.<sup>173</sup>

Whereas his 1970 essay relied largely on speculation regarding Washington’s psychological motives, Harlan’s 1971 essay presented events from Washington’s life to support his thesis. “The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington” may be Harlan’s most charitable—or perhaps, more accurately, least uncharitable—writing on Washington. He conceded that: “[Washington] was a man, with all that the name implies of strength and weakness.” Still, his central thesis was that Washington’s efforts benefitted him personally while failing to secure any meaningful gain for blacks: “Washington’s secret life is probably more significant as a revelation of his character than because of its effects.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 403-407, 409, 414-415.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 415-416.

## HAGIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM IN THE EARLY 1970S

The trends in Washington scholarship of the late 1960s continued apace in the early 1970s; serious historians utilized the critical paradigm to produce serious works of scholarship, while sympathetic historians merely repeated the platitudes of the hagiographers. In 1972, Francis Shaw attempted to vindicate Washington of the aspersions purveyors of the critical paradigm cast on him by highlighting Washington's long-term assimilationist goals. Despite his efforts, Shaw offered little more than another rote neo-hagiography. Two years later, Manning Marable published an essay examining Washington's philosophy of compromise in an international context, and he concluded that Washington was not an assimilationist, but a seminal black nationalist. Comparison of Shaw and Marable's essays reveals that while sympathetic historians were unable to craft new ways of looking at Washington, the critical paradigm served as a springboard for further exploration into Washington's life and career.

Francis H. Shaw, a history professor at Oregon State University, attempted to discern Washington's long-term vision for black Americans in his 1972 essay, "Booker T. Washington and the Future of Black Americans," published in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*. Shaw's essay largely strayed from his chosen topic and, in the end, failed to articulate Washington's vision for the future in any meaningful way. From a historiographical perspective, Shaw's work is only valuable when juxtaposed against Harlan's early essays. Both historians neglected to consider the writings of previous Washington scholars, but Harlan's essays remained cogent because of his extensive use of primary source materials. Contrarily, the majority of Shaw's references were quotations from Washington's published works; the only historians he cited were Spencer and Meier, and only in a single footnote. The result was that Shaw's essay, like the writings of the hagiographers, merely echoed Washington's autobiographical propaganda.<sup>175</sup>

The body of Shaw's essay largely strayed from his selected topic—what Washington envisioned for the future—and offered instead a survey of Washington's life and work. In retelling this story, Shaw echoed hagiographers. Washington, he wrote, opposed disfranchisement. He offered no qualification or recognition of Washington's accommodationism. Furthermore, Washington believed, correctly in Shaw's opinion, that blacks bore responsibility for shaping their own destiny.

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<sup>175</sup>Francis H. Shaw, "Booker T. Washington and the Future of Black Americans," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1972): 193.

Disregarding the opinions of the scholars of the previous decade who disagreed, Shaw concluded that “Washington was, in the language of the 1960s, a ‘black power’ advocate,” since he supported constitutional rights for blacks. Shaw answered the question of Washington’s future vision only in the vaguest sense: “Committed to equal treatment under the law, Washington was . . . committed to the two peoples living together in justice.”<sup>176</sup>

Shaw’s analysis did not penetrate beyond the myths Washington propagated in his public writings nor did it challenge the critical paradigm. A half century after the writings of Scott, Stowe, and Riley, sympathetic historians offered little more than repetitions of the platitudes of the hagiographers.<sup>177</sup>

The success of the Woodward-Meier paradigm was due not only to its basis in robust scholarship and its explanatory power, but also to its flexibility. Historians built up the paradigm, examining unexplored aspects of Washington’s life and work. For example, Woodward presented Washington’s ideology as a compromise between industrial interests and the demands of blacks. In his 1974 essay in *Phylon*, “Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism,” historian Manning W. Marable expounded on this observation, demonstrating that several African leaders adopted Washington’s program and compromised with imperial powers, much to the detriment of black progress in Africa.

Marable, a prominent black American scholar who specialized in African history, strongly believed in black nationalism. A decade after writing his essay on Washington, he served as a prime mover behind the formation of the National Black Independent Political Party, a minor party formed in the wake of Ronald Raegan’s election. According to the Party platform, its intent was to “serve the interests of the working class and the poor,” and “actively oppose racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism.” Since Marable supported economic principles diametrically opposed to Washington’s, it is unsurprising that his opinion of Washington was wholly negative.<sup>178</sup>

Marable began by noting that Washington believed that “the uncivilized Negro of Africa could improve himself and his society through individual initiative and the acceptance of Western religion and cosmology.” Washington felt that guidance from black Americans, such as himself, could expedite the acculturation and economic progress of African natives. Marable argued that Washington’s position was rooted in Western chauvinism. He cited Washington: “The natives have

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid., 200, 202, 203, 207.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., 208, c.f. note 32.

<sup>178</sup>Justin J. Corfield, “Marable, Manning,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*, ed. F. Abiola Irele, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t301/e247> (accessed 9/14/2015).

never been educated by contact with the white man in the same way [as black Americans].” Marable was highly critical of Washington’s conservative philosophy and sought to prove its detrimental effects in Africa.<sup>179</sup>

Marable published his essay on Washington while working on his dissertation at the University of Maryland. Since his topic was John Langalibalele Dube, an influential South African educator and the first president of the South African Native National Congress, in his essay he scrutinized Dube’s relationship with Washington. Dube visited Tuskegee in 1897 to receive guidance from Washington. “Dube’s complete adherence to Booker Washington’s philosophy was remarkable,” Marable commented. Dube returned home and made “a pragmatic alliance with white paternalists in South Africa” in an attempt to gain blacks entry into the South African economy and society. “Paralleling Washington’s accommodationist philosophy and black capitalist concepts in America,” Marable wrote, Dube and his followers “appealed to white benevolence, and thus, could not afford to support [the] anti-business or anti-government forces” that were essential to securing social justice. Compromise failed Washington in American and it failed Dube in South Africa. The result of Washington and Dube’s collaboration, Marable concluded, was the silencing of black opposition to capitalist and colonialist exploitation and the persistence of a racially stratified society in South Africa.<sup>180</sup>

Similarly, Marable believed that Washington’s “pro-capitalis[t]” and “pro-colonial” views influenced black leaders in Togo to acquiesce to German colonial interests. Washington convinced the Togolese that peaceful cooperation would result in the progress of both races. According to Marable, the reality was that “moderate protests for biracial opportunity could not abolish racism when the white bourgeois society would only seriously consider revolutionary demands.”<sup>181</sup>

Indeed, Marable’s central criticism of Washington was that his “anti-labor and avowedly capitalist” philosophy made protest for equality practically impossible. Washington, he stated, “attacked socialism, trade-unionism, and leftist politics as detrimental to the fortunes of the black race.” Marable cited Woodward to prove that Washington’s conservative philosophy was to the sole benefit of “Christ-like philanthropists.” Like Woodward, Marable maintained a strict dichotomy between accommodation and activism. His only concession was that, despite its flaws, on both continents Washington’s

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<sup>179</sup>W. Manning Marable, “Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism,” *Phylon* 35, no. 4 (1974): 398-399.

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid.*, 399-401-403.

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*, 398-399, 406.

philosophy encouraged the development of black nationalism. Marable believed black nationalism necessarily produces the class and racial solidarity needed to challenge economic, political, and social inequality.<sup>182</sup>

The essays of Shaw and Marable reveal how a particular historian's view on race relations is shaped by his or her philosophy. Shaw believed Washington a genius for promoting a vision of mutual progress via cooperation between the races. For Shaw, the obstacle to progress was not economic stratification, but legally enforced discrimination which prevented socio-economic assimilation. Washington, Shaw maintained, constantly promoted a universalism that countered white prejudice. Marable, however, believed that capitalism produces adamant economic and racial stratification. For him, any attempts at assimilation were counterproductive, as assimilation with the capitalist system meant a *de facto* acceptance of economic stratification. The solution, he believed, was a revolutionary overturning of the economic order, resulting in the destruction of racism. Black solidarity, rather than interracial cooperation, was the force that would liberate blacks.

#### LOUIS HARLAN AND THE ROOTS OF WASHINGTON'S PSYCHOLOGY

In 1972, Louis Harlan published the first volume of his biography, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*. Washington had died almost sixty years previously, and until Harlan's, no scholarly biography had yet been published. Scott, Stowe, Riley, and Mathews's works were hardly serious scholarship and, for all its virtues, Samuel Spencer's biography was almost too concise, and it lacked footnotes or documentation. Harlan's biography remedied these weaknesses. It was remarkably well-documented, containing references to thousands of Washington's correspondences, publications, and speeches. He also succeeded in exposing the myths in Washington's autobiographies. In this first volume, as he had in his 1970 essay, Harlan undertook to study the origins of Washington's psychological motivations. His assessment of Washington's psychology was almost wholly negative; he wrote, "[Washington] was not an intellectual, but a man of action. Ideas he cared little for. Power was his game, and he used ideas simply as instruments to gain power. Washington's mind as revealed in formal public utterances was a bag of clichés"<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Harlan was so ready to condemn

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 402, 406.

<sup>183</sup>Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), quotation found in the preface which is unpaginated.

Washington that he sometimes went beyond the evidence in asserting Washington's malice. Nonetheless, Harlan crafted what was widely considered the first scholarly Washington biography.

Harlan's first volume, being a biography, adopted a chronological narrative. In the first chapter, he made excellent use of testimony from Washington's immediate family in reconstructing details of Washington's early life. Based on the correspondence of Washington's daughter, Portia, he raised the possibility that Washington's heretofore-unknown father was Ben Hatcher, a local blacksmith. Around the approximate date of Washington's birth, his mother, Jane, ran away from the Burroughses and was taken in by Hatcher. When her enslavers reclaimed her, she was pregnant. Similarly, Harlan cited a former playmate of young Washington's who recalled that Booker's brother, John, "was a good deal cleverer than Booker." Harlan also uncovered testimony from John who claimed that in his autobiographies, Washington appropriated several of John's early life experiences and presented them as his own. Harlan's discovery of these, and other, biographical facts previously unknown to historians, attests to his mastery of the papers in the Library of Congress.<sup>184</sup>

Beyond offering interesting biographical anecdotes, Harlan explored how Washington's experiences as a slave shaped his psychology. He restated the premise of his 1970 essay, that Washington's experience of slavery was relatively mild and he offered further evidence. He noted that four of Washington's nine years as a slave occurred during the Civil War; when the male Burroughses left for war, the slaves were managed by white women "who lacked the power or inclination to exploit [the slaves'] labor as systematically as had the men." Furthermore, according to Harlan, Washington's adherence to the Protestant Ethic may have originated earlier than previously supposed; the slave system inculcated in his enslavers a habits of indolence and apathy, these qualities being the antitheses of the Protestant Ethic. Because he witnessed the idleness of the masterclass, Washington came to view diligence and industry as the path to personal success.<sup>185</sup>

Harlan argued that Washington's acquired his insatiable ambition during his employment in the Ruffner household. Correcting a mistake in his 1970 essay, Harlan noted that while Washington claimed his employment was untroubled, Viola Ruffner recalled that Washington left her employ "a half dozen times." Adding to the points he made in his earlier essay, Harlan described the origins of Washington's ambition:

Behind his desire to please [Viola Ruffner] burned an ambition to escape the toil and poor rewards of the miners and salt packers and to live a life of his own more like that of the Ruffners. Even this early there were two Booker Washingtons, the public one eager to please others, and the private one with purposes of his own.

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid., 1 5-6, 14-15.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 21-22.

Furthermore, because the Ruffners treated Washington with dignity and helped him gain valuable experience, Washington came to believe that “the white paternalist was the black man’s only friend.” Harlan ventured into conjecture when he stated that during this period Washington dreamed of becoming “a congressman, governor, or even President.” He offered no quotation or footnote to corroborate this claim. In Harlan’s narrative, by the time he left the Ruffners’ employ, Washington had already developed an unshakable devotion to the Protestant Ethic and a naïve trust in white benefactors.<sup>186</sup>

If Washington found a surrogate mother in Viola Ruffner, in Samuel Armstrong he “found the white father figure he had perhaps unconsciously been searching for.” Harlan believed Washington’s mentor was a profoundly bad influence. Harlan highlighted Armstrong’s racist assumptions, noting that he happily accepted the end of Reconstruction because he disapproved of “its egalitarian tendencies.” Harlan was similarly critical of Hampton’s pedagogy, which he believed produced “workers and peacemakers, not soldiers or militant political leaders.” Some of Harlan’s criticisms of Washington’s Hampton career were mere speculation. For example, Washington paid his way through Hampton by serving as a janitor; of this, Harlan said: “Though other Hampton students worked at the institute farm, Booker was content to stay at the Big House close to the white teachers. There he could study their movements, moods, and trains of thought.” Harlan did not provide primary source evidence to prove this point. Furthermore, while it is a well-known fact that Washington held a reverential admiration for Armstrong, Harlan felt the need to explain away the one instance in which Washington opposed Armstrong. When Armstrong vetoed the ruling of a student court he had promised to defer to, students signed a petition of protest. Washington’s name was on the list, but because it was near the bottom, Harlan speculated that Washington was “hesitant” to challenge Armstrong. It is also logically possible that Washington was simply one of the last students approached with the petition. Harlan’s chapter on Washington’s time at Hampton reveals the confidence he placed in his own assessment of Washington’s psychology.<sup>187</sup>

After graduating from Hampton, Washington, in Harlan’s account, lacked purpose. Immediately after graduation, Washington did “what he would later spend his life warning black men against”—he went North. Serving as a waiter in Saratoga Spring, New York, Washington acquired “the worshipful manner toward the wealthy that later filled the coffers of his school.” Dissatisfied with the menial nature of his work, Washington cast about “for a suitable career that would give purpose and scope to his . . . thirst for power and gift for manipulating others.” At this point, Harlan pointed to an interesting

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<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 42, 45, 47-48

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 52, 56, 63, 73-74.



omission in *Up from Slavery*. In the autobiography, Washington stated that he considered a political career but neglected to mention that he explored the possibility of becoming a lawyer. This was, perhaps, because he sought to warn readers away from political involvement, presenting himself as the exemplar. By neglecting to mention his consideration of other careers, Washington made his rejection of politics appear more purposeful. In reality, as a recent graduate, Washington was, in Harlan's words, merely "tossed about in a fevered search" for meaning until Armstrong offered him a position as principal of the Tuskegee Institute.<sup>188</sup>

In Harlan's telling, Washington began manipulating those around him as soon as he arrived in Tuskegee. Before taking up his duties as principal, Washington visited Tuskegee residents, making friends, black and white. During this public relations campaign, according to Harlan, Washington "sense[d] his own power to move and direct others, black and white, toward what he wanted them to do." Considering Washington's original curriculum, Harlan speculated that Washington rejected liberal education in favor of hands-on "industrial education" in order to cynically exploit "cheap student labor for the building of the institution." Interestingly, *on the same page*, Harlan contradicted this assertion, noting that "Washington actually overstated the industrial offering of the school" as most classes were academic or normal courses. Washington's success in pacifying the local whites and his use of student labor resulted in a school that was insulated from the harsh realities of Southern life. "In the middle of their own little city," Harlan wrote, "entirely enveloped by a black institution designed to sustain them," the students and faculty of Tuskegee "sometimes forgot that they lived in a hostile social environment." As proof Harlan noted that by the end of the 1880s, Washington flew an American flag on campus, in contravention of Southern antipathy for the flag. And later in the book, Harlan offered a contradictory supposition, suggesting that Washington spent excessive time in the North because he wanted to avoid "the tight constrictions of life in the South." Harlan's contradictions evidenced his desire to transform every incident from Washington's life into an indictment.<sup>189</sup>

The Thomas Harris affair also seemed to demonstrate that Tuskegee's security was balanced on a razor's edge, yet Harlan ignored these implications, focused instead on attacking Washington. In June of 1895, white residents of Tuskegee violently attacked Thomas Harris, a black lawyer residing in Tuskegee, complaining that he openly challenged segregation. Bleeding, Harris fled to the Tuskegee Institute and sought asylum. Harlan recounted what occurred next: "Washington's

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<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 79, 92, 96.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 118-119, 140, 160-161, 164, 232.

response was characteristically devious. He appeased the local whites by publically seeming to turn the man away, while privately like a house servant fooling the master he helped the man to safety and a doctor.” While Harlan admitted that “Washington came out of the Harris affair with some honor,” he added, “The incident unquestionably deepened Washington’s commitment to a life of duplicity, the only kind of life by which he could achieve his goals of power, influence, and security.” “What would happen,” Harlan asked, when Washington “used the same secret method to pursue his other goals, including attack on his black brothers rather than their rescue?” Even when recounting Washington’s more noble moments, Harlan manufactured cause for criticism.<sup>190</sup>

Harlan did, however, engage in a lengthy and thoughtful analysis of Washington’s participation in the Atlanta Exposition. He demonstrated that, outside of Tuskegee, Washington was virtually unknown before the speech. The conservative organizers of the Exposition selected him to speak over other equally qualified blacks because they saw him “as a ‘safe’ Negro counselor.” Furthermore, while Washington declared that the white managers of the Exposition treated blacks fairly, this was clearly not the case. Washington ignored that black exhibits at the Exposition were housed in a segregated building. Nor did he protest when blacks were forced to march at the rear of the Exposition’s opening parade. Harlan’s treatment of Washington’s speech was predictably critical, though it was not unfair. He accused Washington of seeking “to disarm his listeners by humorous stories that reinforced their stereotypes of Negroes.” He also “stood on its head the whole theory of abolition and Reconstruction” when he claimed that adequate preparation for the exercise of rights was more important than actually possessing those rights. Harlan did concede that Washington’s “fingers and hand” analogy was a commentary on the common interests of the races rather than an acceptance of segregation. Harlan’s conclusion did not stray far from the Woodward-Meier paradigm: Washington’s speech catapulted him into prominence because it offered a vision of race relations that did not challenge white hegemony.<sup>191</sup>

In his newfound position as the leader of the black race, Washington set about constructing an elaborate network of influence, which, following Du Bois, Harlan termed the “Tuskegee machine.” “Washington,” Harlan wrote, “gained as easy mastery of the art of patronage politics and used it to reward friends, punish enemies, and strengthen the Tuskegee machine.” In so doing, Washington violated his constant admonition to blacks against political involvement. Washington, for example, hired lobbyists to secure land grants for the Tuskegee Institute. The machine was not exclusively political, however. Harlan

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 171-175.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 208, 215, 218-219, 227-228.

believed that Washington's National Business League offered little help to struggling black businessmen, but it *did* provide him an alliance of loyal blacks. Through the remainder of his first volume and in the second, Harlan relentlessly explored the stratagems of the Tuskegee machine.<sup>192</sup>

One of the more scathing chapters in Harlan's biography was titled, "Master of the Tuskegee Plantation." As he had in his 1970 essay, Harlan compared Washington's management style to that of an unforgiving plantation owner. He claimed that the Tuskegee faculty dreaded Washington's appearance: "He bestrode the Tuskegee campus like a colossus. He dominated. He ruled with an even temper but with a steady will to bend every other will to his purpose and vision. . . . He was paternalistic and even dictatorial in the manner of the planters and business tycoons for whom he always reserved his highest public flattery." Harlan offered several examples to prove his point. Washington required his faculty to report on any of their peers who failed to attend morning devotionals. Without any semblance of due process, he fired a teacher who was accused of rape. Washington, he added, micromanaged his students. He personally inspected his students' apparel and chastised the unkempt. Strangely, Harlan criticized Washington for personally investigating whether his students were receiving sufficient portions of food. He felt Washington should have delegated this task to faculty members. In the chapter's final paragraph, Harlan admitted that "probably most boarding schools of [Washington's] day were equally totalitarian," but he justified his criticisms, arguing that Washington was motivated by his belief in the necessity of "hierarchical structure." Washington, Harlan explained, lacked faith in equality and democracy. "Like the self-made businessmen he admired, he considered his institution a lengthened shadow of himself, an extension of his own person, and indeed it was."<sup>193</sup>

Harlan's first volume concluded with a chapter on Washington's controversial White House dinner with President Theodore Roosevelt, which he viewed as exemplifying the themes of his biography. "Washington's rise was spurred by his own intense, faustian [sic.] ambition, but equally important at every juncture of his career was the help of a succession of fatherly white men." Roosevelt was the most recent in a long line of powerful white men to whom Washington attached himself. Washington's deference earned him the imprimatur of whites whose funding, attention, and support lifted him to the position of race leader. Harlan ended his book with these words: "[Washington] became by 1895, and certainly by 1901, the American white leaders' candidate for black leadership, the white hope. The dinner at the White House was the final

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<sup>192</sup>Ibid., 255, 258, 266

<sup>193</sup>Ibid., 272, 273, 278-279, 287.

accolade, a symbolic as the placing of a crown upon his head. By the white men's indirect rule he was 'the king of a captive people.' " Harlan ignored that much of white America responded with vitriol when the newspapers reported that a black man had dined in the White House. Harlan's biography then ended abruptly, without a conclusion or a summation of his arguments.<sup>194</sup>

The historical community universally praised *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*. In *The Journal of Southern History*, Idus A. Newby called Harlan's biography, not only "the most distinguished biography of a black American," but also, "one of the significant biographies of this generation." He commended Harlan for his readable prose, thorough knowledge of the subject, and exhaustive research. Harlan's uncovering of the details of Washington's early life, she said, "has the earmarks of a detective's quest." Curiously, Newby felt that Harlan evinced a "sympathetic detachment." Emma Lou Thornbrough's review appeared in *The Journal of American History*. "For readers who are familiar with Harlan's earlier articles and with the research of August Meier," she wrote, "this volume will hold few surprises," though she credited Harlan for offering "a wealth of biographical details" and "new material on his personal life." In particular, she praised Harlan for demonstrating that "all the elements of Washington's philosophy—social, political, economic, racial—had been formulated and expressed long before the Atlanta Address." In his review in *The American Historical Review*, William Cheek endorsed all of Harlan's theses, calling Harlan's biography "the only three-dimensional study of a black leader in all of our vast historical literature." Reviewers in less prestigious journals were also laudatory. Writing in *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Elizabeth Jacoway Burns declared that the biography "establishes Louis Harlan as the leading Washington scholar." In *The English Historical Review* Duncan J. McLeod called Harlan the first "adequate [Washington] biographer," adding that "this is biography at its best." In *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* Louis L. Gould praised Harlan's "thorough research, clear narrative, and judicious tone." Randall B. Woods' review in *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* called the book a "sensitive portrayal." Woods alone offered mild criticism, noting that "wide gaps in the historical record" forced Harlan "to draw rather heavily on his imagination in reconstructing portions of Washington's past." The trustees of Columbia University agreed with those reviewers who felt Harlan's work groundbreaking; in 1973 they awarded *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader* the prestigious Bancroft Award.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 304, 234

<sup>195</sup>Idus A. Newby, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* by Louis R. Harlan, *The Journal of Southern History* 39, no. 2 (1973): 302-304. Emma Lou Thornbrough, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* by Louis R. Harlan, *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 2 (1973): 487-488. William Cheek, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, by Louis R. Harlan and *The*

The accolades Harlan received reveal how far Washington had fallen in the eyes of the historical community by the end of the Civil Rights era. Washington, in Harlan's narrative, came across as a megalomaniac who convinced his followers to accept a "peasant conservatism," all the while enjoying the praise and favors of white benefactors. He was a man obsessed with power, to the exclusion of all else. He was a coward who refused to stand against white supremacy, accommodating himself to prejudice and asking his race to do the same. And Harlan's work on Washington was not close to completion.

### WASHINGTON SCHOLARSHIP DIVERSIFIES

Though sympathy for Washington had fallen out of vogue during the Civil Rights era, a few scholars still found value in his life and work. Like most historians who examined Washington's educational philosophy, in his 1976 essay in *Phylon*, "The Educational Philosophy of Booker T. Washington: A Perspective for Black Liberation," Alfred Young offered a favorable opinion of Washington. Young argued that though industrial education was not original to Washington, he added elements that made it a uniquely "black perspective" on education. The resulting pedagogy served as a "liberating force."<sup>196</sup>

Though Young recognized similarities between Washington's program and progressive education, he believed there was a "qualitative difference." Though both educational philosophies aimed at "an interlinking of the total human experience—mind, body, and soul—which would produce a moral man." The progressive educators highlighted the value of education for individuals while Washington focused on its communal value. Washington's curriculum sought to instill a communal spirit of "of black manhood, identity, and citizenship" in his students. This was the particularly *black* element that Washington added to the general program of progressive education: "Concern with the group, not the individual, has been an historical reality for Afro-Americans because 'the intellectual and economic assaults of whites drove blacks back upon themselves.'" Young acknowledged that Washington's early curriculum actually included little training that was industrial

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*Booker T. Washington Papers. Volume 1, The Autobiographical Writings; volume 2, 1860-89*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 5 (1974): 1634-1635. Elizabeth Jacoway Burns, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1973): 78-80. Duncan J. MacLeod, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader 1856-1901*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The English Historical Review* 90, no. 355 (1975): 465. Lewis L. Gould, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (1973): 493. Randall B. Woods, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1974): 90-92.

<sup>196</sup>Alfred Young, "The Educational Philosophy of Booker T. Washington: A Perspective for Black Liberation," *Phylon* 37, no. 3 (1976): 225, 227.

in character. This, he believed, supported his thesis. Though Washington billed his education as industrial, the “values and attitudes” he promoted “were generally associated with liberal education.”<sup>197</sup>

Ignoring the influential writings of Woodward, Meier, and Harlan, Young attempted to refute Oliver Cox’s attack on Washington. He criticized Cox for making use of a “Marxian analysis” that was “based upon the dialectical process which assumes a ‘class struggle.’” Young maintained that Cox and his fellow radicals favored violent revolution over peaceful reform effected via education:

Cox conceived “talented black men” in slavery as destined to become either “discontented bondsmen with ideas of escape and revolt, or trusted slaves.” He concluded that, “Washington’s slavery experience seems to have conditioned him to the latter type of personality.” . . . Applying this analysis to the lives of individuals whole lived under the “peculiar institution,” Cox failed to understand the dynamics of the slave situation. As a consequence, his analysis precludes the “day to day” resistance activities of the large multitude of “not so talented black men.” . . . Cox has fallen into the familiar trap of using only slave revolts as a measurement of opposition to slavery.

Young believed that Cox extended this paradigm not only to slaves, but to black living in Washington’s era. Young might be accused of caricaturing Cox’s position; it is not at all clear from his writings on Washington that he believed violent revolution was necessary. Still, Young was challenging the idea that a strict dichotomy exists between accommodation and activism. In this way, Young foreshadowed the writings of the contextual historians who explored this question in the twenty-first century.<sup>198</sup>

Young’s essay was emblematic of several trends in Washington scholarship. Educational historians generally viewed Washington favorably. These historians maintained, to various degrees, that progress proceeds from the bottom-up, through education, an opinion diametrically opposed to that of historians like Du Bois, Cox, and Marable. Second, Young’s attack on Cox demonstrated the relationship between a historian’s economic views and his judgement of Washington. The more left-leaning a historian was, the more unfavorable his assessment. Moderate historians were more inclined to favorable judgments of Washington. Educational historians largely avoided consideration of economic theory all together. Third, until the rise of the contextual paradigm in the twenty-first century, historians sympathetic to Washington failed to construct paradigms that explained Washington’s political, racial, and economic views. The educational historians were, again, the exception to the rule. They largely ignored broader questions of politics and economics; their position on race relations centered on education, particularly on the practical effects of Washington’s pedagogy. Finally, though educational historians

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<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 230, 234-235.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., 232.

in the twentieth century did not overturn the dominance of the Woodward-Meier paradigm, they offered a cogent, alternative interpretation.

Despite the dominance of the critical paradigm and the development of the educational paradigm, hagiographic treatments of Washington survived. An example was Melbourne Cummings' essay, "Historical Setting for Booker T. Washington and the Rhetoric of Compromise, 1895," published in the *Journal of Black Studies* in 1977.

When, in 2008, Cummings looked back over her life's work, she described her upbringing in Washingtonian terms: "I come from very humble Southern beginnings where to survive everyone was responsible for someone else." She continued, "What I noticed about people in my hometown is that when people showed potential to succeed, they were nurtured in such a way that they always succeeded. . . . When they set their sights on what to do with their lives, then the community seemed to come together to make it a reality." She credited her community for assisting her in the path to becoming a historian. Having benefited enormously from local solidarity, Cummings had deep sympathy for Washington, a man who constantly preached the value of self-help and communal values. Her essay, however, appeared more polemical than scholarly. It lacked footnotes and cited only two previous works, both of which were relatively favorable to Washington—Calisata's "Booker T. Washington: Another Look" and Meier's "Booker T. Washington and the Negro Press." Cummings' only other source was *Up from Slavery*. Her essay was little more than an unoriginal compilation of pro-Washington arguments.<sup>199</sup>

Cummings began by placing Washington's rise to prominence in the context of the 1890s, noting, with a touch of melodrama, that "the entire nation was torn by everything short of anarchy." "At the bottom of the economic heap, she stated, blacks suffered the most." Their last hope, Populism, collapsed in the early 1890s and "direct political agitation . . . proved to be painful and costly." Cummings presented the nation as yearning for "a rhetoric of compromise." Blacks, in particular, needed a leader who could "gain the respect and ear of a white supremacist government."<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Melbourne Cummings, "In Her Own Words: Melbourne Cummings Talks about NCA, her Career, & Mentoring," (2008), <http://www.iupui.edu/~ncfws/2008/cummings08.htm> (accessed 10/11/2015). Melbourne Cummings, "Historical Setting for Booker T. Washington and the Rhetoric of Compromise, 1895." *Journal of Black Studies* 8, no. 1 (1977): 82.

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid.*, 75-76, 81.

Cummings presented Washington's Atlanta speech as an answer to both demands. The speech, she claimed, instilled in white audiences "a sense of duty, responsibility, and satisfaction in the existing situation." Cummings failed to explain why white satisfaction was desirable. Though she admitted that Washington's rhetoric appeared accommodating, she argued that Washington outlined the only practical course of action. Since white opposition to civil rights was intractable, Washington prudently eschewed demanding equal rights, pursuing, instead, the "economic progress and industrial gains" which whites would allow. Cummings failed to outline the effect Washington's "practical course of action" had on the black community and on race relations. Her argument was weak because, like the earlier hagiographers, Cummings presented Washington's accommodation with white supremacy not as a regrettable tactical necessity, but as a positive good.<sup>201</sup>

While Young's essay was discursive in a manner unmatched by Cummings' there was overlap between the emerging paradigm of the educational scholars and that of neo-hagiographers like Cummings. Both focused less on proving the beneficial effects of Washington's ideology than on proving his ideological assumptions correct. Both agreed with Washington that progress, whether educational, economic, or political, begins from the bottom-up.

Educational scholars were not the only specialists to study Washington during the late 1970s and 1980s. Literary scholars applied their particular skills to analysis of Washington's autobiographies. Unlike the educational scholars, however, the literary scholars, without exception, agreed with Harlan's negative assessment of Washington. Though they qualified some of his statements, they did not diverge from his modification of the Woodward-Meier paradigm.

In his 1979 essay in *Callaloo*, "Paternal at Last: Booker T. Washington and the Slave Narrative Tradition," Raymond Hedin, an English literature professor who specialized in black American literature and slave narratives posited that Washington was not "offensively paternalistic or perversely authoritarian." Hedin did not cite Harlan as promoting this view, perhaps because he agreed with Harlan that Washington's leadership was detrimental to black progress. Hedin merely disagreed as to the nature of Washington's psychological motivations. Washington, he believed, was not driven by a

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<sup>201</sup>Ibid., 76, 79-80.



megalomaniacal paternalism but by a misguided sense of paternal concern. “His actions,” Hedin wrote, “[were] the groping of a neophyte father.”<sup>202</sup>

Like Harlan, Hedin explored how Washington’s upbringing shaped his psychology. Early in his life Washington experienced the “family insecurity” endemic in slave families. A reading of slave narratives, Hedin wrote, reveals that “the single greatest source of grief to nineteenth century male slave narrators, even greater than physical violence, was their experience of radical family vulnerability.” Washington carried this insecurity into adulthood, attempting to compensate for it by filling the role of the “public father of an extended family.” He was obsessed with money, for example, because money is the means by which a father supports his family. Some accused Washington of pandering to white prejudices when he referred to his race as “children.” Hedin believed they missed the point: “Black history provided him with considerable justification for that view of his people.” Washington, Hedin stated, genuinely desired to guide his race along the path of progress.<sup>203</sup>

Compared with Harlan’s assessment of Washington’s psychology, Hedin’s analysis was, on the surface, charitable. Hedin, however, was not attempting to disprove Harlan’s conclusions; he believed that Washington’s paternal impulse harmed black Americans. Since, Washington’s usurpation of paternal authority was not consensual, he was forced to “parent” via coercion: “He chose to have children; his people did not so fully choose to have him as father. All the more reason why he couldn’t let them act independently: his precarious position demanded continual bolstering through obedience.” Washington conducted himself as an overprotective father, never allowing his children to assume responsibility for their own lives. Washington resented Du Bois because, from Washington’s perspective, he behaved as a rebellious child. In reality, Hedin wrote, Du Bois was attempting “to throw off the stultifying control of a father whose authority has turned authoritarian.” So, while Hedin disagreed with Harlan’s analysis of the origins of Washington’s psychology, he agreed with Harlan that Washington behaved as a megalomaniac.<sup>204</sup>

Hedin’s distinction between paternal instinct and paternalism was too nuanced to be meaningful. In the conclusion of his essay, the boundary between the two became blurred. Hedin wrote that “the real tragedy of Washington” was that “in

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<sup>202</sup>“Raymond Hedin,” available at the Indiana University at Bloomington’s website, [http://www.indiana.edu/~engweb/faculty/profile\\_rHedin.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~engweb/faculty/profile_rHedin.shtml), (accessed 10/11/2015). Raymond Hedin, “Paternal at Last: Booker T. Washington and the Slave Narrative Tradition,” *Callaloo*, no. 7 (Oct., 1979): 95.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, 95, 98-99.

<sup>204</sup>*Ibid.*, 100-101.

founding Tuskegee on the grounds of a former plantation, he tried to reverse the effects of slavery . . . But he ended up taking on too much of the plantation himself; he turned from father to master, just as many of the masters had taken on attributes of the father.” Harlan, no doubt, would have agreed wholeheartedly. Still, Hedin felt compelled to offer a sympathetic, and somewhat discordant, caveat, “Washington’s leadership was doubly ironic: he exercised it so completely that he rendered similar successors unlikely; which is one way of saying that perhaps he led his people to the stage of adult independence after all.”<sup>205</sup>

Another scholar inspired by Harlan was Roger J. Bresnahan. Bresnahan, an English literature professor who specialized in literary theory, complimented Harlan for making “a powerful case on external evidence” that Washington targeted “two distinct sets of readers” in *The Story of My Life and Work* and *Up from Slavery*. In his 1980 essay, “The Implied Readers of Booker T. Washington’s Autobiographies,” published in *Black American Literature Forum*, Bresnahan sought to buttress Harlan’s case by offering literary insights.<sup>206</sup>

Bresnahan described the political and cultural backdrop that Washington presented in his autobiographies as imaginary. A contemporary reader, whether white or black, would not have recognized the harmonious state of race relations that Washington described. This left the reader “no choice but to place his confidence in Washington as his guide.” According to Bresnahan, Washington deliberately utilized this literary tactic to evoke different responses from different readers. Since *Up from Slavery* targeted wealthy and influential whites, Washington’s imaginary societal construct included a model of “gradual [black] progress which would not threaten white economic and political hegemony.” Similarly, Washington used *The Story of My Life and Work* “to lead black readers . . . to conclude that adherence to the Tuskegee model will bring about lasting progress because that model was fashioned by one who had himself risen from poverty to power.” Whereas Hedin offered an unconvincing modification of Harlan’s thesis, Bresnahan offered compelling evidence to support Harlan’s deconstruction of Washington’s autobiographies.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup>Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>206</sup>“Roger Bresnahan,” *ResearchGate*, [http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roger\\_Bresnahan/info](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roger_Bresnahan/info) (accessed 10/11/2015).

<sup>207</sup>Roger J. Bresnahan, “The Implied Readers of Booker T. Washington’s Autobiographies,” *Black American Literature Forum* 14, no. 1 (1980): 15-20.

Despite the prominence of the critical paradigm and the influence of Harlan's work, a few scholars still attempted to explain Washington's life and work in novel terms, though few strayed far from the critical paradigm. David Howard-Pitney, a specialist in the history of black American leaders, was once such historian. While working on the Martin Luther King, Jr. papers project at Stanford University in 1986, he published an essay on the rhetoric of black leaders, "The Jeremiads of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois and Changing Patterns of Rhetoric, 1841-1920," in the *Journal of American Ethnic History*. In the essay, he examined the rhetoric of each black leader in the context of a perennial American rhetorical device, the jeremiad. Howard-Pitney concluded that, because Washington worked during the apex of white supremacy, he directed his jeremiad to blacks, whereas Douglass and Du Bois addressed both races.<sup>208</sup>

Howard-Pitney noted that the jeremiad was a byproduct of a millennialist attitude towards American history that emerged during the Puritan era and persisted throughout American history. A jeremiad treats America as "a savior nation" and includes three elements which Howard-Pitney summarized: "Affirmation of society's *promise*, criticism of *declension*, or current retrogression from the promise, and a closing *prophecy* that society will shortly complete its mission and redeem the promise." Because of the element of prophecy, jeremiads were inherently optimistic, despite their dire warnings. Black jeremiads incorporated an additional element, presenting "blacks as having a unique social mission" which was a "precondition for the American nation to fulfill its mission to the world." Black jeremiads treated blacks as "a chosen people *within* a chosen people." Washington's speeches to blacks included all three elements of a jeremiad.<sup>209</sup>

Howard-Pitney argued that because Washington believed it futile to challenge white supremacy his jeremiads, unlike those of Douglass and Du Bois, demanded nothing of whites. His was "a conservative middle-class jeremiad" that blamed blacks for their "state of declension" from the promises of American democracy. Blacks, rather than whites, were responsible for their poverty and lack of education. Washington called blacks to conversion; if they followed his "pillar of fire," that is, "the myth of the self-made individual," they would be admitted into the Promised Land of American democracy. And like other jeremiads, Washington's were inexhaustibly optimistic; Howard-Pitney quoted Washington as

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<sup>208</sup>David Howard-Pitney, "MacMillan Education,

<http://www.macmillanhighered.com/Catalog/Author/davidhowardpitney> (accessed 10/11/2015).

<sup>209</sup>David Howard-Pitney, "The Jeremiads of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois and Changing Patterns of Black Messianic Rhetoric, 1841-1920," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 6, no. 1 (1986): 47, 49.

saying, “Progress is the law of God.” Washington’s jeremiads differed from those of other black leaders, however, in that he presented progress as gradual and did not demand immediate reform.<sup>210</sup>

Washington was less sanguine about the rate of progress than Douglass and Du Bois because he led the black race during the apex of white supremacy. Howard-Pitney explained: “Douglass and Du Bois were most optimistic about America when white Americans were concerned about the quality of their political democracy. Washington seems to have been reacting to a situation when white society showed more concern for the private interests of the marketplace than for public interest of a just and virtuous democracy.”<sup>211</sup> According to Howard-Pitney, adjusting his rhetoric to the state of race relations during the era, Washington turned inward, directing his jeremiads solely at his fellow blacks. His jeremiads accommodated the constraints placed on blacks by white supremacists.<sup>212</sup>

Howard-Pitney ended his essay with a jeremiad directed at his own generation. Writing during the second term of Ronald Reagan’s presidency, he warned that “the tradition of democratic public interest has been weakening and the tradition of private self-interest had been gaining strength.” With a touch of melodrama, he predicted a reversion to a Washington-era state of affairs: “If this continues, it may be difficult for black leaders in the future to believe that they can appeal to the conscience of white America.” Like Manning Marable, Howard-Pitney believed that positive race relations depended largely on economic justice. “Private interest” in the marketplace, in his view, led inevitably to the breakdown of harmony between the races. The way to avoid this declension, he suggested, was to reject Washington’s individualistic creed and self-help ideology. The path to salvation was a rejection of the so-called Reagan Revolution.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid., 52-55.

<sup>211</sup>Du Bois was not optimistic about black progress during his later years. Howard-Pitney, however, considered only Du Bois’s World War I-era writings, ignoring his later opinions. For this reason, Howard-Pitney was able to present Du Bois as an optimist.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., 50, 56-57, 59.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 59. In 1993 Temple University Press published *The African American Jeremiad* by David Howard-Pitney, which expanded upon the themes and arguments presented in his 1986 essay. In addition to his treatment of Douglass, Washington, and Du Bois, he added chapters on several other black leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. His book is not considered separately in this thesis because it offered no new insights into Washington’s jeremiad. David Howard-Pitney, *The African American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 60, 74, 89.

## LOUIS HARLAN AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF WASHINGTON'S LEGACY

“W.E.B. Du Bois,” Louis Harlan wrote in *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, “spent much of his long life puzzling over the phenomenon of Washington, a man who did not seem to have an abstraction about him.”

He continued:

Du Bois was a shrewd observer, but what he saw in Washington as a lack—of ideals, principles, vision—was actually Washington's great and almost unique gift as a black political leader. He could immediately and intuitively, without formal questioning, see through the masks and intellectual superstructure of those he met to the mainspring of their behavior. Then he imaginatively bent their purposes to his own.

Harlan's second volume, published in 1983, explored the ways Washington manipulated those around him to his benefit.

Whereas the first volume was arranged chronologically, the second was presented in a thematic manner. And whereas the first focused largely on the origins of Washington's psychology, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee* focused on its consequences, both personal and political.<sup>214</sup>

Harlan's second volume resumed where the first left off, chronicling Washington's increasing political involvement in the wake of the White House dinner. Washington's alliance with Roosevelt, publically consummated by their controversial dinner, “put the final rivet in the Tuskegee Machine that made it fully operational.” Though Washington always claimed to dislike politics, Harlan argued convincingly that he “entered patronage politics with a gusto.” Washington vigorously promoted black nominees for political appointments, and Roosevelt largely acquiesced. Washington glibly ignored the fact that Roosevelt reduced the overall number of black presidential officeholders. Furthermore, Washington used his newfound political power to exact revenge on his enemies; for example, he convinced Roosevelt to remove Judson W. Lyons from his position as register of the U.S. Treasury. Washington told Roosevelt that Lyons held anti-administration sentiments, but Harlan demonstrated that Washington resented Lyons for expressing sympathy for Trotter. What was the result of Washington's alliance with Roosevelt? Harlan believed “the rewards were small.” Southern states continued to pass disfranchisement constitutions and though Washington denied it, Harlan said that he “endorsed those constitutions.” Washington also failed to shape the “Negro planks” in the 1904 Republican Party platform in any meaningful way. In Harlan's telling, Washington political alliance increased his personal power but failed to ameliorate the plight of blacks.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup>Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), x-xi.

<sup>215</sup>*Ibid.*, 5, 6, 7, 10, 24-25, 29.

Washington's intolerance of criticism and the lengths to which he went to preserve his power was a major theme throughout the remainder of the book. In particular, Washington feared college educated blacks because Washington misunderstood their ideas and desires, and resented them for deviating from his ideology. Washington made it clear to Roosevelt that "his critics were simply spoiled young men who had been educated beyond their intelligence." Harlan also chronicled the underhanded tactics Washington employed to undermine his opposition. On numerous occasions he hired Melvin J. Chisum, an old friend of Emmet J. Scott, to spy on his enemies' gatherings. He used philanthropic donations to establish black newspapers in an attempt to leech business from publications, such as Trotter's *Guardian*, that diverged from his philosophy. In a telling episode, in 1904, Washington convened a conference at Carnegie Hall for the ostensible purpose of reaching an accord with his black opponents. Washington then proceeded to pack the Hall with his allies; Du Bois estimated that the delegation was divided sixteen to nine in Washington's favor. Washington also invited prominent white guests to speak; each offered a litany of praise for Washington. Washington's hoped to impress his critics with a show of white support. Harlan called the conference a failure because Washington continued to advocate accommodation, refusing to adopt a more progressive stance. Harlan offered compelling evidence to support the proposition that Washington's perpetual fear of losing his power "made him prize loyalty above talent." This, naturally, "drove talent to the opposition."<sup>216</sup>

The failure of the Carnegie Hall conference led "inevitably" to the formation of the Niagara Movement. In Harlan's telling, while Washington advocated conciliation, "the Niagara Movement proposed to clear the air by frank protest of injustice." The Movement, Harlan stated "reflected the personality of W.E.B. Du Bois" because he, unlike Washington, "was an intellectual system builder." Harlan's evaluation of Du Bois was glowing. He called *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois' "greatest book" because it contained "the most persuasive intellectual critique ever written of Washington's racial strategy." Washington, of course, believed that Du Bois and the other leaders of the Niagara Movement were jealous of his leadership position. He responded with his usual nefarious tactics, employing spies and silencing opposition newspapers. Harlan conceded that the two factions failed "to bring about the noble ideas and meliorative [sic.] goals that each possessed" because they expended their energy and resources combating each other. Still, Harlan held Washington responsible; in his view the Niagara Movement better understood the path to progress and Washington's opposition hindered their ability to act.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 48, 53, 56-56, 58, 62-63, 70-73, 84.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., 50-51, 84-85, 90, 101, 106, 304.

Returning to mundane biographical matters, Harlan commented on Washington's personal relationship with his family. He called Washington "a conscientious if somewhat humorless father." His children "led useful, ordinary lives. Indeed, they seemed to do everything better as soon as they ceased to depend on him." Harlan's tone here was unnecessarily critical; the goal of good parenting is, after all, to see one's children grow into independent adults. Harlan did credit Washington for gathering his extended family around him at Tuskegee without engaging in nepotism or "selfish calculation as to how they might repay" him. Nonetheless, Harlan speculated that Washington was too busy to enjoy the comforts of domestic life: "Somehow the satisfaction of his many good deed eluded him, and instead his satisfaction in life generally came from overcoming his enemies in some underhanded maneuver."<sup>218</sup>

Harlan's critical assessment of capitalism surfaced in his treatment of Washington's relationship with white philanthropists. He described the industrialist's charitable impulse as a byproduct of their monetary excess: "The swollen fortunes of American industrialization and financial capitalism . . . were ready to be disgorged." Washington, Harlan wrote, sensed this "philanthropic revolution" and turned "his willpower, cajolery, and compromise [tactics]" to the task of separating the titans of industry from their money. He "understood the foibles of the wealthy and played upon them." Harlan felt that Washington sanctioned the injustice inherent in the capitalist system by taking the philanthropists' money: "It is clear that Washington flattered and cajoled the very rich and never challenged the appropriateness of their status at the peak of the American success pyramid."<sup>219</sup>

Next, Harlan turned again Washington's micromanagement of the Tuskegee Institute. He criticized Washington for deliberately holding his faculty's salaries below the national average. Washington's rationale was that he wanted to employ only those dedicated to his mission, regardless of pay. "There was no such thing as tenure," Harlan added. Next, Harlan catalogued the school's strict rules. Though he admitted the rules were a standard "Victorian code of conduct," he opined that Tuskegee must have *felt* more oppressive than other schools because the code allowed "few safety valves" for natural impulses. Once again, Harlan was determined to find fault in Washington, even though Tuskegee's code of conduct was normal in the context of the time.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>Ibid., 113, 123, 126-127

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 128-129, 133-134, 142

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., 151-153, 155-156, 157.

Similarly, Harlan felt that Washington's secret legal challenges to white supremacy were little more than token gestures. He listed several examples of Washington's efforts. In 1902 Washington financed Du Bois' legal battles. In 1904 he funded the appeal of Dan Rogers, a black man was convicted in a criminal case by a jury that excluded blacks. In 1908 Washington supported Alonzo Bailey's legal attack on peonage. The case made its way to the United Supreme Court which delivered a positive decision in 1911. Harlan faulted Washington for believing these favorable verdicts heralded "a new dawn in the South." The truth was that Washington's efforts did nothing to turn the tide of white supremacy.<sup>221</sup>

Indeed, according to Harlan Washington's approach to black uplift "was bound to fail." Since the point of segregation was subordination, he wrote, it was illogical to think that accommodationism could bring about equality. Without the black franchise, state educational funds were inevitably withheld from black institutions. Black businessmen could not prosper when white supremacists drove them out of town. Black farmers could not escape tenancy without credit. Like Meier, Harlan pointed to the town of Mound Bayou as a microcosm of Washington's failed strategy. Harlan's only caveat was that the Tuskegee Institute *did* establish some welfare programs for blacks who failed on the road up from slavery. Washington, however, was naïve to think that private charity could adequately meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of blacks. The essential problem with Washington's approach was, according to Harlan, that it was *laissez faire*. Washington seemed to believe that, left alone, blacks would prosper. Harlan sat firmly within the mainstream of historians who, writing in the 1970s and 80s, believed that federal intervention was the necessary path to civil rights and economic prosperity.<sup>222</sup>

Returning to his narration, Harlan offered coherent criticisms of Washington's response to the Brownsville affair. Washington, he argued, failed to denounce Roosevelt's perfunctory dismissal of the black soldiers because he did not want to jeopardize his relationship with the President. The affair revealed "Washington's psychological inability to comprehend the monstrous injustice of the President's action and the structural inability of the politics of accommodation to deal with outright betrayal by a white ally." For many blacks the affair was revelatory; they could no longer could trust Roosevelt or the Republican Party. Harlan maintained that Washington should have arrived at a similar conclusion. "To do that, however, he would have had to be someone other than Booker T. Washington."<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup>Ibid., 247-248, 250, 255

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., 205, 212, 225, 233, 236-237, 263.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 310, 317, 322



Political setbacks for blacks accelerated during Taft's tenure as president. Washington watched "helplessly" as "the little black political empire he had built" collapsed. Taft systematically removed Washington's black appointments. Through it all, however, Washington maintained public support for the President and continued to serve as his advisor—though Taft rarely acted on Washington's advice. Revealing his self-serving adaptability, Washington presented these setbacks as confirmation that he was not, nor had he ever been, a political boss. Other blacks, however, realized their precarious political status and banded together to form the NAACP. This organization, Harlan wrote, "came to represent the future," while Washington clung desperately to the past. Washington was too invested in his program to read the signs of the times and respond with appropriate vigor.<sup>224</sup>

What finally woke Washington to the violence of white supremacy was, according to Harlan, the Ulrich affair. While visiting New York City in 1911, Washington left his hotel and, for unknown reasons, took the subway to an apartment building near Central Park. After ringing the doorbell and receiving no response, he began walking away, but hesitated and returned to the building. At this point, a white man named Henry Ulrich appeared and began beating Washington, causing severe cuts and abrasions. Washington fled with Ulrich in pursuit. The assault ended when Washington stumbled upon a police officer. Ulrich defended his actions, accusing Washington of saying, "Hello Sweetheart," to his live-in girlfriend, Laura Alvarez. Washington, denied the allegation. Harlan's analysis of the affair was balanced. He highlighted the inconsistencies in Ulrich and Alvarez's story. Similarly, Harlan noted that Washington failed to offer a plausible explanation for his visit to Ulrich's building. Harlan revealed that after the subsequent trial Washington used his political influence to punish Lorenz Zeller, one of the two judges who acquitted Ulrich. When Zeller came up for reelection, Washington financed his opponent. Harlan concluded that the affair drove Washington to speak more publicly against racial injustice, as he finally experienced white violence. He surmised that Washington's exclusion from White House politics also contributed to his increasingly vocal protest. Harlan felt, however, that Washington's mild conversion came too late in his life to redefine his legacy. And despite his conversion, in his twilight years Washington continued to behave as if he were still "in charge of the Afro-American destiny," disregarding his waning influence and relevance. Harlan faulted Washington for never disavowing his "policies of peasant conservatism" and "the New South spirit of materialism." Despite his shifting emphasis, Washington would still have been, according to Harlan, out of place in the later age of civil rights.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 338, 341-342, 345, 360, 362, 376-378

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 387, 399-402, 404-405, 429, 237

As in Harlan's first volume, the conclusion to *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee* was unusually abrupt. After noting the circumstances of Washington's death, he ended the book with an odd, and somewhat depressing paragraph:

Washington had asked to be buried in the little cemetery on campus beside the chapel, the gravestone to carry only his name and the years of his birth and death. This was done, but they chose a granite boulder as big as the rock of ages, dominating the graveyard as he had dominated the others buried there during their lives. Ironically, pick-pockets appeared to work the crowd at the railroad station, and soon after the funeral excitement a faculty member who had earlier suffered a nervous breakdown jumped to her death from a high window on the campus.

Did Harlan end the biography with a suicide because he believed Washington's approach to black uplift was a suicidal approach to race relations? He offered no summation or afterword to clarify.<sup>226</sup>

Reviewers almost universally proclaimed *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee* a landmark work. In her review in the *American Journal of Education*, Nancy J. Weiss praised Harlan's biography as "meticulously researched, beautifully written, unflinchingly perceptive in its insights." She went so far as to call it "the most important biography we now have of any black American, if not one of the most significant biographies of *any* American since the Civil War." Weiss explained that Harlan's myriad speculations and conjectures were "helpful insights," offered to fill gaps in the historical record. "Future scholars," Weiss concluded, "will doubtless try to rewrite the life of Booker T. Washington, but it is hard to imagine anyone improving on the job that Louis R. Harlan has already done." James D. Anderson called Harlan's second volume "a superb work of historical scholarship" that "deserves our highest praise" in his review in *The Journal of American History*. He pointed to a few shortcomings, including Harlan's "limited understanding" of the relationship between Washington and northern capitalists; his "fundamental misunderstanding of the practices and purposes" of Tuskegee's pedagogy; and his failure to outline the differences "between Washington's social philosophy and that of his critics." "The search for the real Washington is not over," wrote Anderson, "but future searches will begin with Harlan's book." Having written *The Journal of Southern History*'s review of Harlan's first volume, Idus A. Newby returned to review the second. He compared Harlan's volumes favorably to the landmark works of Eugene Genovese, Leon Litwack, and Lawrence Levine. Newby noted that the effect of Harlan's volume was "ultimately devastating to Washington." He continued, "Harlan has used his unparalleled knowledge of the Washington papers to dismantle the wall of circumlocution, indirection, and masked purpose with which Washington surrounded himself." In *The American Historical Review*, Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., called

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<sup>226</sup>Ibid., 456-457

*Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee* a “tour de force,” which provided “a sensitive, balanced portrait” of Washington, “in every respect definitive.”<sup>227</sup>

In *That Noble Dream*, Peter Novick wrote that in the 1980s “Historians who had done no more than uncover new facts were respected, but the profession had often bestowed its highest honors on those whose contributions were primarily interpretive.” The wild success of Harlan’s second volume is an example *par excellence* of this dynamic. Not only were reviewers universally laudatory, but it also won the Bancroft Prize. His interpretation of Washington would stand without serious challenge until the 2000s. For his part, Harlan believed his work *the* definitive treatment on Washington. Looking back in 2006, he wrote, “Until another biographer brings convincing evidence of another view of Washington, I will stand by my own interpretation based on 20-odd years of scholarly labor. . . . As a race leader . . . Washington seems to have been pretty much a failure.”<sup>228</sup>

#### WASHINGTON’S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY EXPLORED

“I feel that [Washington] played an important but not remarkably innovative role in education history,” Harlan wrote in *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, “I have stressed what seems to me more important: the sources, nature, uses, and consequences of his power.” This was a startling omission considering Washington’s primary public role as that of an educator, the principal of the Tuskegee Institute. Despite Harlan’s contention that Washington’s pedagogy was ancillary to debates over his legacy, historians and specialists in educational history and philosophy continued to explore this aspect of Washington’s work.<sup>229</sup>

In “The Influence of Personalities on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama,” Horace Mann Bond challenged the notion that assessing the effect of Washington’s program was a simple matter; he demanded rigorous statistical proofs to

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<sup>227</sup>James Douglas Anderson, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The Journal of American History* 70, no. 4 (1984): 903-904. Nancy J. Weiss, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, by Louis R. Harlan, *American Journal of Education* 92, no. 3 (1984): 352-354. Idus A. Newby, review of *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The Journal of Southern History* 50, no. 1 (1984): 141-143. Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., review of *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, by Louis R. Harlan, *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 1 (1984): 218-219.

<sup>228</sup>Novick, 594-595. Dagbovie, *African American History Reconsidered*, 142.

<sup>229</sup>Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, xi.

support any claims regarding Washington's influence. Inspired by Bond's article, James D. Anderson, a specialist in the history of African American education, sought to provide evidence that Washington harmed the cause of black education in his 1990 article, "Black Rural Communities and the Struggle for Education during the Age of Booker T. Washington," published in the *Peabody Journal of Education*.<sup>230</sup>

Anderson began his inquiry by inspecting the state of black education in the South in the years preceding Washington's ascendancy. His essay was well-sourced and condensed much statistical data. Anderson maintained that during Reconstruction, progress was made in the education of Southern blacks. In 1877, he noted, state governments spent tax dollars equitably on white and black education and blacks even surpassed whites in total number of school attendees. He attributed the high standard of black education to "constitutional provisions for public schooling shifted from vague clauses to decisive *shall* declarations and highly specific requirements." Anderson demonstrated that Washington and his hagiographers were incorrect in presenting Reconstruction as an unmitigated disaster for black education. He argued convincingly that Washington's early success was largely due to his entering the educational scene during "an era of advancement in black education, dating back to the Reconstruction Constitution of 1868."<sup>231</sup>

The situation changed in 1890, however, when a bill was passed in Alabama allowing the State Superintendent of Education to distribute tax dollars earmarked for education in whatever manner he deemed fair. This allowed the Superintendent, Solomon Palmer, to bypass the constitutional requirement that tax dollars set aside for education be spent on a per capita basis. Though Washington opposed the bill, Anderson noted that Washington had previously "allied himself with the southern planters and businessmen against the poorer class of whites." Now, Washington's allies led the charge against black education. Anderson offered charts demonstrating that the 1890 bill led to dramatic reversals of the gains made during Reconstruction. Washington tried to halt the dismantling of the black public school system, but Anderson maintained that his "passive style" of protest had little effect.<sup>232</sup>

Nor did Washington's strategy benefit black education in the long term. Anderson summarized the hagiographers' view on this point; they believed that "despite the setbacks in politics, civil rights, and human rights that occurred during the age of Washington . . . his disciples were steadily building an infrastructure of practical education that protected blacks from

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<sup>230</sup>James D. Anderson," *Directory of American Scholars* (Detroit, Gale: 1999), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale Document Number: GALE|K1612500337 (accessed 10/11/2015). James D. Anderson, "Black Rural Communities and the Struggle for Education during the Age of Booker T. Washington, 1877-1915," *Peabody Journal of Education* 67, no. 4 (1990): 46-47.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.*, 50, 52-54.

<sup>232</sup>*Ibid.*, 54-57, 59.

the worst tendencies of Southern racism.” Anderson argued that the facts refuted their claim. After Washington’s death blacks violated his advice to “cast down your bucket where you are” and migrated North *en masse*, fleeing “state enforced illiteracy.” And those who remained in Southern states grew increasingly vocal in their protests—again, in violation of Washington’s prescriptions—eventually forcing the states to fund black education. Anderson concluded that Washington’s ideology had no positive or lasting effect on black education.<sup>233</sup>

Anderson was the first educational historian to answer Bond’s call for a statistical assessment of the results of Washington’s work. Other educational historians, like Tambe, considered, instead, Washington philosophy of education, taking for granted that it achieved its desired effects. Anderson offered an effective challenge to the educational paradigm, and no historian has yet offered a systematic challenge to his conclusions.

If Anderson allowed the data to lead him to his conclusions, Virginia Lantz Denton did the opposite. Her ideological affinity for Washington’s educational program led her to conclude that he was visionary. Her work, *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement*, published in 1993, was the first book-length treatment of Washington’s educational program. It was also the most sympathetic book on Washington released since Mathews’ *Booker T. Washington: Educator and Interracial Interpreter*. An unabashed Washington partisan, Lantz dedicated the book “to the memory of Booker T. Washington.” In the book’s preface she offered sweeping praise for his educational philosophy, crediting his innovations as benefitting “Alabama, the nation, and [the] world.” She expressed puzzlement that a nation who honored Martin Luther King, Jr. could “forget its Washington.” Denton’s thesis was that Washington’s promotion of adult education was a “prophetic implementation of the American creed,” which offered an effective challenge to white supremacy.<sup>234</sup>

Denton assumed that Washington’s bottom-up economic prescriptions were correct. People in the market must compete, she wrote, and in order to compete they must be educated. The particular form of education that should be offered must be “determined by the availability of jobs.” It is unsurprising, then, that Denton felt the American Missionary Association’s pedagogy an appropriate response to the economy of the industrial era. The AMA, she wrote, “saved hundreds of lives.” Denton criticized Horace Mann Bond for not appreciating the humanitarian impulse that drove these Northern missionaries. They were, in her view, dispassionately interested in helping Southern blacks. As principal of the Hampton

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<sup>233</sup>Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>234</sup>Virginia Lantz Denton, *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 1993), ix, xi, xii, 2-3, 6.

Institute, Samuel Armstrong applied the philosophy of the AMA and “formulated a successful blueprint for educating former slaves, poor whites, and Indians.” While at Hampton, Washington benefitted enormously from the AMA’s pedagogy; he, in turn, translated their conservative philosophy into a successful program for black uplift.<sup>235</sup>

If Harlan interpreted events from Washington’s life in the most negative ways possible, Denton’s book glossed over any sordid or suspicious events. For example, she ignored the Hampton Institute’s complicity in the forcible “education” of Native Americans. Though she admitted that the Native Americans Washington “taught” were prisoners of war who did not desire education, she praised Captain R. H. Pratt, the officer who delivered them to Hampton, because he removed their chains while en route to the Institute. According to Denton, Pratt’s action proved him “a man of Christian faith and great humanity” and “another unheralded hero in the annals of adult education.” The incongruity of forcible education and humanitarianism seems to have escaped her. Throughout her book, Denton presented the promotion of adult education as the highest good, superseding all other consideration. That Pratt and Washington educated Native Americans against their will was no matter—*they were educating adults!*<sup>236</sup>

Denton chronicled the ways Washington promoted adult education after the establishment of the Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee’s first students were public school teachers, adults interested in improving their education. Through his tours and speeches across the South, Washington educated a generation of blacks. At great length, she chronicled the various organizations Washington founded to promote black economic and educational advancement, including the Tuskegee Negro Conference, the Farmer’s Institute, the Bible School at Tuskegee, the National Negro Business League, and the National Urban League. Denton failed to mention that some of these programs were short-lived. Because Washington was educating adults, she assumed they were resounding successes.<sup>237</sup>

Denton celebrated the fact that a “wide spectrum of nations” adopted analogues to Washington’s programs. “By 1900,” she wrote, “extension through the zealous work of over 1,000 Tuskegee students was well established in twenty-eight states, Cuba, Jamaica, Africa, Puerto Rico, and Barbados.” Similarly, he had disciples in Japan and China. Historians like Manning Marable argued that these foreign “Tuskegees” bolstered colonial regimes while doing little to help oppressed

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<sup>235</sup>Ibid., 12, 19-20, 26, 68-69, 75, 92.

<sup>236</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid., 96, 102, 101-112, 118-123.

minorities. Denton offered no rebuttal of this position. Because the programs were wide-spread, and because they featured adult education, she assumed them efficacious.<sup>238</sup>

It is well-known that Washington vacillated between the language of black economic nationalism and assimilation. Denton completely ignored the former, presenting Washington's philosophy as assimilationist. In her analysis of the Atlanta speech, she completely glossed over his controversial "separate fingers" metaphor, focusing instead on the "subtle and strategic points" he made in favor of universal progress. The adult education movement, with Washington at its head, reflected "a slow but steady movement toward the American idea [of] . . . universal justice and liberation." In fact, she maintained that Washington's leadership "actually accelerated" that process. For these reasons he felt justified in citing Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe, calling Washington, the builder of "an entire civilization."<sup>239</sup>

Denton treated Washington's contemporary critics dismissively. Du Bois was a "restless intellectual . . . who turned to communism and left the United States." She felt William Monroe Trotter irrelevant because many of his peers were troubled and embarrassed by his tactics. The NAACP, she wrote, was an institution created and run by whites. Although these statements were technically true, Denton committed the *ad hominin* fallacy because she neglected to analyze the critics' complaints against Washington. Furthermore, she lacked a spirit of fairness in that she failed to acknowledge Washington's ruthless attacks on his black enemies.<sup>240</sup>

It is little wonder that Denton extended her attack on Washington's enemies to those historians who felt him anything less than heroic. She blamed Washington's early critics for perpetuating negative opinions of him which "obscured the magnitude of his work, relegating him to mere footnotes of irrelevance." Misunderstanding August Meier's thesis, Denton praised him for correcting Washington's reputation as a compromiser and a conciliator. Meier was correct, she wrote, in stating that Washington's critics misconstrued his long-term goals. Denton ignored Meier's examination of the more nefarious side of Washington's secret life. Similarly, overlooking the general thrust of Horace Mann Bond's work, she credited him for proving that "some measurable progress [was made] in Macon County during the Washington era." Still, she faulted Bond for neglecting to study "Washington's national and international" influence. This criticism was manifestly unfair as Bond's study focused deliberately on Alabama. Unsurprisingly, Denton despised Harlan. She accused him of

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<sup>238</sup>Ibid., 105, 107, 145-148, 151.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid., 23, 101, 189-192.

<sup>240</sup>Ibid., xii, 169, 171.

expressing undue empathy for “northern views,” without explaining why Southern views were preferable. Of *The Booker T. Washington Papers* she wrote that though they

were generally well edited . . . The more dangerous and serious flaw . . . lies in the judgmental introductions written by the editor and numerous co-editors. As if distrusting the reader’s intelligence, introductions frequently spoon-feed the reader with liberal, revisionistic [sic.] judgments and interpretations; the facts within the text itself often do not substantiate the editor’s judgmental conclusions.

While there is merit in this claim, Denton’s own partisanship undermined her credibility as a critic of *The Booker T. Washington Papers*.<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, she denounced Harlan for focusing more on “the consequences of Washington’s power” rather than on his “more important” educational work. She criticized his “hackneyed phrases and images,” listing more than a dozen. Contrary to Harlan, Denton asserted that “Washington was dominated by purpose, not power.” Despite this claim, Denton’s hagiographic treatment failed to address Harlan’s deconstruction of Washington’s legacy. For Denton, Washington’s support for adult education was an *a priori* vindication of his life and work. All criticism of Washington was unwarranted, even criticisms offered by scholars and backed by rigorous research.<sup>242</sup>

*Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement* received mixed reviews from historians. In his review in *The American Historical Review*, Raymond Wolters correctly noted that despite its title, Denton’s book spent little time exploring Washington’s contributions to the adult education movement, focusing instead on Washington’s biography. Wolters believed that Denton went “too far in defending Washington.” Robert G. Sherer’s review in *The Journal of Southern History* was even more critical. “For Denton,” he wrote, “Washington never made a mistake. . . . [She] denounces anyone who disagrees with Washington’s actions or questions his overwhelming influence.” He accused her of ignoring previous scholarship. Most importantly, Sherer noted that the national adult education movement began in the 1920s. Denton redefined the movement, broadening its scope in order to include Washington’s pedagogy. Joyce Humber-Faison, an educational historian, disagreed with Sherer. In her review which appeared in *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, Humber-Faison credited Denton for examining “a hitherto ignored, though extremely important period in the history of adult and developmental education.” She applauded Denton for exposing Washington’s “full portfolio of educational innovations.” In *The Journal of Negro History*, Edwin Hamilton conceded that Denton engaged in “‘retro-fitting’ modern adult education principles and concepts . . . to Washington’s educational endeavors,” though he felt her

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<sup>241</sup>Historian Michael Bieze accused Harlan of stacking *The Booker T. Washington Papers* with papers that supported his thesis, excluding other relevant documents. His arguments will be considered in the fourth chapter of this thesis. Michael Bieze, *Booker T. Washington and the Art of Self-Representation* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2008), 24, 27.

<sup>242</sup>Denton, xiii, 155, 163, 165-167.



arguments convincing. He praised her book as “a powerful and persuasive argument that appears to refute most of the negative aspersions about Booker T. Washington.”<sup>243</sup>

In his second volume, Harlan concluded that Washington’s educational philosophy needed little explication as it was neither original, nor his defining characteristic. Though Anderson agreed with Harlan that Washington’s leadership was detrimental to black uplift, he felt compelled to settle the question raised by Horace Mann Bond. Did Washington’s work have a measurable effect, positive or negative, on black economic and social progress? He believed Washington’s legacy purely negative. Contrarily, Virginia Lantz Denton maintained that Washington’s educational program was visionary. Whereas Harlan focused on Washington’s power at the expense of his educational philosophy, Denton honed in on Washington’s pedagogy as the *only* important aspect of his life and work. Though Denton’s work lacked scholarly rigor and read like a polemic, her arguments foreshadowed the educational paradigm, which would come into its own in the twenty-first century. Harlan’s neglecting to examine Washington’s educational program left the door open for educational historians to define Washington’s legacy, free from the burden of refuting him.

#### THE CRITICAL PARADIGM EXPLORED

In the 1990s, historians writing in scholarly journals continued to qualify and correct perceived oversights and mistakes in Harlan’s analysis, though they accepted the overall thrust of his arguments.

In his 1993 essay, “Strategies of Self-Representation in Booker T. Washington’s Autobiographies,” published in the *American Quarterly*, Donald B. Gibson contrasted *The Story of My Life and Work* and *Up from Slavery*. Gibson, a scholar who specialized in African American literature, treated the development of Washington’s autobiographies as an evolutionary

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<sup>243</sup>Raymond Wolters, review of Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement, by Virginia Lantz Denton, *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (1995): 245-246. Robert G. Sherer, review of *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement*, by Virginia Lantz Denton, *The Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 3 (1994): 607-608. Joyce Humber-Faison, review of *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement*, by Virginia Lantz Denton, *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education* 11, no. 1 (1994): 113-114. Edwin Hamilton, review of *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement*, by Virginia Lantz Denton, *The Journal of Negro Education* 62, no. 4 (1993): 513-514.

process in which Washington consciously revised and refined his public self-representation. Gibson analyzed Washington's shifting narrative against the factual backdrop of Harlan's "marvelously researched" biographies.<sup>244</sup>

As a case study, Gibson considered the episode, presented in both autobiographies, in which a young Washington selected his last name. Washington claimed that when he first attended school as a young boy, the teacher took roll and asked him his last name; Washington, not having a last name due to his former status as a slave, chose to call himself "Washington" in honor of the first president of the United States. Gibson believed Harlan incorrect in assuming Washington's account of this event plausible. He hypothesized that when the teacher asked Washington his last name and received no answer, the teacher prompted, "What is your father's name?" Washington, not understanding that the teacher required a surname answered with his stepfather's first name, "Washington." Gibson felt his hypothesis possible for two reasons: First, he doubted that as an unschooled former slave Washington had ever heard of the first President. Second, Gibson wrote, "I seriously doubt that a ten-year-old boy would decide not to take the name of his stepfather, even though he did not like him very much." This debate was relevant to Gibson's thesis because of the different ways Washington recounted the tale of his self-naming. In the earlier work, *The Story of My Life and Work*, he included a prior reference to his stepfather, Washington Ferguson, though he omitted it in *Up from Slavery*. After the publication of his first autobiography, Gibson implied, Washington realized that mentioning his stepfather's first name called the truthfulness of his narrative into question. Gibson believed that this subtle change in Washington's account exposed his attempted "to take control of his life."<sup>245</sup>

Bresnahan argued that Washington tailored his autobiographies to different audiences and Harlan treated *Up from Slavery* as a wholly new narrative. Gibson, however, believed that Washington merely revised *The Story of My Life and Work*; his literary endeavors were an evolutionary, rather than a revolutionary, process. Gibson pointed to textual parallels in the autobiographies as evidence. For example, though most of the stories in the autobiographies were the same, Washington's diction in *Up from Slavery* mirrored that of slave narratives, in contrast to his matter-of-fact tone in *The Story of My Life and Work*. Since slave narratives were "the form most frequently, prominently, and successfully [used] by blacks to represent themselves to a mainstream audience," Washington reshaped his narrative to take advantage of this popular literary convention. He wrote the original manuscript of *Up from Slavery*, Gibson noted, shortly after his first reading of

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<sup>244</sup>Sheri, Metzger, "Gibson, Donald Bernard 1933–," *Contemporary Black Biography* (2005), available at *Encyclopedia.com*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2874200039.html> (accessed 10/11/2015). Donald B. Gibson, "Strategies and Revisions of Self-Representation in Booker T. Washington's Autobiographies," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1993): 371.

<sup>245</sup>*Ibid.*, 372-376, 379.

Frederick Douglass' autobiography, which was a slave narrative. Gibson, however, believed that Washington's appropriation of the slave narrative format was purely cynical: "For Douglass, and other such narrators, the future will bring freedom. . . . Washington arguably does not seek freedom, civil rights, and social equality, but he wants public acknowledgement of his individual accomplishments." Whereas Douglass' narrative focused on his escape into freedom, Washington focused on conciliation. He was interested "in assuring its white audience that blacks, in slavery and out, were utterly and entirely without 'bitterness,'"<sup>246</sup>

While Gibson disagreed with Harlan on some particulars, such as whether Washington deliberately adopted George Washington's name, he accepted Harlan's psychological analysis of Washington. Like Harlan, Gibson viewed Washington as a master of self-representation, an accommodator who was more interested in protecting his individual accomplishments than in promoting racial justice. And though Gibson did not mention it, his conclusions and those of Bresnahan and Harlan were not mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible that Washington wrote his books with different audiences in mind, while, at the same time, refining his narrative. Regardless, Harlan and Bresnahan would have agreed with Gibson's essential point, that Washington carefully crafted a "fictive" self-representation.

Historian Karen Ferguson, a professor at Simon Fraser University and a specialist in African American history, disagreed with Harlan's assertion that Washington lacked core beliefs. Focused solely on "what August Meier exposed as Washington's 'accommodationist mask,'" she believed that historians, like Harlan, failed to understand Washington's coherent, if mistaken, ideology. In her 1998 essay in *Agricultural History*, "Caught in 'No Man's Land': The Negro Cooperative Demonstration Service and the Ideology of Booker T. Washington, 1900-1918," Ferguson argued that Washington sincerely believed black progress proceeded from the bottom-up through self-help and "separation from whites and their structures of exploitation." Ferguson added, however, that Washington's ideology was a severe miscalculation because it forced him to rely on "white money and influence" in his pursuit of black economic nationalism. Deference to his donors required him to dilute his message to the point of meaninglessness. Ferguson concluded that the "anachronisms of Washington's self-help ideology" failed to lift the vast majority of impoverished Southern blacks from a state of tenancy.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 380-381, 384-384, 387, 389.

<sup>247</sup>"Karen Ferguson," available at Simon Fraser University's website, <https://www.sfu.ca/history/faculty-and-staff/faculty-by-name/karen-ferguson.html> (accessed 10/11/2015). Karen J. Ferguson, "Caught in 'No Man's Land': The Negro Cooperative Demonstration Service and the Ideology of Booker T. Washington, 1900-1918." *Agricultural History* 72, no. 1 (1998): 34, 40, 53-53.

Ferguson offered the history of the Negro Cooperative Farm Demonstration Service (NCFDS) as a case study. The NCFDS was a program begun in 1903 under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The program was intended to serve as “the vanguard of [the] rural reform movement.” Ostensibly, its agents were responsible for educating black farmers in the “bourgeois values of cleanliness, sanitation, and discipline” in order to help them escape tenancy. Because the NCFDS’s goals paralleled those of the Tuskegee Institute, it hired many Tuskegee alumni and agents. However, Ferguson wrote, the program was abortive because “the southern cotton economy militated against black independence and self-sufficiency.” Cynical northern industrialists understood this from the start. Exercising control via their donations, they hijacked the USDA in order to create “a stable, obedient, and efficient rural workforce” of blacks in the South. Because the industrialists undermined the NCFDS’s mission, the southern agricultural economy remained stagnant.<sup>248</sup>

Ferguson offered statistical and historical data to support the claim that the NCFDS’s efforts were counterproductive. It initially appeared that the program achieved some success; by 1910, 16.5 percent of all Southern farms were owned by blacks. However, the collapse of cotton prices in 1914 reversed these gains and many blacks were forced back into tenancy. The Great Migration began precisely because the self-help programs of Tuskegee and the NCFDS failed. In Washington’s era, the majority of Southern blacks experienced no increase in wealth or independence; escape from the South became their only option.<sup>249</sup>

Ferguson and Harlan agreed that Washington’s efforts to achieve black uplift were ineffectual. They differed in their evaluations of Washington’s psychological motivations. Harlan saw malice and self-interest as Washington’s *raison d’être*, Ferguson believed he acted upon misguided ideology.

## EVALUATION

Relative to previous decades, the 1990s saw a paucity of scholarship on Washington. Though Anderson, Gibson, and Ferguson produced cogent arguments, their conclusions offered no new ways of looking at Washington. The only book published, Denton’s *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement*, proved more of throwback to hagiography era than a true revisionist text. If Washington dominated black life in his era, Harlan dominated Washington scholarship in his. Perhaps because Harlan’s work on Washington was so exhaustive, few scholars in the 1990s felt qualified to challenge his interpretation. Or perhaps Harlan’s narrative merely solidified the scholarly deconstruction of Washington’s legacy that

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<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 37, 41-42.

<sup>249</sup>Ibid., 48, 50-51, 53.

had begun in earnest with the publication of Woodward's *Origins of the New South*. Regardless, the strength of the Woodward-Meier paradigm and its biographical incarnation in Harlan's two volumes had the effect of stifling alternative views. A journal essay was far too short a format to effectively challenge, much less to overturn, the reigning paradigm. Even books like Denton's were too narrowly focused on a particular aspect of Washington's work to challenge the critical paradigm. In the 2000s, however, scholars began the process of chipping away at the dominant paradigm.

#### CHAPTER IV: THE RETURN TO SYMPATHETIC SCHOLARSHIP, 2000-2010

In 2000, any objective observer looking back over the past century of Washington scholarship would have concluded that Booker T. Washington's legacy as a compromiser and an accommodationist had been conclusively established. The second half of the century saw the effective refutation of the hagiographies written by Washington sympathizers. The critical paradigm dominated virtually all scholarly writing on Washington. Louis Harlan's biographies appeared the definitive treatment, and scholars relied almost exclusively on *The Booker T. Washington Papers* when garnering primary source materials on Washington. That a revival of interest in Washington and a new sympathetic awakening were on the horizon would have seemed unlikely.

As has been demonstrated, how historians viewed race relations and economics largely determined how they approached Washington. In the second half of the twentieth century blacks were finally granted civil rights and a modicum of participation in American government and society. Furthermore, liberal economic goals such as the establishment of the welfare state had been accomplished. Despite these facts, as scholars from disparate political poles, such as Cornell West and Thomas Sowell have noted, black economic status and family stability peaked around the 1950s and declined in subsequent decades. Scholars who attempted to contend with these facts did so in various ways. Liberals tended to emphasize the legacy of slavery and racism, arguing that government intervention had not gone far enough in overcoming historical baggage. Conservatives tended to emphasize what they perceived as the moral failings in black communities and families, arguing that government paternalism kept blacks in a perpetual state of childhood. While academia largely eschewed the conservative assessment of the situation, by the turn of the century it was becoming clear that neither the conservative nor the liberal solutions were wholly sufficient. A modified vision of racial progress was required. Scholarship on Washington began to reflect the quest to find such a model.

Several scholars looked back at Washington's era and concluded that critical historians failed to recognize the terrible situation he faced during the nadir of African American history. Whereas the hagiographic paradigm presented Washington as emblematic of the self-made man, the contextual paradigm took a less romantic approach. Historians like David Jackson and Robert Norrell concluded that the virulently racist society of Washington's day was an enormous handicap to black progress, particularly in the South. They treated Washington not as an advocate for the values of his time—the Protestant Ethic, Social Darwinism, the Social Gospel, etc.—but as a shrewd resistance fighter who subtly challenged white supremacy while avoiding the violent repercussions so often suffered by blacks who attempted to do so.

These historians were largely unconcerned with Washington's acceptance of capitalist values and denied that he capitulated to industrial interests. Ever concerned with context, they noted that Washington simply turned to the only demographic who expressed any interest in funding black education.

Another interesting strain of revisionist scholarship honed in on Washington's educational philosophy. Writers in the previous century presented Tuskegee's curriculum as designed to produce cheap black labor for the industrialists' factories. In the twenty-first century, however, scholars with backgrounds in educational theory like Donald Generals, Wilson J. Moses, and Michael Bieze contended that Washington's program of industrial education was a species within the genus of progressive education. They compared Washington to progressive icons like John Ruskin and John Dewey.

Less sympathetic historians also produced revisionist works. Houston A. Baker, Jr, attempted to employ the methods of psychoanalysis to understand Washington, though his results were not compelling. David Sehat examined Washington through the lens of international colonialism. Patricia Schechter and David Leverenz applied gender considerations to the debate.

By the end of the decade, the overall trend in Washington scholarship had shifted from criticism to sympathy.

#### WASHINGTON'S LEGACY: A USABLE HISTORY

It is natural that as a century turns, historians consider the past movements of history and their implications for the future. Washington scholars were no exception. In 2000, historians like Martin Kilson and Carla Willard were concerned that a conservative victory in the November election would undo the gains made by liberals on behalf of blacks in the previous decade. In an attempt to discredit conservative ideology, Kilson and Willard both revived the specter of Washington and compared him to neoconservatives. Donald Generals, on the other hand, considered Washington's educational philosophy and concluded that it was progressive rather than conservative. He argued that Washington's educational prescriptions could benefit blacks in the twenty-first century. Nearly a century after his death, Washington's legacy proved politically malleable.

In March of 2000, in his essay "The Washington and Du Bois Leadership Paradigms Reconsidered," published in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, historian Martin Kilson contrasted the leadership paradigms of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Born in 1931, Kilson spent a long career examining issues of race, class, and economics in America. A year prior to the publication of the essay, Kilson retired after teaching for forty-two years at

Harvard University. In this essay, published on the eve of the momentous Bush-Gore presidential election, Kilson revisited the critical paradigm, using it to condemn Washington's philosophy, which, he believed, was the intellectual ancestor of modern neoconservatism.<sup>250</sup>

Kilson maintained that Washington's Atlanta speech represented a "pathetic Faustian bargain" with the industrialists. He argued that it "belittled the possibility of using politics to advance African American needs, concerns, and status in a raucously evolving industrial capitalism." Kilson attributed the speech's popularity to the fact that "Washington sought to strike a bargain with America's captains of industry and, through them, with America's operational authoritarian white supremacist overrule of some 10 million black people." Kilson, however, focused less on Washington's accommodation with Southern white supremacists and more on his relationship with Northern industrialists. Kilson's emphasis was due to his severe judgment of capitalism, which he accused of "buffeting human beings about like leaves in the wind." Washington's leadership was entirely geared, Kilson argued, toward protecting the compromise between black interests and the industrialists' demand for cheap labor. However, according to Kilson, the white industrialists with whom the Washington struck his bargain "double-crossed" him; never intending to allow blacks "citizenship and social mobility."<sup>251</sup>

Kilson believed that Washington embodied two styles of leadership. The first he termed "social organization type black leadership" which is concerned solely with infrastructure building. At the expense of political rights, black leaders of this type focused on "the nuts and bolts of outfitting a group with agencies, mechanisms, networks, and institutions related to modern social development." Far from effecting progress, Kilson believed these leaders damaged the cause of black progress as they failed to make the procurement of civil rights the capstone of their agenda. Kilson characterized Washington's second leadership style as "client type or errand boy black leadership" which "served only a small, cynical inner circle of the black elite."<sup>252</sup>

In contrast to Washington's leadership styles, Kilson described W.E.B. Du Bois's style as "guidance leadership." Unlike Washington, Du Bois was concerned with "translating American social contract rights into rights for black people." He sought assistance from "cosmopolitan white bourgeois elements" rather than allying himself, as Washington did, with "those bourgeois whites at the other end of the leadership attitudinal spectrum—the parochials [sic.] who employ their

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<sup>250</sup>Willard R. Johnson, "Kilson, Martin L., (1931-)," *BlackPast.org*, <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/kilson-jr-martin-l-1931> (accessed 12/23/2014).

<sup>251</sup>Martin Kilson, "The Washington and Du Bois Leadership Paradigms Reconsidered," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (2000): 300, 302-304, 309.

<sup>252</sup>*Ibid.*, 298, 303-305.



strategic and social capacities to restrict these values.” More importantly, Du Bois’s leadership focused on convincing the federal government to recognize and protect the rights of black Americans. Kilson maintained that the work of guidance leaders lead to the “juridical dismantling of American racism.”<sup>253</sup>

Kilson stretched the facts to support his vision of black leadership styles. First, he claimed that if Du Bois had given the Atlanta speech instead of Washington, its content would have been completely different. Here Kilson committed the fallacy of anachronism. Du Bois actually praised Washington’s Atlanta speech at the time; only over the next decade, as he grew increasingly radical, did his critique of Washington emerge. Furthermore, Kilson offered a quote from Washington’s *The Future of the American Negro*, inserting explanatory brackets that fundamentally changed its meaning: “There is but one hope of solution; and that is for the Negro in every part of America to resolve from henceforth that he will throw aside every non-essential [citizenship and human rights] and cling only to essential.”<sup>254</sup> It is doubtful that even Harlan would have accused Washington of having no regard for “citizenship and human rights.” Kilson manipulated the facts in order to present a Manichean struggle between heroes—like Du Bois—and villains—like Washington.

Kilson also presented Washington as one of the progenitors of the neoconservative ideology that emerged later in the twentieth century. Attempting to prove this connection, Kilson traced the evolution of the Washington and Du Bois’s ideas over the decades. In his narrative, during the Great Depression and New Deal era “the establishmentarian or conservative sector of African American middle-class and professional families and associations” promoted Washington’s accommodationism. However, during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, black leaders adopted the guidance leadership paradigm, leading to “a battery of federal civil rights legislation and other policies like the war on poverty program and the overall affirmative action practices.” Because of these government interventions, in the 1990s the economic prospects of black families looked promising; 65 percent of blacks now belonged to the economic “mobile stratum,” he claimed. Despite these successes, Kilson believed that modern neoconservatives, motivated by political grandstanding, focused entirely on the smaller percentage of failed black families:

This neoconservative ideological manipulation of black crises has involved neo-racist backslashing and race-baiting, much of it accounting to pandering to long-standing white supremacist assumptions among most white Americans regarding their phobias toward African Americans as possible neighbors, professional peers, school mates, and political allies.

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid., 298, 305-307.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid., 302-303.

Kilson maintained that these conservatives, like Washington before them, were “trashing the policies that liberals, moderates, and progressives fashioned,” policies that resulted in black political and economic uplift. The revival of the Washington leadership paradigm, he warned, presaged a resurgence of racism and white supremacy: “White conservatives are just as likely to double-cross the Washington paradigm as their counterparts did earlier in the twentieth century.” Implicit was a warning against voting for George W. Bush or Republican candidates in the upcoming November elections. Kilson’s essay simply rehashed the activist-accommodationist dichotomy propagated by earlier historians while offering rote condemnations of capitalism.<sup>255</sup>

“By synthesizing the concepts of social responsibility and educational growth, [Washington] would anticipate John Dewey’s magnum opus—*Democracy and Education*—by over 30 years,” wrote historian Donald Generals of Rockland Community College in his 2000 essay, “Booker T. Washington and Progressive Education: An Experimentalist Approach to Curriculum Development and Reform” in *The Journal of Negro History*. Having earned his Ed.D. in Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education at Rutgers University, Generals devoted his studies to progressive education in America, a movement for which he felt deep sympathy. In his essay on Washington, Generals concluded that the critical paradigm was insufficient and misleading because Washington’s educational philosophy was “consistent with the broad movement of progressive education.” Modern educators, Generals concluded, have much to learn from Washington.<sup>256</sup>

Generals maintained that to characterize Washington’s philosophy as “accommodationist” was a historical distortion. He cited John Dewey who predicted that, if they failed to understand that vocational education was progressive in nature, people would view it as perpetuating class stratification. Generals believed that the popularity of the critical paradigm vindicated Dewey’s assertion; critical historians associated Washington’s industrial program with accommodation and capitalist exploitation. However, according to Generals, the historical reality was that progressive education lessened class disparity. He maintained that Washington’s goal was to use industrial education to facilitate black uplift and to undermine white supremacy. Washington, he added, consciously emulated progressive educators. After all, Washington studied the writings of Heinrich Pestlozzi and Frederich Froebel, the European progenitors of progressive education. Thinkers in the

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<sup>255</sup>Ibid., 308-310, 312.

<sup>256</sup>Donald Generals, “Booker T. Washington and Progressive Education: An Experimentalist Approach to Curriculum Development and Reform,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 3 (2000): 215, 230. “Meet the President,” available at the Community College of Philadelphia’s website, <http://www.ccp.edu/about-us/college-leadership/meet-president> (accessed 8/18/2015).

Enlightenment tradition, these educators believed that mass education would undermine tyranny, uplift the poor, and spread democracy. In order to liberate and uplift blacks, Washington attempted to put their theory into practice.<sup>257</sup>

Generals argued that Washington's intent was to educate students in the virtues requisite for responsible citizenship and to prepare them for a leadership role in the American democratic system. Since democratic growth is organic, Washington began his pedagogy with the basics: "Washington realized that the fundamental activities of life included economic and social interaction, moral and ethical engagement, communication and good home living." Generals added that, because students learned these skills in a communal setting, Tuskegee's pedagogy inculcated a sense of solidarity. Generals concluded that Washington's focus on "learning by doing" was harmonious with the central tenet of progressive education, that education must prepare people both to understand their environment and to make it work for them.<sup>258</sup>

Generals ended his essay by applying Washington's pedagogy to twenty-first century educational problems. He lamented the fact that many of his contemporary educators believed that poor student performance could be remedied through changes in funding allocations rather than through curricula reform. Generals desired reform that included some version of progressive education. He believed modern programs similar to Tuskegee's could enable inner-city children to excel academically and provide them with invaluable practical experience that would translate into successful careers.<sup>259</sup>

In December 2001 Carla Willard published her article "Timing Impossible Subjects: The Marketing Style of Booker T. Washington" in the *American Quarterly*. Having come of age in a multi-racial home in Philadelphia, Willard said that her goal as a historian was to answer the question of how "skin-color can make such a difference in terms of social access and social belonging." In pursuit of answers, Willard earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Pennsylvania in 1995. Her 2001 essay examined Washington's rhetorical style and explored its implications for race relations in twenty-first century America.<sup>260</sup>

Willard's article focused on Washington "as a man of the media," in particular, on the various stories he told his audiences. She believed his tales were carefully timed to evoke specific emotional responses from his listeners. Whereas some previous historians felt that *Up from Slavery* downplayed the horror of growing up a slave, Willard saw Washington's

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<sup>257</sup>Generals, 218, 220-222.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., 222, 226, 229-230.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 232.

<sup>260</sup>"Carla Willard," available at Franklin and Marshall College's website, <http://www.fandm.edu/carla-willard> (accessed 12/27/2014).

understatement as strategic. After all, he *did* matter-of-factly recount the flogging of his uncle. While “uninitiated” whites ignored these passages, in the minds of ex-slaves the stories would have conjured up memories of “brutalities.” As proof, Willard offered the words of a black lawyer, George F. Robinson, who called Washington’s story, “my own experience.” Still, Willard interpreted Washington’s acknowledgment of past black sufferings as little more than a rhetorical tactic, designed to ingratiate himself with blacks, thereby convincing them to subscribe to his pacific ideology. As so many before her, Willard characterized Washington’s program as a compromise, because while he acknowledged the horror of slavery, he also propagated the caricature of the “affable—and wealthy—ex-master” in appealing to white sentiment. “Donors rewarded the tenaciously forgiving nature of the narrator with amounts that . . . arrived ear-marked for Washington's worthy cause.” Washington’s rhetoric did little to challenge white myths, but it was central to “one of the most successful marketing campaigns of his time.”<sup>261</sup>

In contrast to Louis Harlan’s suggestion that Washington was a man with no core, Willard believed that underneath Washington’s dissembling, there existed a set of central beliefs. He often told success stories about black men and women who belonged to what she termed the “professional-managerial class.” She asked: “If he wanted to avoid . . . inflammatory statement[s] and pitch his writing solely to secure philanthropic funding, why risk the insertion of a black PMC ‘man’ and ‘woman’ at all?” And since the professional-managerial class was largely imaginary, Willard concluded that Washington was trying “to force ideological change,” by crafting a self-fulfilling prophecy. Though Washington did not describe the social reality of his era, he hoped to convince whites that, contrary to their bigotry, blacks *had* earned a degree social and economic achievement. Willard described this rhetorical strategy as “counter-typing,” that is, the production of tropes to challenge dominant white myths.<sup>262</sup>

However, Willard criticized Washington precisely because his counter-typings failed to directly challenge the reality of black subordination. He “sold his people up the river of Progress by marketing an alternative black world. . . . In substituting current events for futuristic dreams, and by replacing the old muddled negro with a distinct class of PMC men and women, his stories deployed narrative as argument.” Thus, rather than promoting reform and justice, Washington’s rhetoric reinforced class stratification because it implied that change was unnecessary. Blacks, in his telling, had already achieved a remarkable degree of success.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>261</sup>Carla Willard, “Timing Impossible Subjects: The Marketing Style of Booker T. Washington,” *American Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2001): 627-628, 630-631, 634, 645-646.

<sup>262</sup>*Ibid.*, 628, 645, 658.

<sup>263</sup>*Ibid.*, 628, 658-659.

Like Kilson, Willard ended her article with condemnations of modern conservatism. Willard claimed that modern black conservatives, in their quest to abolish welfare programs, blamed blacks for their poverty and “impoverished family life.” She felt that black conservatives, like Washington, refused to honestly admit the reality of racial injustice. Black progress in the twenty-first century, she believed, was hindered by the rhetoric of black conservatives.<sup>264</sup>

Both Willard and Kilson condemned Washington for his alleged conservatism and called upon modern liberals to reject the vain promises of conservatives. The implication was that since Washington’s conservatism failed blacks in the previous century, modern conservatism was also destined to hurt blacks. Educational scholars in the later 2000s, however, argued that the assumption that Washington was a conservative, axiomatic in the era of Meier and Harlan, was unfounded. Generals anticipated this trend when he argued that Washington’s pedagogy was a manifestation of progressive education. Though, Kilson, Willard, and Generals disagreed on the merits of Washington’s philosophy, it is worth noting that all three based their judgment on his perceived alignment on the political spectrum. Kilson and Willard saw Washington as an inveterate conservative and denounced him. Generals viewed him as a progressive and embraced his ideas. All three articles implied that conservatism was not a strategy beneficial to black survival. The hagiographers had praised Washington because of his conservative solutions; the emerging educational paradigm, in contrast, presented him as a progressive hero. In this regard, the educational paradigm and the critical paradigm overlapped; both saw progressivism as the force that would ultimately uplift blacks.

#### A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO WASHINGTON

In 2001 Houston A. Baker, Jr, published *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T*. The book was a disciplinary hybrid that contained Baker’s memoirs and reflections on Washington. Baker held a Ph.D. in Victorian Literature from the University of California, Los Angeles, and was, like Willard, a left-leaning scholar who disliked Washington’s leadership style and condemned his conservative economic beliefs. Unlike Willard, however, Baker deviated from the critical paradigm. Something of an iconoclast, Baker condemned black conservatives, such as Shelby Steele, and black radicals, such as Cornell West, for distorting the goals of the Civil Rights movement. Considering his

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<sup>264</sup>Ibid., 659-660.

unconventional beliefs, it is unsurprising that Baker attempted to step outside the critical paradigm, producing a unique psychoanalytic reflection on the meaning of Washington's life.<sup>265</sup>

Fourteen years before the publication of *Turning South Again*, Baker wrote *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Though this work was concerned with broader issues than Washington's legacy, Baker offered a few thoughts on Washington, some sympathetic and some mildly critical. For example, though he criticized Washington's "conciliatory 'hands across the color line' rhetoric" as a denial of white racism, he believed that Washington's goal "was to train the Afro-American masses in a way that would ensure their inestimable value to the white world—that would, in a word, enable them to survive." However, in *Turning South Again* Baker explained that a reassessment of *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* was necessary because in the earlier book "much seems understated, hidden, or, too triumphal by half." Baker added that as a young black man he associated Washington with his father, as both were "practical men." His father, like Washington, "sustained (always) a virtual faith that if he made the right culture cultivating moves he would be called to courts of earthly (read 'white') power on grounds of total equality." However, Baker stated that his father's passing away had afforded him perspective enough to reconsider his conclusions.<sup>266</sup>

Baker attempted to use the categories of psychoanalysis to discover Washington's motivations. For example, he viewed Washington's public activities as "performances." By a "performance" he meant a "human activity engaged in by an agent who is both conscious of and seeking to satisfy some standard of achievement." Baker believed that the standards of Washington's era were defined by class and race; the postwar economy was divided between "those who have (own, possess financial resources, oversee money and property) and those who don't (are owned as property, are indictable as bereft of capital reserves.)" This divide was reinforced by legally enforced discrimination. Washington, Baker believed, desired to transcend his preordained social strata. In order to accomplish this he had to cleanse himself of his blackness and integrate himself with the white power elite. Washington's public "performances" were not intended to challenge white supremacy, but to earn him personal status and power equal to whites.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup>Vershawn Young, "Houston Baker: *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era*," *New Books in African American Studies*, <http://newbooksinafroamstudies.com/2011/08/04/houston-a-baker-betrayal-how-black-intellectuals-have-abandoned-the-ideals-of-the-civil-rights-era-columbia-up-2008/> (accessed 8/18/2015).

"Houston A. Baker, Jr.: American Educator and Critic," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Houston-A-Baker-Jr> (accessed 8/18/2015). Emily Eakin, "Black Captive in White Culture?," *Racematters.org*, <http://www.racematters.org/blackcaptivewhiteculture.htm> (accessed 8/18/2016)

<sup>266</sup>Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 38, 62. Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2001), 27-28.

<sup>267</sup>*Ibid.*, 20, 35-37, 43.

Baker believed that Washington's desire for purification could be traced to his formative years; as an adolescent, Washington engaged in various purification "rituals." For example, Baker maintained that when Viola Ruffner taught Washington how to properly sweep a floor there were ritualistic undertones: "Decontamination and purity depend very much upon ritual acts of sweeping or cleaning up the taboos of 'dirt' " which were associated with blackness. Baker stretched this argument to absurd lengths: "It seems impossible to ignore the sexual overtones of such an encounter [between Ruffner and Washington]—whether these overtones became moments of actual physical contact, or remained only desire sublimated into joint rituals of 'sweeping,' we cannot say." Baker explained Washington's interactions with his female teachers at Hampton in similar psycho-sexual terms. Baker concluded that, as a young man, Washington believed that contact with whites and participation in their rituals would erase his blackness.<sup>268</sup>

According to Baker, Washington saw white male superiors as representative of his absent white father. Searching for a surrogate father, Washington was easily influenced by prestigious white men like Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Theodore Roosevelt. Baker characterized Washington's adoption of their chauvinistic philosophy as a "racial cross-dressing," a "homeroetic display" intended to gain him entry into the white "phallic economy." Baker added that "there existed a deeply homeroetic bond between Booker T. Washington and *all* white men—but in particular and most expressly between the Wizard of Tuskegee and General Armstrong." Baker maintained that these ritualistic attempts to join white society resulted in personal psychic damage. For example, Washington's nervousness before going onstage was not "mild discomfort," but a performance anxiety of clinical intensity. He cited the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* to prove that Washington suffered from the "specific phobia" of "social anxiety." Baker failed to back his allegations with historical evidence of any kind.<sup>269</sup>

Diverging from his earlier statements in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Baker concluded that Washington's performances were purely selfish. "Washington's masquerade, insofar as it was not an overt pedagogy or an open curriculum of Tuskegee Institute, represented preeminently the black principal's *personal triumph in white drag*." Baker felt the title, "Master of the Tuskegee Plantation," was appropriate, noting that Washington not only situated the Tuskegee Institute on a former plantation, but also "instituted and argued for an essentially black peasant southern plantation economics." Instead of focusing on personal advancement, Baker believed that Washington should have "dedicated himself

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<sup>268</sup>Ibid., 46-47, 55.

<sup>269</sup>Ibid., 38-39, 50-51, 62, 73.

to black *mass-mobilization towards citizenship*,” teaching blacks how to “dress for success.” Baker passed his judgment: Washington’s acceptance of Armstrong’s ideology was “a treacherous act.”<sup>270</sup>

In diagnosing of Washington’s hidden intentions and psycho-pathologies, Baker’s analysis suffered from a lack of evidence. A clinical diagnosis of Washington’s nervousness, for example, would require extensive primary-source documentation and consultation with a professional psychologist. But Baker failed to provide even the most basic of citations. Peter Novick has pointed out that after the 1980s, psychoanalysts, particularly those with backgrounds in literary criticism and cultural anthropology, demonstrated “a strong disposition to reconceive the ongoing psychoanalytic venture as hermeneutic rather than scientific.” In other words, scholars engaged in psychoanalysis felt they could discern hidden motives by producing an internally consistent psychological model explaining the words, actions, and beliefs of their subjects, rather actually undertaking a scientific and empirical study of that subject’s psychology. Novick notes that analysts often shrank from “statistical demonstrations” that their conclusions were valid; due to the speculative nature of their methods, their conclusions suffered from unfalsifiability. *Turning South Again* evidenced the methodological problems with psychoanalysis as Baker made sweeping claims concerning Washington’s psychology while failing to back them with primary source materials or scientifically rigorous clinical diagnoses. While Baker can be credited for offering a unique explanation for Washington’s motivations, it is hardly clear that his conclusions were true or even plausible.<sup>271</sup>

Still, reception of *Turning South Again* was mixed. In his review in *American Studies*, Clarence E. Walker called it “a rather tortured exegesis.” Writing in *American Literary Realism*, Jeanne Campbell Reesman called the work a “brilliant critique of Booker T. Washington.” Reviewers in *South Atlantic Review* and *The Review of Politics* were similarly favorable. What may be more significant than these positive reviews, however, is the fact that no established Washington scholar nor any major journal published a review of Baker’s book. Only a few later writers cited it, and none took his thesis very seriously.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup>HAB2, 64, 69-70, 81. All emphases original.

<sup>271</sup>Novick, 558-559.

<sup>272</sup>Clarence E. Walker, review of *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.*, by Houston A. Baker, Jr., *American Studies* 44, no. 1/2 (2003): 296. Jeanne Campbell Reesman, review of *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* by Houston A. Baker, Jr., *American Literary Realism* 34, no. 3 (2002): 281. Kate A. Baldwin, review of *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.*, by Houston A. Baker, Jr., *The Review of Politics* 64, no. 2 (2002): 380-383. John M. Reilly, review of *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.*, by Houston A. Baker, Jr., *South Atlantic Review* 67, no. 3 (2002): 133-135. Peter Coclanis is an example of a historian with an unfavorable view of Baker’s writings. His writings on Washington will be considered in this chapter.



## REEXAMINING WASHINGTON'S LEGACY

In 2000, historian Robert Norrell of the University of Tennessee suggested to W. Fitzhugh Brundage, a history professor at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, that the centennial of the publication of *Up from Slavery* in 2001 deserved recognition. They decided jointly to lead a panel on the topic of Washington's autobiography at the Southern Historical Association's annual meeting in 2001. The panel's success led them to organize a later conference on Washington. "Rethinking Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery: A Centenary Conference*" was held at the University of Florida from 4-6 October 2001. Two years later, the essays given at the conference were published in *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up from Slavery 100 Years Later*. The book, edited by Brundage, contained several excellent essays that offered divergent opinions concerning the meaning and value of Washington's autobiography. Reexamination of Washington's legacy began in earnest with the publication of *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress*.<sup>273</sup>

Brundage wrote the introductory essay, "Reconsidering Booker T. Washington and *Up from Slavery*." He felt that Washington's autobiography was "one of the most influential compendiums of the arguments for industrial education" ever written and noted that despite its homey tone the book was "a complex text marked by tactical silences, carefully contrived narrative devices, and artful representation." Brundage left the task of uncovering these meanings to his fellow authors. Instead he briefly reviewed Washington historiography. He concluded that Meier and Harlan were the premier Washington scholars of the twentieth century; they uncovered Washington's secret life and exposed the workings of the Tuskegee Machine. He noted that revisionist scholarship was on the rise, though no scholar had yet succeed in lifting the stigma of accommodationism from Washington. The concluding words of his essay were ironic, considering the purpose of the book: "Perhaps in the end, Washington will remain . . . fundamentally unknowable. But we nevertheless stand to learn much that is valuable about the South, the United States, and the plight of people of color in the Age of Empire by continuing to struggle to get to know Booker T."<sup>274</sup>

Louis Harlan wrote the second essay in the book, titled "*Up from Slavery* as History and Biography." Harlan stood by his earlier opinions. Regarding *Up from Slavery*, he noted that it is "important historically because it was the best and

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<sup>273</sup>"Robert J. Norrell," *Contemporary Authors Online* (Detroit: Gale, 2002), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale document number: GALE|H1000111985 (accessed 8/18/2015). "W(illiam) Fitzhugh Brundage," *Contemporary Authors Online* (Detroit: Gale, 2002), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale document number: GALE|H1000114257 (accessed 8/18/2015). W. Fitzhugh Brundage, et al., *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up From Slavery 100 Years Later* (University Press of Florida, 2003), vii.

<sup>274</sup>Brundage, 1-4, 15.

most inspirational statement [Washington] ever made of his social philosophy and his program for black advancement.” As a truthful account, however, Harlan found it lacking. He repeated several of the inaccuracies in *Up from Slavery* that he had demonstrated in his biographies. Harlan felt compelled to wonder “whether *Up from Slavery* is essentially fact or fiction.” He concluded that the inconsistencies and inaccuracies “limit the usefulness of *Up from Slavery* as a biographical and historical source.” Harlan offered no new evidence nor any reconsideration of his earlier writings, but several of the essays following his offered poignant challenges to his interpretation.<sup>275</sup>

Robert J. Norrell’s essay, “Understanding the Wizard: Another Look at the Age of Booker T. Washington” was in striking contrast to Harlan’s essay. Norrell offered a contextual account, arguing that the critical paradigm failed to provide a comprehensive explanation for Washington’s philosophy and activities. Norrell criticized Harlan for exploring Washington only within the contexts of presidential politics and internecine competition among black leaders. He argued that two other contexts were equally important. The first was the white ideology of Washington’s era. Keeping white bigotry in mind, Norrell wrote, it is clear that “the overarching message” of the Atlanta speech “was not acceptance of disfranchisement or segregation but rather a message of [black] progress.” In his speech Washington attempted to craft an ideology to compete with that of white supremacy. To this end, Washington used his influence over the media to showcase black progress. The second context Harlan failed to grasp was that Washington was quite vocal compared to many black leaders. For example, “Washington faced hostile and unscrupulous competition from the heads of two other black industrial schools in Alabama.” Washington’s adversaries, William Paterson and William Hooper Council, blatantly pandered to white supremacists in an attempt to garner state educational funds for their schools. Compared to them, Washington was progressive as he “often spoke up for civil and political rights.” Norrell elaborated:

The tendency to make protest leaders into good guys and accommodators the bad guys reflects the sentiments at large in society since the Civil Rights Movement. . . . [But in fact], there have been few if any black ‘leaders’ in American history who were not protest leaders in some measure. It is only by comparing degrees of protest commitment, or preferring certain styles of protest to others, that distinctions are drawn.

Norrell concluded his essay by stating that Washington worked too hard on behalf of blacks to be called an accommodationist. Still, he conceded that “by no honest measure can he be seen as an overall success.” But Norrell placed this observation in context, noting that the NAACP did not convince the public of its view until after the Second World War. Norrell’s challenge to the reigning paradigm was compelling. He spent much of the rest of the decade investigating

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<sup>275</sup>Ibid., 20, 28, 30-31-33 35.

Washington in the light of his contextual paradigm, an undertaking that culminated in the publication of his 2008 biography, *Up from History*.<sup>276</sup>

Norrell was not the only historian to offer a contextual account. In “What Made Booker Wash(ington)?: The Wizard of Tuskegee in Economic Context,” historian Peter A. Coclanis posited that Washington’s economic program was a prudent response to the challenges faced by blacks of his era. Coclanis, who earned his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1984, specialized in American, Southeast Asian, economic, and business history. Drawing on these broad areas of expertise, Coclanis juxtaposed Washington’s activities with those of oppressed peoples and classes outside the United States. He began by noting that while many previous historians assumed that a malleable Washington simply adopted the ideologies of his era—the Social Gospel, Social Darwinism, and the Protestant Ethic—Washington was actually more pragmatic than ideological. For example, Washington’s “fixation with cleanliness and his zealous promotion of cleanliness behaviors . . . were both closely related to, if not direct functions of his ‘lived experience’ in the highly morbid and . . . disease [filled] environment of the late-nineteenth century South.” He continued:

Indeed, in terms of developmental measures such as the PQLI (Physical Quality of Life Index) and the HDI (Human Development Index) . . . the South—with its low levels of literacy, high levels of infant mortality, and relatively low life expectancy—had fared far below levels “predicted” by income/wealth even during the antebellum years. During the postbellum period, though, the South became an unmitigated economic, epidemiological, and developmental disaster area.

These environmental conditions, Coclanis explained, hindered economic development. “Don’t laugh,” he wrote, “In recent years, a number of economists have challenged traditional assumptions about the direction of the relationship between health, particularly ill health, and economic growth.” Coclanis added that the legacy of slavery produced “moral analogues” to these biopathologies. Furthermore, Coclanis felt that historians who condemned Washington for his relationship with wealthy industrialists committed the guilt-by-association fallacy. In reality, Coclanis wrote, Washington’s appeals resembled those made by modern Third World countries to “authorities and agencies such as the IMF, the UNDP, the ADB, or the World Bank.” Coclanis’s argument was compelling in that it treated blacks as a colonized people, as had Oliver Cox and Manning Marable, while plausibly explaining Washington’s program as a response to the subordinate social status of blacks in that colonial order.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup>Ibid., 59, 61-62, 64, 74, 77.

<sup>277</sup>“Peter Coclanis: Director of the Global Research Institute,” available at UNC Global’s website, <http://global.unc.edu/about/people/peter-coclanis/> (accessed 8/18/2016). Brundage, 82-84, 90-91.

Coclanis' presented Washington's philosophy as a pragmatic approach to the economic conditions of his time; similarly, in his essay, "More Than an Artichoke: The Pragmatic Religion of Booker T. Washington," Wilson J. Moses treated Washington's religious utterances as a pragmatic approach to black uplift. Moses, a professor of history at Pennsylvania State University who specialized in American cultural and intellectual history, argued that "to his tremendous benefit" when Washington was young, his mentors emphasized a practical religion that consisted of "struggle and duty, rather than comfortable and fatalistic contentment." He commended *Up from Slavery* for anticipating the central tenets of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, four years before Max Weber completed it. In *Up from Slavery*, Moses wrote, Washington successfully harmonized "the seemingly contradictory themes of self-interest and self-sacrifice." In other words, utilizing religious language, Washington promoted both individual responsibility and group solidarity. Hence, Tuskegee's industrial program was designed to improve both individuals and communities. Like Donald General, Moses chastised Harlan for not understanding that Tuskegee's curriculum was progressive in nature: "The similarity of Washington's praxis to that of Dewey is almost too obvious, but Louis Harlan—after seriously considering the possibility of an analogy—in the end figuratively shakes his head and says, in effect, 'Naw, it can't be.'" Moses ended his essay by stating that the Tuskegee Machine was a force for uplift that replaced the old plantation machinery: "Laissez-faire would not work. A program for uplift must include a socializing element and a regulatory mechanism. Washington's 'Tuskegee Machine,' aptly named by his detractors, was designed to replace the torturous machinery of slavery with a progressive engine that would function to the advantage of black folk." To summarize Moses' argument: Washington's acceptance of the Protestant Ethic led him away from Calvinistic antinomianism and inspired him to create institutions that benefited American blacks.<sup>278</sup>

In the twentieth century, Washington's autobiography was often analyzed in terms of race and class, but never in terms of gender. Patricia A. Schechter, a professor at Portland State University who specialized in woman's history, attempted to remedy this oversight in her essay, "'Curious Silence'?: African American Women in *Up from Slavery*." Schechter attended the 2001 conference on Washington and was perturbed to find that the topic of one of the panels was "Washington's curious silence about his wives and his omission of black women in his autobiography." She felt the panel asked the wrong question as there was nothing curious about Washington's silence. "Reticence about love and romance," she wrote, "are not new to me as a student of African American literature." Washington, she said, was a typical "Victorian middle-class" male who felt obliged to conceal his women from "the dominant culture's . . . 'gaze.'" In fact, she felt his

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<sup>278</sup>Wilson Jeremiah Moses: Ferree Professor of American History," available at Penn State's website, <http://history.psu.edu/directory/wjm12> (accessed 8/18/2016). Brundage, 109-112, 122.

treatment of women in *Up from Slavery* balanced and bold. He did not use racist humor or “mammy” stereotypes when writing about his mother. She contrasted Washington’s glowing treatment of his mother with his less-than-favorable memories of his stepfather and concluded that this portion of his narrative cut against the grain of the gender expectations of his era. Furthermore, while Washington’s overall rhetoric in *Up from Slavery* appealed to white myths, he never applied stereotypes to black women. Schechter offered a word of criticism, noting that when Washington wrote that his second wife, Olivia, “worked herself to death,” he was evoking a “Christian mythology . . . that contemporary black feminist theologians have recently begun to critique as historically ill-suited for African American women’s survival.” Still, Schechter concluded that scholars, rather than Washington himself should be blamed for the silence regarding the women in his life. She was not inclined to charity on this score: “Erasure of black women [from the historical discussion] also enables a particular reading of U.S. ‘race relations’ as a problem among men, fixable by men.” While Schechter did not feel Washington particularly visionary, she credited him for his progressive treatment of women in *Up from Slavery*.<sup>279</sup>

Another expert in the gender stereotypes of Washington’s era was David Leverenz who held a Ph.D. in literature from Berkeley. He disagreed with Schechter’s conclusions. In his essay, “Booker T. Washington’s Strategies of Manliness, for Black and White Audiences,” he argued that Schechter mistook Washington’s patriarchal attitude towards his women for respect. Leverenz wrote, “Across classes and races, manhood meant men’s ability not only to be independent, but also to protect the reputation of the women in their lives.” Washington’s silence about the women in his life was a symptom of his desire to protect his manliness. Indeed, Washington’s quest to prove his manliness took on larger proportions as his influence grew: “He took emulative pleasure in his patriarchal domination of his ‘plantation’ at Tuskegee, as Louis Harlan emphasizes.” Leverenz concluded that Washington’s treatment of women in *Up from Slavery* was informed by the gender assumptions of his day, rather than by a real sense of respect.<sup>280</sup>

As a compendium of opinions on Washington, *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress* was remarkable in that, excepting the hagiographic tradition, all the major paradigms in Washington scholarship were represented. The critical paradigm endured, exemplified in the essays of Brundage and Harlan. Norrell’s contextual account was a direct challenge to the critical paradigm. Coclanis’s examination of the economic context of Washington’s activities reflected the revisionism of the decade and offered an answer to historians, like Cox and Marable, who considered Washington an agent of colonialists.

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<sup>279</sup>“Faculty Bio-Patricia Schechter,” available at Portland State University’s website, <https://www.pdx.edu/history/bio-schechter> (accessed 8/18/2015). Brundage, 131, 133-134, 137-138, 143.

<sup>280</sup>“David Leverenz: Professor Emeritus,” available at the University of Florida’s website, <http://web.english.ufl.edu/faculty/dleverenz/> (accessed 8/18/2015). Brundage, 149, 152-153.

Moses's essay highlighted the direction the educational paradigm was heading, presenting Washington as progressive educator. Schechter and Leverenz, unlike the others, cannot be said to be representative of a paradigm. Other than Houston Baker, they have the distinction of being the only scholars to date to have considered Washington through gender analysis. Most importantly, *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress* serves to highlight the rising tide of revisionist writings on Washington. Despite a few hagiographic hold-outs, in the 1970s and through the 1990s, the critical paradigm was clearly the consensus position. In *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress* that consensus disintegrated.

### WASHINGTON AND COLONIALISM

While Oliver Cox and Manning Marable maintained that Washington collaborated with colonial forces, both in American and internationally, other scholars, like Naren Tambe and Peter Coclanis, viewed Washington as a shrewd resistance leader who undermined colonialism. In 2007, while pursuing his Ph.D. in history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, David Sehat sided firmly with Cox and Marable in an essay titled "The Civilizing Mission of Booker T. Washington," published in *The Journal of Southern History*. Later, in 2011 Sehat wrote *The Myth of American Religious Freedom*, in which he criticized the coercive influence he believed organized religion wielded over society. This world view was implicit in his earlier article on Washington; Sehat believed that Washington accepted the religious chauvinism of the American Missionary Association and its colonialist ethos.<sup>281</sup>

Sehat criticized both Louis Harlan's "role psychology" and the contextual paradigm as too narrowly focused. He maintained that the plight of blacks in the era of Washington was not, in Gunnar Myrdal's famous phrase, a uniquely "American dilemma." Rather, Sehat maintained that the dynamic between blacks and whites in the South was analogous to the relationship between other "subjugated peoples" and colonial powers. In this context, he viewed Washington as an "indigenous collaborator." Such collaborators, Sehat stated,

gain esteem and prestige within the colonial system because they serve as intermediaries between colonial rulers and the subjugated population, and they are necessarily critical of the traits and cultural systems of the colonized peoples from which they come. . . . They often stand before their own people as promoters of the prescribed systems of behavior and the so-called civilizing mission undertaken by the colonial regime.

As an intermediary, Washington promoted the racist assumptions of the occupiers, though he couched these assumptions in the language of uplift so as to appease black demands. For example, Washington promised progress, but always placed it

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<sup>281</sup>"David Sehat," *Contemporary Authors Online* (Detroit: Gale, 2002), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale document number: GALE|H1000203691 (accessed 8/18/2015). David Sehat, "The Civilizing Mission of Booker T. Washington," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 2 (2007): 324-325.

sometime in the hazy future. In this way he attempted to pacify blacks who demanded change and white supremacists who resisted that change. Washington alone benefited from these prevarications. Sehat concluded that Washington's position as "the most significant" indigenous collaborator in the American South explains his behavioral and rhetorical inconsistencies.<sup>282</sup>

In any colonial system, Sehat reminded, the colonialists deny that they are occupiers, presenting themselves, instead, as "civilizers." The American Missionary Association was one of the foremost civilizers in the postbellum South; their focus was on imposing their vision of "a Protestant Christian America" on the South. They were remarkably successful in their mission: by 1888 nearly half of the fifteen thousand black teachers in the South had been trained by the AMA. Sehat highlighted the connection between the AMA's philosophy and Washington's work:

The AMA's civilizing mission, which Booker T. Washington continued and expanded, was equal parts racist paternalism and classic liberal thought. In the free labor ideal of the nineteenth century, the AMA regarded all people as equal before the law. However, the guarantee of equality was strictly formal, so that as long as the law did not actively discriminate between persons, any structural or substantive claim of inequality was outside the purview of the law. Some individuals might possess better opportunity, family resources, or bargaining positions that perpetuated or resulted in profound actual inequality, but so long as anyone could adopt the necessary values for success in the free labor system, classical liberalism called the system fair.

Sehat viewed classical liberalism as naïve and argued that, in practical terms, the AMA required blacks to adopt white culture and values. The corollary was that if blacks failed to comply, they constituted a threat to American democracy. Sehat believed that Washington adopted the religious and cultural chauvinism of the AMA wholeheartedly as a youth. He eventually emerged as the perfect collaborator, a true believer.<sup>283</sup>

As a case study, Sehat considered Washington's anticlericalism in light of his role as a collaborator. Sehat noted that the AMA viewed African American religion as "emotional escapism that failed to offer the foundation for a proper, bourgeois morality." Such religion "promoted an otherworldly orientation" at the expense of constructive solutions in the here and now. Washington, he wrote, agreed that Africanism needed "to give way to the liberal Christianity of the AMA." Hence, Washington disapproved of emotive religion and even accused black ministers of entering the seminary solely to avoid manual labor. As principal of the Tuskegee Institute, Washington established a theological school aimed at reforming black ministers. It was, in Washington's words, "*strictly* undenominational;" he was more concerned with the AMA's civilizing mission than with sectarian theological debates. Washington's motives, however, were not purely theological;

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<sup>282</sup>Sehat, 324-328, 354.

<sup>283</sup>Ibid., 329, 334-335, emphasis original.

Sehat wrote: “By impugning those who disagreed with him as either lazy or vicious, he effectively tightened his leadership and strengthened his emerging significance before white, northern philanthropists.” Washington benefited personally in his promotion of the civilizer’s vision of religion.<sup>284</sup>

According to Sehat, in the later years of Washington’s life, the AMA drew back from its economic prescriptions. Its leaders realized that the conception of equality held by the classical liberals only reinforced white supremacy and economic stratification. Sehat pointed out that in 1904 the new president of the AMA, Washington Gladden, aligned with the Du Bois faction. Despite the fact that the AMA repudiated its earlier philosophy, Washington never retreated from the civilizing mission. Washington chose to defend the industrialists and conservative values until his death. For this reason, Sehat believed Washington a failed leader.<sup>285</sup>

Sehat’s essay was both thoughtful and original; he highlighted the much-neglected connection between Washington’s ideology and that of the American Missionary Association. In reviving the colonial thesis, he also stepped outside the Woodward-Meier paradigm. Still, while it is certain that the classical liberalism of the AMA shaped Washington’s ideology, it is debatable whether this was to the detriment of black progress. Sehat assumed *a priori* that classical liberalism and racial uplift are mutually exclusive. Horace Mann Bond would have demanded statistical proof. Perhaps limited by the scope of his essay, Sehat failed to undertake such an investigation. Like the scholars who adhered to the educational paradigm, Sehat assumed that particular ideologies produce specific effects, without demonstrating the causal relationship. Nonetheless, Sehat offered intriguing opinions which deserve to be investigated further by future historians.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL PARADIGMS ASCENDANT

Sehat was the last historian of the decade to attack Washington. The contextual and educational paradigms dominated the remainder of the decade. In 2005 Michael Bize published an essay investigating Washington through the lens of cultural and educational history. The year 2008 proved a turning point in Washington scholarship as three revisionist works were published. Robert Norrell published a major biography that largely defined the contextual paradigm. David H. Jackson and Bieze completed monographs that investigated the various ways Washington succeeded in undermining white supremacy. These works were pointed reminders that an ostensible historical consensus cannot endure indefinitely.

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<sup>284</sup>Ibid., 331, 336, 338, 342.

<sup>285</sup>Ibid., 356-357, 359-362.



It is unsurprising that Washington was largely ignored by cultural historians, given his status as an educator and political leader. In fact, historian Michael Bieze was the first to apply the methods of cultural history to Washington studies in his 2005 essay, “Ruskin in the Black Belt: Booker T. Washington, Arts and Crafts, and the New Negro,” published in *Notes in the History of Art*. At the time he wrote, Bieze, who held a M.F.A. in art history from the University of Washington and a Ph.D. in educational policy studies from Georgia State University, had served for twenty years as the chair of the Fine Arts department at a Catholic college preparatory school in Brookhaven, Georgia, the Marist School. The thesis of Bieze’s essay was that Washington’s pedagogy actually centered on aesthetics and was inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement in vogue in *fin de siècle* America.<sup>286</sup>

Contradicting historians who viewed Washington’s pedagogy as essentially materialist, Bieze argued that Washington’s goal was to assist blacks in achieving the “heights of civilization.” He intended to challenge white prejudices by proving that blacks could match “white models of Victorian taste.” Washington deliberately utilized aesthetics to combat the stereotype that blacks were bestial and uncouth. In this pursuit, Bieze wrote, Washington transformed the Tuskegee Institute into “one of the first organized centers of African-American artistic activity.” Tuskegee’s publications “matched white aesthetics, thus proving intellectual and cultural equality without making the direct demands of contemporaries like Du Bois.” In building the Institute and in promoting it to the general public, Washington deliberately hired black architects, photographers, and artists. In Bieze’s telling, the Institute served as a venue for showcasing black accomplishments. Whereas Du Bois and his allies offered political challenges to white supremacy, Washington sought to change hearts by demonstrating black cultural accomplishment.<sup>287</sup>

Like Donald General and Wilson J. Moses, Bieze situated Washington within the progressive mainstream of his era. The Arts and Crafts movement originated, he reminded, in the ideas of a progressive, John Ruskin. Ruskin believed that utility was innately beautiful and “conceived of art’s highest expressions as those that linked the worker, nature, and spirituality.” Similarly, Washington, taking a cue from his mentor, Armstrong, often spoke of the “dignity of labor.” Bieze noted that the connection between Washington and Ruskin was not purely theoretical; Ruskin’s works were required reading at the Institute.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup>Michael Bieze, “Ruskin in the Black Belt: Booker T. Washington, Arts and Crafts, and the New Negro,” *Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 4, (2005); reverse cover.

<sup>287</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-27, 30.

<sup>288</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-25, 27, 29.

The contention that Washington was deeply concerned with the arts contradicted the assumptions of many previous historians who viewed Washington's industrial program as materialistic. They accepted Du Bois' contention that Washington opposed "non-essentials" like arts and aesthetics. Bieze faulted previous Washington scholars for uncritically accepting this assumption and neglecting to investigate the Tuskegeean's contributions to black art history. In the years following the publication of his essay, Bieze continued to investigate Washington's promotion of the Arts and Crafts movement. His synthesis of cultural and educational history would produce a cogent challenge to the critical paradigm.<sup>289</sup>

Of all the revisionist accounts that emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the most comprehensive was Robert J. Norrell's biography, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*. Published in 2008, the 508 page volume offered not only a readable and entertaining account of Washington's life and work and a forceful challenge to the critical paradigm. Norrell was born in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1952 and once said, "I write primarily about what I know most—the history of the South and Alabama." Norrell completed his undergraduate and graduate studies in history at the University of Virginia, earning his Ph.D. in 1983. By the time he published his Washington biography, Norrell had written several books on race relations, particularly those in Alabama, while teaching at the University of Tennessee. Having spent two decades studying the state of race relations in the post-Reconstruction South, Norrell concluded that Washington scholars had fundamentally understated the dangers posed by white supremacy and had ignored Washington's shrewd challenges to racial prejudice.<sup>290</sup>

Norrell offered a historiographical critique, lamenting that the demonization of Washington had achieved the level of historical dogma in the twentieth century. Though scholars writing in the decade after Washington's death tended to view him positively, Norrell noted that his popularity waned during the Great Depression, which signaled to many the apparent "demise of capitalism." Furthermore, during the Second World War, Americans grew increasingly aware and critical of racism in their society and began paying more attention to activist leaders. Though civil rights activists in the years following World War II began viewed Washington as a failed leader, Norrell believed that Washington's strategies were actually responsible for the weakening of prejudice: "Under government sponsorship, awareness of black achievement became what Washington had intended it to be: the antidote to the ugly images of blacks promoted in American popular

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<sup>289</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>290</sup>"Robert J. Norrell," *Contemporary Authors Online* (Detroit: Gale, 2002), available at *Biography in Context*, [www.ic.galegroup.com](http://www.ic.galegroup.com), Gale document number: GALE|H1000111985 (accessed 8/18/2015).

culture.” Despite this fact, Du Bois’ narrative in *Dusk of Dawn*, which Norrell called “the most influential critique” of Washington, cemented a negative assessment of Washington in the scholarly community.<sup>291</sup>

Norrell faulted Du Bois for focusing “selectively on ideological differences” while ignoring other important issues, such as the constraints white supremacy placed on black leaders’ ability to maneuver. Du Bois writing were widely praised, Norrell maintained, because his condemnation of capitalism and Washington’s supposed capitulation to the selfish demands of northern industrialists resonated with the Depression-era *zeitgeist*. However, Norrell believed that Du Bois “exaggerated Booker’s political influence” while claiming erroneously that Washington “excused the South’s discrimination and always blamed the poor black man himself for his own predicament.” Norrell called Du Bois’ chapter on Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk* “an artful critique that carefully masked its intense partisanship.” In it, Du Bois “adopted a romantic viewpoint” and advanced a particular “racial essentialism” that inspired “several generations of black nationalists.” He criticized Du Bois for failing to acknowledge the life-threatening danger that white supremacists posed to Southern blacks and artfully deconstructed Du Bois’ main argument: “Du Bois touted the saving grace of the Talented Tenth, but his numbers in fact amounted to a much smaller fraction. His higher-education graduates accounted for about one in every 5,000 American blacks in 1903. *Souls* was silent about the fate of the other 4,999, and he gave Booker Washington no credit for his concern with educating the black masses.” Norrell concluded that only a dimwitted person could have misunderstood Washington’s “propaganda of interracial peace.” And since Du Bois was certainly not dimwitted, Norrell attributed the attacks in *The Souls of Black Folk* to willful malice. Norrell concluded: “Few men in an open society get to set the terms for the historical memory of their avowed enemy, but W.E.B. Du Bois was one who did.” Norrell maintained that because later scholars accepted Du Bois’ critical assessment, their understanding of Washington was impoverished.<sup>292</sup>

Norrell also assessed the works of the major Washington scholars who followed Du Bois. August Meier, he said, offered “a measured estimate,” proving that Washington’s philosophy reflected the opinions of the black majority. Although he commended Meier for exposing Washington’s “secret legal challenges,” Norrell criticized him for failing “to place Washington plausibly within the ugly environment of the turn-of-the-century South” and for casting “Booker’s approach as ‘accommodationist.’” Norrell was less charitable to Woodward, whom he felt merely echoed Du Bois. He accused Woodward of *willfully* ignoring that Washington was “fighting a defensive battle” against the attacks of white supremacists.

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<sup>291</sup>Robert J. Norrell *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 15, 425, 427-428.

<sup>292</sup>*Ibid.*, 266, 269, 277, 279-280, 283-289, 425-426.

“With this omission,” Norrell wrote, “Woodward left the unmistakable impression that Washington had more freedom to speak and act than he actually did.” Furthermore, Norrell chastised Woodward for failing to recognize that white philanthropy actually made black education possible: “To have acknowledged the good works of the rich men would have undermined [Woodward’s] argument about the evil influence of big corporations on the South.” Lastly, he faulted Woodward for completely ignoring the symbolic nature of Tuskegee’s achievement. Norrell lamented that Woodward’s “seminal” interpretation was reinforced by Harlan’s work. He criticized Harlan for “recycl[ing] his mentor’s pejoratives” and “mimick[ing] Monroe Trotter in flinging epithets at Washington.” Harlan, Norrell argued, presented a Manichean struggle between “black idealists of ‘distinction and dignity’ and the Tuskegee Machine,” clearly favoring the former. Harlan also ignored the personal animosity of Washington’s contemporary critics and overlooked their vitriolic attacks on him, while “pil[ing] up evidence of spite from Washington’s camp.” He downplayed white prejudices by deliberately ignoring “the mounting white hysteria” that Washington’s influence in the Republican Party evoked. In addition, Norrell accused Harlan of failing to acknowledge that Washington’s inveterate optimism bolstered black morale. Norrell concluded that because Harlan “drove his thesis well and paraded vivid images before the reader, [he] shaped virtually all the writing on post-Reconstruction race relations published after 1972.” Having exposed the insufficiencies in previous Washington scholarship, Norrell undertook to explain Washington’s philosophy and work in the context of the “ugly environment” of white racism and violence.<sup>293</sup>

Norrell began his biography by examining Washington’s early life as a slave. He acknowledged that Washington’s experience was relatively benign. While some previous historians, like Carla Willard, argued that Washington deliberately downplayed the brutalities he witnessed as a young slave, Norrell was inclined to believe Washington when he presented his slave experience as mild: “He never romanticized slavery [in his autobiographies], but he apparently did not suffer much from it physically or psychologically.” Furthermore, after emancipation, Washington benefited from positive contact with whites, more so than most of his generation. Norrell concluded that having experienced both slavery and white charity, Washington’s upbringing afforded him “a realistic understanding of whites’ behavior.”<sup>294</sup>

Norrell presented Washington’s relationship with Samuel Chapman Armstrong and the other teachers at Hampton as examples of Washington’s positive contact with whites. Norrell did not excuse Armstrong’s shortcomings, noting that he assumed “an unapologetic paternalist posture.” He correctly noted that the education Hampton offered was equivalent to that

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<sup>293</sup>Ibid., 434-437.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid., 21, 41.

of a modern middle-school. Still, he dismissed Baker's conclusion, stating: "*Amateur* psychiatrists have speculated that Armstrong might have represented to Booker the white father who had never claimed him." Citing Peter Coclanis's essay to prove the connection between hygiene, health, and wealth, Norrell credited Armstrong's pedagogy for instilling in Washington the importance of good hygiene. Washington also learned the art of rhetoric at Hampton, a skill he constantly utilized later in life. He gained valuable agricultural experience at Hampton, passing on his knowledge to the student body of the Tuskegee Institute. More ambiguous, in Norrell's opinion, was Washington's absorption of "a progressive view of history . . . from a strongly triumphalist Anglo-Saxon perspective." Though an older Washington *did* lament the dismissive and derogatory presentation of blacks in history textbooks, throughout his life he also maintained, as Norrell put it, that "blacks had had no history of their own" and that their experiences under slavery was "merely an adjunct of whites' history." However, Norrell conceded that Washington's unshakable optimism also arose from his progressive view of history. He firmly believed that black progress was inevitable. Despite the flaws in Hampton's pedagogy, Norrell believed Washington's education afforded him valuable leadership skills and taught him that "the best sort" of whites would prove valuable allies in the struggle upward from slavery.<sup>295</sup>

After a routine chronicle of Washington's establishment of the Tuskegee Institute, Norrell turned his attention to Washington's Atlanta speech. He believed the speech outlined a philosophy that Washington adhered to throughout his life. Though he spent fewer pages on the speech than other biographers, Norrell offered penetrating commentary. He denied that Washington offered an accommodation to white supremacy, but, rather, he subtly challenged it. For example, Washington began by thanking the exposition's organizers for acknowledging the "manhood" and successes of blacks. "This," Norrell wrote, "when many white southerners dismissed blacks as worthless and bestial. He thus suggested that . . . the organizers of this great exposition, did not see blacks in such a negative way." When Washington admitted the failure of Reconstruction and the impotence of the black vote, Norrell felt he was making the tactical concession of "independent black political power" in order to forestall white outrage that too often resulted in violence. In the speech, Washington said, "Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars . . . helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South." Norrell correctly noted that Washington was explicitly addressing white industrialists. He hoped to entice them to "cast down their buckets" in the South by investing in black education and employment. Norrell conceded that the speech referenced the Lost Cause myth that the master-slave relationship was

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<sup>295</sup>Ibid., 31, 33, 35, 37, n. 447-448. Emphasis original.

mutually beneficial. Norrell, however, believed Washington deliberately twisted this trope in order to prove that blacks did not threaten, but actually contributed to, Southern society. Norrell concluded that in the speech, Washington “aimed to freeze the downward spiral of black conditions and white discrimination where they were, before they got worse.” The speech represented a tactical gambit rather than a craven compromise.<sup>296</sup>

Norrell felt it unfair to blame Washington for how his speech was misinterpreted. Some whites cited the speech as an acceptance of black exclusion from politics. Black critics, Norrell maintained, acquiesced to this misconception and “assigned [Washington] responsibility for allowing himself to be misunderstood.” However, Norrell noted that shortly after the speech, Washington took public stances in support of black education and against railroad discrimination. A year later, he publically expressed sorrow over the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling and condemned the American Federation of Labor for fostering white monopoly over the trades. Washington’s critics, Norrell maintained, made the mistake of excising Washington’s words from the context of his activities.<sup>297</sup>

Norrell was similarly discerning in his analysis of Washington’s published works. He acknowledged that Washington appealed to different audiences in different books. In *Black Belt Diamonds*, which was written primarily for blacks, Washington avoided appearing to approve of segregation. The book’s overall message reflected “Washington’s certainty that a rising people had to attend to their moral education” while demanding that “for his people to rise, whites could have to be taught how to treat them better.” Likewise, in *The Story of My Life and Work*, also marketed to blacks, Washington offered a “brief but realistic” account of slavery, including the memory of his uncle’s beating. In *Up from Slavery*, marketed heavily to white audiences, Washington presented slavery as essentially benign. The beating episode was eliminated and Washington’s former master was presented as benevolent. The autobiography also repeated Lost Cause myths, presenting slavery as a civilizing school for savage Africans. In a similar nod to Southern myths, Washington presented Reconstruction as premature, though he did write in support of the black franchise. Norrell noted that Washington contradicted historical fact when he denied the existence of Ku Klux Klan activity prior to 1901. Norrell excused Washington’s repetition of white myths in *Up from Slavery*: “Booker was trying to establish a common historical understanding with whites so that they would be open to the overall thrust of his message. Had he begun with the diatribe against the moral evil of slavery . . . he might have lost white readers from the outset.” Washington, Norrell continued, “did not say slavery was good for blacks . . . and he emphasized its legacy of dysfunction.” Norrell demanded that Washington

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<sup>296</sup>Ibid., 122-126.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid., 135, 141-143.

not be judged solely on the basis of *Up from Slavery* because in his later works, *Story of the Negro* and *My Larger Education*, his “opinions about race and civilization were decidedly less accommodating to whites.” He added that Washington’s essay, “Is the Negro Having a Fair Chance?” answered the question so negatively as to provoke a favorable response from Du Bois. Norrell felt that Washington’s later works more honestly represented his philosophy.<sup>298</sup>

Norrell felt that one of Washington’s flaws was his overreaction to his black opponents. Washington lost his sense of perspective and forgot that criticism was inevitable and that his opponents represented an extreme minority. “He might well have ignored Trotter and the others and lost little influence,” Norrell wrote, “[but] both sides got down in the mire, and all would inevitably get up bruised and dirty, with Booker’s reputation damaged once and for all.” Examining Washington’s use of spies, Norrell described Washington’s tactics as “no more unscrupulous than Trotter’s.” Still, Norrell maintained that Washington’s organized opposition “was held together mostly by its members’ antipathy to Washington.” In fact, because the NAACP paid undue attention to Washington, the group accomplished little until after his death: “Having lost its original *raison d’être*, opposition to Washington, the NAACP found constructive purpose in a comprehensive pursuit of black civil rights.” Norrell argued that the leadership battle between Washington and his critics undermined the cause of black advancement.<sup>299</sup>

Norrell denied that Washington was opposed to open protest for civil rights. Harlan condemned Washington for not objecting to the segregated nature of the exhibits at the Atlanta Exposition. Norrell rejected the notion that this silence represented acquiescence to segregation; rather, Washington realized that a separate venue ensured that black accomplishments would not “simply disappear in a sea of white exhibits.” In terms of active protest, Washington encouraged blacks to boycott segregated trolleys. And boycotts are, as Norrell noted, a form of economic protest. Washington also attacked white supremacists who claimed that blacks were at their moral best under the slave regime, arguing that, by the same logic, prisoners are the most virtuous members of society. Washington publicly stated that black rapists were reported in newspapers because lynching often followed their exposure, whereas rapes perpetrated by whites were not reported because they were handled in court. These and other examples lent credence to Norrell’s thesis.<sup>300</sup>

Norrell conceded that, on occasion, prudence demanded that Washington abstain from speaking openly against injustice. For example, when legislation to disfranchise blacks was proposed in Louisiana and several other southern states,

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<sup>298</sup>Ibid., 159, 216, 218-219, 220, 223, 373, 408.

<sup>299</sup>Ibid., 283-284, 289, 296, 389, 415, 422.

<sup>300</sup>Ibid., 122, 170, 193.

Washington declined to protest. Norrell saw this silence as a “studied dishonesty.” He wrote, “Whites’ hostility to black voting rights had grown so strong that he simply misled them to believe he accepted disfranchisement.” Norrell added, “Agents in a resistance movement usually lie to the enemy.” More important, Norrell felt, was the fact that Washington *did* oppose disfranchisement legislation in other Southern states. He “was a lion against disfranchisement in Georgia” but “a fox” in Louisiana. Ultimately, Norrell saw Washington as a shrewd tactician who adopted different strategies of resistance, depending upon the circumstance.<sup>301</sup>

While Harlan viewed Washington as a self-interested political boss, Norrell presented his political activities as a tenuous attempt to gain a simulacrum of “political power [for] black people in the so-called American democracy.” Defending Washington’s alliance with Theodore Roosevelt, Norrell noted that many black leaders, Frederick Douglass being a prime example, cultivated relationships with white presidents and politicians. Norrell marveled that some historians condemned Washington for his relationship with Roosevelt, who was progressive on race issues when compared to other presidents of the era, but not Du Bois and Trotter who both supported Woodrow Wilson. Norrell remarked, “[Benjamin] Tillman or [James] Vardaman could hardly have improved on Wilson’s advancement of Jim Crow.” Still, Norrell recognized that Washington’s unshakable loyalty to Roosevelt led him astray when he refused to denounce the President’s handling of the Brownsville affair; Norrell called it “the worst mistake of [Washington’s] public career.” Though Washington’s alliance with Roosevelt effected no grand political reformation, Norrell felt his efforts an understandable effort to gain blacks a foothold in the American democratic system.<sup>302</sup>

Norrell’s contextual paradigm centered on the observation that Washington performed as shrewd resistance leader in the face of white prejudice and extralegal violence. Whereas Woodward and Harlan focused on what Washington *should have done* to combat racism, Norrell emphasized the constraints Washington faced. He witnessed, for example, the violent fate of prominent blacks who condemned lynching. Jesse Duke, a black newspaper editor in Montgomery, was a friend of Washington’s. Furor arose in the city after Duke editorialized against lynching, forcing him to flee. The clamor did not subside, however, and whites began attacking black residents of Montgomery. Norrell maintained that the threat of similar white violence was omnipresent in Washington’s world. And much of this violence was economic in motivation. Washington understood that whites assumed that economic advancement was a zero sum game; any gain for blacks, they believed, was a loss for whites. This naïve belief often led groups of whites to burn the homes and crops of successful

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<sup>301</sup>Ibid., 185-186, 188, 208-209.

<sup>302</sup>Ibid., 262, 350, 404.



blacks. Similarly, because tax dollars *were* finite, whites constantly demanded that states withhold tax dollars from black schools and responded with vitriol when a single dollar was spend on black education. Washington understood that the negative stereotypes endemic in popular media encouraged this prejudice and violence: “Virtually all of the dozens of newspapers that Booker examined each week carried coon illustrations in advertisements.” These dangers, Norrell believed, forced Washington to pursue black progress subtly and prudently, rather than openly. Because the Southern culture of extralegal violence posed a greater immediate danger to blacks than legalized segregation, Washington’s philosophy focused on changing the culture rather than the law.<sup>303</sup>

According to Norrell, Washington crafted an educational program that he believed would challenge racist assumptions and afford blacks valuable skills; he simultaneously avoided activities that might invite white retaliation. In the nineteenth century, curricula across America shifted away from classical education, towards industrial and progressive pedagogies. Since Washington understood that the Southern states were unlikely to fund black educational institutions, he turned to Northern philanthropy. In order to gain their support, Washington allowed his donors to think his program was primarily industrial, when, in fact, the majority of Tuskegee alumni became teachers. Norrell demonstrated that Washington used his influence over the philanthropists liberally, endorsing gifts to schools he had no association with. Washington’s program itself benefited his students enormously. Norrell credited Washington for educating both men and women at a time when coeducation was rare. He hoped his program would spark a renaissance in black entrepreneurship. Washington, Norrell wrote, “had confidence in the market economy to reward black businessmen who met an economic need,” believing that economic interdependence was the key to fostering harmony between the races. Far from schooling his students to become cogs in the industrial machine, Washington’s intent was to afford blacks the skills to become personally successful so that they might benefit their communities.<sup>304</sup>

Though Norrell believed Washington’s intent was noble, he was realistic about the effects of his program. In assessing its merits, he wrote: “Washington’s promise that economic success would ultimately bring political rights received only partial vindication in Tuskegee. As late as the mid-1930s only a handful of blacks could vote in Tuskegee and Macon County, and the Institute administrators constituted most of the blacks on the voting roll.” Still, Norrell qualified this judgment, noting that an economic approach by itself was unlikely to gain blacks civil rights. “Economic and political

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<sup>303</sup>Ibid., 56, 81, 115, 120.

<sup>304</sup>Ibid., 31, 56, 65, 70, 81, 95-85, 108, 115, 120, 312, 367-368.

strategies are parallel and must be complementary,” he argued. He concluded that Washington actually pursued both: “While he publicly stressed the economic purpose . . . [Washington also] persistently pursued political goals.”<sup>305</sup>

Norrell also recognized that in promoting his philosophy Washington often engaged in rhetorical contortions, some clever, some disingenuous. Norrell wrote: “In the North, Booker honored myths of Union triumph and other symbols of American nationalism. In the South, he apparently offered fealty to competing myths: the Old South, the Lost Cause, and Black Reconstruction. He tried to have it both ways because he needed the support—or at least the toleration—of each for blacks to rise.” Responding to those who challenged him on his contradictions, Washington famously replied that he never said anything in one section that he did not say in the other. Norrell commented on this: “Washington’s self-serving and partly untruthful response showed that he had yet to learn how to cope with a crisis. His unsteadiness . . . [led] him to lie publicly, always a dangerous strategy in the emerging modern age of mass communications.” Still, Norrell understood Washington’s motivation: “[Washington’s] self-defense also revealed how little freedom of expression existed for a black who lived in the South.” Like others before him, Norrell agreed that Washington’s protest against injustice hardened after 1912. Norrell attributed Washington’s shift not to ideological change but to his exiting the national political scene and, perhaps, a desire to protect his legacy.<sup>306</sup>

In the final analysis, Norrell’s biography represented a major paradigm shift. *Up from History* was not revolutionary; it accepted that Meier and Harlan had, for the most part, accurately described Washington’s secret life. However, Norrell offered other, equally important, factors for consideration. With unprecedented vigor, he explored the historical constraints Washington faced. His narrative was balanced, presenting Washington’s story in the contexts of both social forces and personality. Washington, in Norrell’s telling, skillfully maneuvered within the constraints imposed on blacks in his era, carving out spaces in which blacks could succeed and challenge white supremacy. Though *Up from History* was adequately sourced, Norrell’s use of primary sources was largely limited to passages taken from *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. Despite this minor flaw, in terms of interpretation, Norrell’s contextual account rivaled the consensus paradigm of the previous decade.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup>Ibid., 428, 431.

<sup>306</sup>Ibid., 150, 167, 407.

<sup>307</sup>Shawn Leigh Alexander, review of *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, by Robert J. Norrell, *American Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (2009): 173.

Scholars who reviewed *Up from History* found Norrell's paradigm compelling, though his biography did not receive the near universal admiration that Harlan's had. Benjamin R. Justesen commended Norrell for a "thoroughly research[ed] thesis" in his review in *The North Carolina Historical Review*. He applauded Norrell for teasing out Washington's "hidden side" and agreed that though Washington's activities sometimes "bordered on the amoral," his behavior was most often "theatrical." Though Justesen's assessment of Norrell's book was overall favorable, he added a caveat:

Norrell's portrait is far from perfect. He prefers to rebut, and often simply contextualize, negative attacks by Du Bois, William Trotter, and others, all but ignoring the positive and promising hints from black power brokers with whom Washington enjoyed substantive, even amicable relationships, particularly National Afro-American Council leaders George White, Alexander Walters, and T. Thomas Fortune.

Similarly, in her review in *Louisiana History*, Eleanor Alexander wrote: "The Tuskegean gets no bad press in Norrell's book. Nevertheless, I recommend it. When read in conjunction with other Washington biographies, a clearer, more balanced picture . . . emerges." In *The Business History Review*, Lisa Cook wrote that *Up from History* would be useful to historians interested in the economic conditions under which black businessmen operated during the age of Washington. Norrell's book, she believed, "is a significant contribution to a growing body of research in economics that seeks to identify and explain the effects of terrorism and violence on economic activity." She lamented that the National Business League was given little attention in the narrative. Writing in *The Journal of American History*, Karen Ferguson called *Up from History* "an enormously sympathetic portrait of Washington." Though Norrell convinced Ferguson that Washington was not a simple accommodationist, she felt he overlooked Washington's problematic attachment to the rural South and the dishonorable trade-offs he made with powerful whites. She also criticized Norrell for downplaying the "legitimate motives" of critics like Du Bois: "In diminishing the debate between Washington and his critics Norrell loses an opportunity to make a more nuanced comment on the dilemmas of black leadership during the Nadir and lends his retelling of Washington's life an air of apology." Writing in *American Studies*, Shawn Leigh Alexander proclaimed, "Norrell has successfully created a new Washington." His only criticism was that Norrell relied too heavily on Harlan's fourteen-volumes; the arguments in *Up from History*, Alexander wrote, would have been strengthened by an examination of the unpublished papers in the Library of Congress. Overall, these reviewers offered balanced critiques of Norrell's biography, highlighting its strengths and its oversights.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>308</sup>Benjamin R. Justesen, review of *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, by Robert J. Norrell, *The North Carolina Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (2009): 367-368. Eleanor Alexander, review of *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, by Robert J. Norrell, *Louisiana History* 51, no. 4 (2010): 494. Lisa D. Cook, review of *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, by Robert J. Norrell, *The Business History Review* 84, no. 1 (2010): 168. Karen Ferguson,

It is worth noting that, unlike most Washington biographies, Norrell's book reached popular audiences. Numerous writers and journalists referenced *Up from History*. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Ta-Nehisi Coates commended Norrell for highlighting the tragic state of race relations in Washington's era. Inspired by *Up from History*, he called Washington "arguably the most effective and powerful black conservative in this country's history." In *The New York Times*, Shelby Steele praised Norrell for "scrupulously excavating the facts of his subject's life and then carefully situating him in his own era." He endorsed Norrell's contextual paradigm:

To belong to an oppressed group always meant that you could not pursue your self-interest by acting directly on the world. You first had to account for the oppressor who had so much power over you. So you inevitably wore a mask that helped you navigate the oppressor's bigotries, ignorances and self-absorptions. For the oppressed, the mask was power itself.

Writing for *Taki's Magazine*, an online magazine popular in libertarian circles, Dylan Hales used Norrell's interpretations as the centerpiece of an article praising Washington. Hales commended Norrell for avoiding "the armchair psychologist routines that have ruined [similar] histories." Norrell, Hales wrote, established "a framework through which one may analyze the actual Washington, the mythical anti-hero morphs into a titan of 'economic independence and self-help.'" Deborah Davis consciously utilized Norrell's contextual paradigm in painting a sympathetic portrait of Washington in her popular history, *Guest of Honor: Booker T. Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, and the White House Dinner That Shocked a Nation*. Still, some popular writes felt Norrell's work flawed. Writing for *New Republic*, a prestigious liberal magazine, Steven Hahn criticized Norrell: "He serves up utterly unmerited disrespect for his predecessors. In truth, Norrell's interpretive differences with Woodward and Harlan are really matters of emphasis." Even after reading *Up from History*, Hahn still felt that Washington's strategy of working behind the scenes did little to effect black progress. Kelefa Sanneh agreed with Hahn in his book review in *The New Yorker*: "Norrell calls Washington a 'heroic failure,' a description that Washington himself would have abhorred: for him, as a pragmatist and a man of action, a 'heroic failure' was a contradiction in terms." He added that "it is easier to root for Harlan's Washington, a cunning and ruthless strategist who fought white supremacists and black rivals with nearly equal fervor. Norrell's advocacy leads him to emphasize how constricted the man's choices were, how reactive his maneuvers. It's a defense, but it's a diminishment, too." Writing for a publication at the opposite end of the political spectrum, Marjorie Romeyn-Sanabria of *The American Conservative* accused Norrell of inaccurately presenting

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review of *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, by Robert J. Norrell, *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009): 866-867. Shawn Leigh Alexander, 173.

Washington as a “heroic failure.” Washington, her article sought to prove, was by no means a failure. Despite receiving these mixed reviews, *Up from History* earned a wide-readership in both scholarly and popular circles, a rare achievement for a work of serious scholarship.<sup>309</sup>

Though Norrell’s biography was undoubtedly the most widely-read and influential of the revisionist writings of the 2000s, other historians were hard at work reinvestigating Washington and the paradigms that defined him in the twentieth century. Though Norrell’s book was far more exhaustive than other treatments, David H. Jackson and Michael Bieze published monographs that were equally thoughtful and discerning.

The same year that Norrell’s biography was released, historian David H. Jackson published a book that synthesized elements of the educational paradigm and the contextual paradigm. Like many others who wrote sympathetically of Washington, Jackson had some background outside history, having earned a B.A. in history education and a M.A. degree in public administration, both from Florida A&M University. In 1997, at the age of twenty-eight, Jackson earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Memphis. In his 2008 monograph, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle Against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912*, Jackson argued that, far from being an accommodationist, Washington was “Machiavellian”—and he used the term as a compliment. Like Norrell, Jackson criticized previous Washington scholars, like Harlan, for failing to place Washington’s activities within the context of the historical constraints he faced. Jackson’s thesis was that Washington successfully employed coded “metalanguage” to challenge white prejudices. By masterful use of such rhetoric, Washington deliberately engaged in a “full-fledged psychological war” against bigotry.

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<sup>309</sup>Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Tragedy and Betrayal of Booker T. Washington,” *TheAtlantic.com*, 3/31/2009 <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2009/03/the-tragedy-and-betrayal-of-booker-t-washington/7092/> (accessed 2/25/2014). Shelby Steele, “Pride and Compromise,” *TheNYTimes.com*, 2/12/2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/15/books/review/Steele-t.html> (accessed 10/25/2015). Dylan Hales, “The Soul of Booker T. Washington,” *Takimag.com*, (5/22/2009), [http://takimag.com/article/the\\_soul\\_of\\_booker\\_t\\_washington/print#axzz2uRkvybtM](http://takimag.com/article/the_soul_of_booker_t_washington/print#axzz2uRkvybtM) (accessed 2/26/2014). Deborah Davis, *Guest of Honor: Booker T. Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, and the White House Dinner That Shocked a Nation* (New York: Atria Books, 2012), 271-272. Steven Hahn, “The Race Man,” *Newrepublic.com*, 10/26/2009, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/the-race-man?page=0,0> (accessed 2/25/2014). Kelefa Sanneh, “The Wizard,” *The New Yorker*, February 2009, available at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/02/02/the-wizard> (accessed 10/25/2015). Marjorie Romeyn-Sanabria, “The Legacy of Booker T. Washington and the Atlanta Compromise,” *Theamericanconservative.com*, 2/18/2014, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-legacy-of-booker-t-washington-and-the-atlanta-compromise/>, (accessed 2/25/2014).

His book focused on how Washington used his educational tours to carry out this war. Jackson, himself an African American, asked his readers to judge Washington on the basis of results, not on the degree of radicalism in his rhetoric.<sup>310</sup>

Like Norrell, Jackson enumerated the dangers blacks faced in Washington's era. He noted that 83 percent of blacks who were lynched in Mississippi in the 1870s were murdered for "political participation." Since, as Jackson put it, "political activism could . . . lead to death," Southern black leaders, unlike northern leaders like Trotter and Du Bois, were wary of steering their followers into politics. This was not cowardice, but concern for the lives of their disciples. Furthermore, white supremacists engaged in "psychological warfare" by propagating derogatory and vicious racial stereotypes. Because of these social conditions, Jackson concluded that it is understandable that Washington eschewed political activism and focused his efforts instead on countering racial stereotypes. Like other contextual historians, he saw Washington's program as a prudent "black survival strategy."<sup>311</sup>

So, balancing the need for survival with the necessity of challenging white supremacy, Washington utilized a coded language, what Jackson called a "metalanguage," of opposition. Jackson maintained that historians misinterpreted Washington's words because they took "a literalist approach," confusing his style with his substance. Jackson sought to expose the meanings behind Washington's public pronouncements. For example, Jackson said that when Washington spoke about the "good and harmonious relations" existing between the races he knew he was not describing reality. Jackson elaborated:

Many times . . . he spoke of behaviors in the past tense that he wanted to see in the present and future. Oftentimes he and his supporters talked about white Southerners being black people's 'best friends' and whites 'doing all they could to help Negroes,' but they said these things strictly for white consumption. By using this kind of metalanguage Washington wanted whites *to behave* in the manner he described, to live up to the expectation, and make it become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

According to Jackson, blacks easily decoded Washington's messages because they shared the cultural experience of oppression. Some whites, Jackson, conceded missed the hidden meanings. Others suspected Washington's true meaning and experienced "cognitive dissonance." These whites ignored their suspicions because admitting that Washington was a shrewd rhetorician would have falsified their assumption that blacks were mentally inferior. However, Washington's "show of black

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<sup>310</sup>David H. Jackson, Jr., Ph.D: Biosketch," <http://drdavidhjackson.com/#bio> (accessed 8/18/2015). David H. Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 2, 32-33, 177, 183-184.

<sup>311</sup>Jackson, 15-16, 19, 33.

progress” convinced other whites to modify their opinions concerning blacks. Though his metalanguage was no panacea, it did reduce the number of whites who held to prejudiced opinions.<sup>312</sup>

Jackson argued that Washington inaugurated his educational tours across the South as a venue for spreading the message of black progress. Whereas previous historians, Harlan in particular, dismissed these tours as unimportant, Jackson saw them as significant efforts to combat white bigotry. He described the tours as “not literally educational tours in terms of academic learning,” but as an opportunity Washington seized “to educate himself, and more importantly others, about the progress of the black race.” Jackson substantiated his claim, pointing out that Washington reached approximately one million people through his tours. He lamented that past historians had focused so heavily on the struggle between Washington and Du Bois because he felt the tours of greater import; through them Washington fought “a much bigger problem and [an] enemy to all African Americans.” Still, Jackson was no hagiographer; he admitted that an ancillary motive for the tours was Washington’s desire “to solidify his position as Head Negro in Charge.” Nonetheless, Jackson argued convincingly that Washington’s educational tours spread the message of black progress, directly challenging white supremacy.<sup>313</sup>

Though Jackson and Norrell worked on their projects independently, both concluded that previous historians had placed unrealistic expectations on Washington. As Washington led the race during the most virulent period of racism in postbellum America, he faced enormous danger. Both agreed that Washington shrewdly challenged white supremacy in the manner least dangerous to himself and his followers. Like the educational historians, Jackson emphasized the role of education in Washington’s strategy. Like Michael Bieze, he believed that through education, Washington subliminally undermined racist assumption.

Also in 2008, Michael Bieze expanded upon his earlier article in *Booker T. Washington and the Art of Self-Representation*. Bieze opened his treatise with a bold historiographical critique. Of all the revisionists, he alone criticized Louis Harlan’s methods in compiling *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. In hopes of finding pictorial artifacts for use in the book, Bieze examined the paper collection housed in the Library of Congress. He concluded that “Harlan laced the *Papers* with an abundance of correspondence meant to directly support his thesis of the ‘secret life.’” While the fourteen volume collection appeared comprehensive, Bieze noted that, by necessity, Harlan and his co-editors included only about one percent

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<sup>312</sup>Ibid., 35, 38-39, 51, 179, 182.

<sup>313</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

of the documents in the Library of Congress. Bieze argued that Harlan slanted the content of *The Booker T. Washington Papers* to support his thesis. Bieze maintained the papers in the Library of Congress actually supported a more sympathetic reading of Washington. It is important to note, however, that Bieze did not reject Harlan's thesis wholesale; he agreed that Washington had a secret life. In fact, Bieze hoped his book would offer "a visual corollary to Harlan's work," using photographs to demonstrate how Washington deliberately crafted distinct identities for different audiences. Nonetheless, he maintained that Harlan's caustic biography was a deeply misleading interpretation of Washington's work.<sup>314</sup>

As he had in his earlier essay, Bieze argued that Washington's promotion of black aesthetics proved a cogent challenge to white supremacy. "Washington appears to have understood that racism is aesthetic," Bieze wrote, "and his solution was to counter demeaning images with positive examples while secretly developing the aesthetic of the New Negro." Washington's use of aesthetics was "a subversive way of claiming intellectual equality" with whites. Far from accommodating blacks to white supremacy, Washington sought to teach blacks the requisite skills to beat whites at their own game: "Washington competed by the master's rules. Because there were no alternatives. His aspiration to white measures of success was not another example of being an Uncle Tom. Instead, it places him squarely within the black middle class of the period." Washington hoped to develop a wholly "new black identity;" he "used one aesthetic to develop another."<sup>315</sup>

Bieze used the educational paradigm to explain Washington. According to Bieze, historians who presented Washington's philosophy as a mere extension of Hampton's Social Gospel failed to recognize the progressive nature of his vision. Washington's pedagogy, he wrote, was equally influenced by the ideas of John Ruskin and John Dewey. His rhetoric and public performances find "company in the world of P.T. Barnum, Mark Twain, and Sarah Bernhardt." Historians failed to understand the progressive nature of Washington's philosophy because they inaccurately juxtaposed his industrial program against Du Bois' political activism. Bieze maintained that the aesthetic philosophies of the two black leaders actually overlapped. "Both saw art as a form of propaganda" and "both men rejected the modernist positions of art as pure expression or form." Though Washington and Du Bois disagreed as to whether social reform begins organically or politically, both looked to aesthetics as a means of effecting reform. Bieze noted that there was a slight difference in their aesthetic philosophies: Du Bois wanted to redefine artistic norms to include black modes of art whereas Washington sought to prove

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<sup>314</sup>Michael Bieze, *Booker T. Washington and the Art of Self-Representation* (New York: Peter Land Publishing, Inc., 2008), 24, 27.

<sup>315</sup>*Ibid.*, 118, 120, 122, 127.



that blacks could meet and surpass white artistic standards. Despite Washington's strategic disagreement with Du Bois, Bieze situated Washington within the pantheon of progressive heroes of the era.<sup>316</sup>

Bieze maintained that because previous historians focused almost exclusively on Washington's political activism—or lack thereof—they neglected to study Washington's "cultural activism." In *Booker T. Washington and The Art of Self-Representation*, Bieze included almost 100 pages of original photographic evidence that corroborated his claim that Washington used visual media to promote black progress. Bieze's presentation of these images was discerning; he did not treat photographic artifacts as *facts* about the past, but, rather, as carefully and deliberately crafted *propaganda pieces*. His interest was in discovering what messages Washington intended to convey when he produced or promoted a particular image. His assessment was reminiscent of Jackson's: "Washington's 'secret life' was successful, in part, because he offered the perception of visual evidence of facts that did not exist. The art of his self-representation lay in offering pictures in newspapers and books which built historical authenticity to myths rather than factuality."<sup>317</sup>

A large number of the images considered in Bieze's book were popularly disseminated depictions of Washington and the Tuskegee Institute. These images existed in various formats, including "stereo cards, photogravures, albumen prints, lithographic posters, post cards, photographic buttons, and even Christmas cards." Bieze noted that these images were "completely at odds with the ubiquitous racist images of the day." He added that thousands of blacks treasured these images; they served as a talismanic reminder of black progress, a refutation of negative stereotypes. For countless blacks, Washington's accomplishments served as a constant source of hope and optimism.<sup>318</sup>

Bieze chronicled Washington's careful management of the production, content, and dissemination of these images. He directed photo shoots. He used rotating artists so that no single style dominated portrayals of himself and Tuskegee. Washington, Bieze noted, was obsessed "with how he was perceived. The correspondence in his letters shows his strong need for control." Washington largely achieved his goal: he remained a national media celebrity for almost two decades. Though Bieze conceded a measure of narcissism in Washington's efforts, he also believed that Washington's popularity afforded him the credibility to promote myths that challenged white supremacy.<sup>319</sup>

Bieze categorized these myths. "For philanthropists," he wrote, Washington "sold a passive image of success measured by white taste." In contrast, "for black elites, he presented an active image of power." Bieze, however, was not

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<sup>316</sup>Ibid., 122-123, 128-130.

<sup>317</sup>Ibid., 34, 37, 139-214.

<sup>318</sup>Ibid., 8-9, 46.

<sup>319</sup>Ibid., 29-30, 43.

inclined to be overly critical of “Washington’s wearing of masks,” as all black leaders of the era were required to do so. Washington’s success lay in the fact that “due to the racial divide of the era” few realized that he wore these various masks. Historians, he maintained, failed to comprehend that Washington crafted different messages for different audiences. Though this was too simplistic an accusation, Bieze was correct that the various myths that Washington directly challenged white supremacy and promoted black progress.<sup>320</sup>

Despite his revisionism, Bieze was not a neo-hagiographer. His research was well-documented and expansive. He granted that Washington was equally concerned with black progress and his personal prestige, and even questioned whether Washington’s strategy achieved its desired result. The final words of *The Art of Self-Representation* reveal his mixed assessment of Washington’s legacy: “Soon, segregated utopias such as Washington’s became remnants of old thinking on race, their Arts and Crafts philosophy a relic of simpler times which could no longer ignore the brutal reality, yet they provided key elements of a transition to greater political, economic, and cultural power.” It is possible, however, that Bieze’s criticisms were merely *pro forma* as his later writings revealed an even greater degree of sympathy for Washington.<sup>321</sup>

In 2012, Bieze and Marybeth Gasman coedited *Booker T. Washington Rediscovered*, a compilation of primary sources. The editors photocopied, rather than transcribed, the documents so their reader could experience the full effect of Washington’s selection and placement of photographs. Because the scope of *Booker T. Washington Rediscovered* was limited by the number of pages the publisher was willing to include, Bieze and Gasman also created an online database to serve as a more comprehensive companion to the book.<sup>322</sup>

Bieze and Gasman felt the flaws in *The Booker T. Washington Papers* necessitated their project. Its bibliography, they claimed, was “incomplete;” the fourteen volumes failed to include many significant books, newspaper articles, and journal articles by Washington. This was not wholly Harlan’s fault, they noted. Some letters written to and by Washington were not in the Library of Congress but in private hands. The editors included a number of these in *Booker T. Washington Rediscovered*. Still, since Harlan altered the layouts of documents, excised photographs, and removed excerpts from their original context, Bieze and Gasman questioned whether *The Booker T. Washington Papers* can rightly be considered a primary source, as these alterations fundamentally changed Washington’s meaning. Though the editors admitted that their selection was not comprehensive, they hoped to prove that “much of the primary materials needed to tell the whole story

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<sup>320</sup>Ibid., 42-44, 122.

<sup>321</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>322</sup>“Booker T. Washington Rediscovered: Supplemental Materials,” available at The Johns Hopkins University Press website, [http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/supplemental/booker\\_t\\_washington.html](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/supplemental/booker_t_washington.html) (accessed 10/16/2015).

remain outside the reach of most researchers,” thereby encouraging scholars to examine sources beyond *The Booker T. Washington Papers*.<sup>323</sup>

The editors also strengthened Bieze’s earlier historiographic criticisms. They noted that Harlan took “a two-volume biography, several articles, and a fourteen-volume edited set of papers to arrive at the conclusion that ‘Washington had no quintessence.’ If that were true, less research would have been required.” Harlan’s influence on Washington scholarship, they wrote, was negative; Washington “suffers the unenviable fate of being spoken for by a long list of detractors who cherry-pick from a mountain of writings” in order to establish a “historical narrative with a tragic plot.” Hence, Washington required rediscovery because he “is simultaneously well known and completely unknown.”<sup>324</sup>

The commentaries Bieze and Gasman offered at the beginnings of each chapter revisited the arguments Bieze made in his earlier book, though with more brevity, precision, and sympathy. They determined that Washington was not a monolithic character, but an evolving thinker who cared about a diversity of topics. They concluded that though Washington was “often miscast as a far-right conservative,” he was actually “a celebrity, a college president, and a cultured thinker who mingled with progressives.” Their commentaries offered a survey of Washington’s various roles and opinions. Overall, their compilation was tiny when compared with *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, though as an addendum to the *Papers* it did serve its purpose, opening future avenues of research.<sup>325</sup>

The writings on Washington published in 2008 proved a major turning point in Washington scholarship. Previously, the hagiographic paradigm dominated sympathetic treatments of Washington. But without resorting to neo-hagiography, Norrell, Jackson, and Bieze offered cogent challenges to the critical paradigm. Just as no serious historian writing after Harlan could ignore his work, now the contextual paradigm must be contended with.

## EVALUATION

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the consensus centered on the critical paradigm dissolved. Robert Norrell offered a contextual paradigm that analyzed Washington in the broader context of white supremacy and

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<sup>323</sup>Michael Bieze and Marybeth Gasman, ed.s., *Booker T. Washington Rediscovered* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), vii, viii, 5-6.

<sup>324</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>325</sup>*Ibid.*, 4-6.

violence. The educational paradigm came into its own, presenting Washington as a progressive educator and leader who challenged prejudice through metalanguage and cultural accomplishment. No longer viewed as an Uncle Tom, Washington was presented as an equal of luminaries such as John Ruskin and John Dewey. If Washington was placed on trial in the second half of the twentieth century, scholars writing in the 2000s voted for acquittal. A century after Washington's death, new vistas have opened, ready to be investigated by curious scholars.

## CONCLUSION

By the end of the twentieth century it appeared that the critical paradigm had successfully deconstructed Washington, but contextual scholarship in the twenty-first century called that consensus into question. Still, while the critical paradigm is in dispute, it has, by no means, been overturned. Historians like Woodward, Meier, and Harlan compiled far too much evidence to support their theses; their opinions will not go quietly into the night. But historians like Norrell, Jackson, and Bieze have successfully created a revisionist springboard for future historians. It is likely that future Washington scholars will debate, qualify, and attempt to synthesize the critical and the contextual paradigms.

While the hagiographic paradigm can no longer be taken seriously by scholars, there is evidence that it survives in the popular imagination—pundits have discovered the usability of Washington’s story. In 2012, on his show, “The Oval,” Glenn Beck produced a segment on *Up from Slavery*. He called Washington’s autobiography “one of the most incredible things” and sneered at the college professors who point to its inaccuracies. He presented Washington as a “hero” who “planted the seeds of the Civil Rights movement.” Beck’s segment presumably reached a large number of conservatives. When he launched his internet television service, GBTV, in 2011, before the first episode of “The Oval” even aired, a quarter of a million individuals had already subscribed. Beck has since offered effervescent praise for Washington on his radio show. Let us hope he never discovers the writings of Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe. Conservatives like Beck ensure the survival of hagiographic tradition, though they accomplish this by demonizing and disregarding serious scholars who have written on the topic.<sup>326</sup>

Conservative support for Washington is rooted in approval for his bottom-up economic prescriptions. Similarly, the vision of race relations advocated by the proponents of the critical paradigm was connected to their economic opinions. It is probable, then, that as long as skepticism concerning the merits of the capitalist system of Washington’s era persists in the historical community, there will be scholars who condemn his approach to race relations.

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<sup>326</sup>“The Oval: Booker T. Washington,” *The Blaze TV*, <http://www.video.theblaze.com/video/v21482247/the-oval-booker-t-washington> (accessed 10/19/2015). Scott Baker, “Wall Street Journal: GBTV Already Has More Subscribers Than Oprah’s Network Has Viewers,” *The Blaze*, 2 September 2011, <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2011/09/12/wall-street-journal-gbtv-already-has-more-subscribers-than-oprahs-network-has-viewers/> (accessed 10/19/2015).

If the contextual and educational paradigms prove as malleable as the previous paradigm, it will likely endure. Bieze, Jackson, and, especially, Norrell, offered compelling arguments. When a new paradigm challenges an older, stagnant paradigm, new vistas open for scholar to explore, often prompting a resurgence of scholarship on a given topic. This occurred after August Meier produced his landmark writings on Washington. Time will tell whether Norrell's writings spark a similar renaissance in Washington scholarship.

How will future historians answer the Washington Question? While the future can never be predicted, we can assume with some certainty that current trends will persist and that Washington scholarship will evolve in new directions. The present state of affairs affords hints of what may be to come. There is room for elaboration upon the arguments made by previous scholars.

Gender studies are currently in vogue in the American historical profession, due in part to the fragmentation of the profession described by Peter Novick. Other than Houston Baker, Patricia Schechter, and David Leverenz, no historians have yet applied the methods of gender studies to consideration of Washington. This may be because the task seems difficult, considering Washington's reticence about his married and family life. However, gender historians have proven remarkably adept at constructing theses when faced with a paucity of primary source materials. Their conclusions regarding Washington would be intriguing.

Analysis of Washington's philosophy through the lens of colonialism has been attempted by several authors, including Oliver Cox, Naren Tambe, Manning Marable, David Sehat, and, most recently, Peter Coclanis. In this work, the author considered presenting the "colonial thesis" as a minor paradigm, but declined because these historians shared no core assumptions or beliefs. Two of the authors, Tambe and Coclanis, considered Washington a shrewd resistance fighter who opposed colonial impression. The others saw Washington as a self-interested collaborator. Still, as Coclanis proved, investigating Washington through the lens of colonialism is a promising endeavor. The colonial thesis deserves further consideration.

Michael Bieze argued that cultural historians have sorely neglected Washington. He demonstrated that there is a wealth of cultural material related to Washington yet to be sorted through. As many college and university history departments now include one or more cultural historians on their faculties, it is probable that some will turn their attention to Washington. It will be interesting to see if their conclusions parallel or refute Bieze's.

Writers utilizing both the hagiographic and the critical paradigms considered Washington a truculent conservative, whereas the more recent educational scholars believed him an icon of the progressive movement. The verdict is out on which opinion is correct as there seems to be sufficient evidence to support either position. This debate merits at least a few scholarly articles.

Still, intellectual historians may do well to reconsider classifying Washington as either a conservative or a progressive. Most historians have rightly noted the profound influence of the Hampton Institute's pedagogy on Washington's thinking. Surprisingly, only David Sehat honed in on the fact that the Institute, as an arm of the American Missionary Association, advocated the values of classical liberalism. This may be a gross oversight. Classical liberalism, as an ideology, appears to overlap with both conservatism and progressivism. F. A. Hayek once wrote, "What in Europe was called 'liberalism' was here the common tradition on which the American polity had been built: thus the defender of the American tradition was a liberal in the European sense." So whereas both Lockean and Continental liberalism appeared revolutionary, classical liberalism in America appeared conservative, especially when juxtaposed against the ethos of the progressive era. However, despite appearances, classical liberals differed markedly from conservatives in that, as Hayek put it, they held a "fundamental belief in the long-range power of ideas" whereas "conservatism is bound by the stock of ideas inherited at a given time." If Washington is understood as a classical liberal, historians may be able to harmonize the seeming contradiction in his simultaneously advocating both progressive and conservative ideas. This hypothesis is well-worth exploring.<sup>327</sup>

However, if Michael Bieze is correct in his assertion that Harlan and his co-editors stacked *The Booker T. Washington Papers* with evidence to support his particular thesis, it may be difficult for future historians to adequately source their writings. Perhaps the most important—and the most difficult—task before Washington scholars is determining whether Harlan's volumes are truly comprehensive and representative of Washington's thought. If Harlan's volumes are sufficient, the contextual paradigm may lose some of its momentum. But if Bieze claim has merit, an ambitious scholar might undertake to publish a new compilation of Washington's papers. A historian brave enough to undertake this daunting task would make an invaluable contribution to Washington scholarship.

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<sup>327</sup>F.A. Hayek, "Why I Am Not a Conservative," in *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), available at <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/articles/hayek-why-i-am-not-conservative.pdf> (accessed 5/14/2014), citations from sections 1 and 4.

What lies in store for the future of Washington scholarship? Historians are creatures of their times. They cast down their buckets where they are, tapping into the political, economic, and intellectual opinions that define their eras. Over the past century, as views on race relations, economics, and education shifted, historians modified their opinions of Booker T. Washington. While Washington's philosophy remained popular, there were hagiographers who treated him as a patron saint. As those values fell out of popularity, purveyors of the critical paradigm found cause to deconstruct Washington. And finally, in the twenty-first century, as the methods of black progress were reevaluated, the contextual and educational historians revisited Washington, crafting a pragmatic reading of his legacy that eschewed the ideological dogmatism of the hagiographic and critical paradigms. The future of Washington scholarship is unknown, but what is certain is that the general trends in Washington historiography will sometimes lead, sometimes follow, but most often parallel the movements of the *zeitgeist*. What is also certain is that Washington, whether he was a hero or villain, a saint or a sinner, will not be forgotten.



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