

MAKING BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW:  
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND THE POLITICS OF THE DISENFRANCHISED

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This dissertation reconstructs the political thought of Booker T. Washington (1856–1915). I argue that Washington envisioned a form of black politics—in the teeth of formidable Jim Crow brutalities and injustice—that would endure because it would be solidly anchored in autonomous institutions and practices. I show how his intellectual interventions and activism informed the everyday political strategies that Afro-Southerners employed in their struggle against white supremacy. Through archival evidence, historical documents, and primary texts I situate Washington’s thought in a rich intellectual context. I recover his complex discursive dialogues with his contemporaries, especially W. E. B. Du Bois, and I elucidate Frederick Douglass’s lasting intellectual influence on Washington’s thought and politics. I then distill Washington’s political vision from three predominant themes in his writings and activism. First, I ground Washington’s politics in his realism and pragmatism. I show that Washington began with the disenfranchised and the concrete constraints on their political voice and agency. Second, I recover Washington’s structural analysis of white supremacy, his argument that the economic, political, and social institutions and practices of white supremacy reinforce and strengthen one another, resulting in a system against which a frontal attack would prove fruitless. Third, I reinterpret

Washington's uplift politics as the most feasible strategy for challenging Jim Crow and cultivating social and political agency under oppression. Washington's thought directly confronted the material and social foundations of white supremacy while enabling individual and communal empowerment and transformation. This revisionist approach to Washington aims to rehabilitate his thinking as a powerful resource for political theory, especially for those interested in the question of intellectual, social, and political agency under oppression.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Desmond Jagmohan researches the history of political thought. He is particularly interested in American and Afro-American political thought, the politics of race and ethnicity in the United States, slavery and modern political theory, and theories of domination and liberty. Having received his doctorate from Cornell University, he is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at Princeton University and will be an Assistant Professor in the Department of Politics at Princeton University, Summer 2016. Before Cornell, Desmond pursued his undergraduate studies at Northeastern Illinois University, where he majored in philosophy and history.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves.

—Exodus 5:7

I had always sympathized with the “Children of Israel” in their task of “making bricks without straws,” but ours was making bricks with no money and no experience.

—Booker T. Washington<sup>1</sup>

### **1. The Political Thought of Booker T. Washington**

The eminent historian John Hope Franklin wrote that Booker T. Washington “was unquestionably the central figure—the dominant personality—in the history of the Negro down to his death in 1915. The vast majority of Negroes acclaimed him as their leader and few whites ventured into the matter of race relations without his counsel.”<sup>2</sup> “Washington’s influence,” Franklin added, “was so great that there is considerable justification in calling the period ‘The Age of Booker T. Washington.’”<sup>3</sup> Even W. E. B. Du Bois, one of Washington’s most famous and firmest critics, did not deny Washington’s political preeminence. “After Frederick Douglass, Washington was the

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<sup>1</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1:295.

<sup>2</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes*, 2nd and revised edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 390.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

next great exemplification and revelation of problems of race and labor in America, so significant as to go to the very core of our democracy,” wrote Du Bois.<sup>4</sup>

Booker T. Washington was born a slave on a plantation near Hale’s Ford, Virginia, in 1856, and he remained in bondage until the conclusion of the Civil War. After the war, Washington and his family moved to Malden, West Virginia, where he would spend the next seven years of his life working in salt furnaces and coal mines and intermittently attending school. In 1872 he scraped up enough money and set off for Hampton Institute, a Normal School, or teachers’ college, located in Virginia. After graduating from Hampton in 1875, Washington returned to Malden and worked as a teacher but soon grew restless. In 1877 he tried his hand at party politics, working as a stump speaker for a campaign to transfer the West Virginia capital to Charleston. Washington then turned to the study of law, but with the collapse of Reconstruction it was clear that neither politics nor the law offered much professional possibility for an African American in the South, so in 1878 he entered Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. He soon found out that he was no preacher and left within the year. In 1881 Washington returned to Hampton to serve as a postgraduate instructor and tutor. He was then hired as the principal for a soon-to-be-founded Normal school in Tuskegee, Alabama. He remained a professor and administrator for the rest of his life.

Over the next decade, Washington transformed what had begun in an old henhouse into one of the largest and most successful black universities in the country. But when he gave his famous speech in 1895 at the Atlanta Cotton Exposition, he was

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<sup>4</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington,” Reel 82, frames 1376–1396, *Du Bois Papers*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

still a relatively unknown principal of an African American university in rural Alabama. On that afternoon, Washington delivered twenty-seven words that propelled him into national prominence, the leadership of his race: “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”<sup>5</sup> Over the next two decades, Washington was the foremost leader of his race and a world-famous public intellectual. Douglass had died a few months earlier and into this breach stepped Washington. When Washington died in 1915, he was still the central voice in Afro-American politics and one of the country’s leading statesmen. How, then, did it come to pass that Washington is now so often dismissed as little more than a charlatan and a compromiser?

This is a thesis on the political thought of Booker T. Washington (1856–1915). It takes as its starting point the following questions: how should we approach the study of Washington’s political thought? Did Washington’s childhood in slavery and his coming of age during Reconstruction shape his political and social vision, and if so, how? What was his intellectual formation? Who did he admire, intellectually and politically? How did he understand his own political thought in regard to the work of Frederick Douglass and later that of W. E. B. Du Bois? How did he conceive of white supremacy? Was his conception distinct and different from how his contemporaries thought of Jim Crow or how we, today, view the history of white supremacy? How did his analysis of the nature of white supremacy shape his more substantive political conclusions?

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<sup>5</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 1:75.

To answer these and other questions, I place at the forefront Washington's emphasis on the political lives of the disenfranchised, the fact that he primarily spoke for impoverished rural black Southerners who were highly vulnerable to the most violent forms of racial oppression. It is therefore essential that we begin with a rich historical context of the limited political opportunity available to African Americans in the South living under Jim Crow at the turn of the century. Historians agree that this period was defined by violent racism, representing a time of the nation's capitulation to the worst excesses of white supremacy. Under these devastating and worsening conditions, African American communities in the South turned inward to their churches, schools, workplaces, clubs, fraternities, and newspapers as a response to segregation, disenfranchisement, lynching, and the realities of living under a protracted sentence of death. What did they do in those spaces? Was this inward turn a retreat? To understand the nature of uplift politics, one has to first look at the conditions that made it a feasible and desirable political response to white supremacy. Washington's thought and politics provide unparalleled insights into the nature of white supremacy and the predominant political response taken by Afro-Southerners. Washington outlined both the instrumental and intrinsic value of a distinct form of politics, one uniquely suited to conditions of extreme domination based in racial caste.

In what follows, I do not simply describe the nature of white supremacy as Washington understood it or his uplift politics but rather turn to the everyday conditions and activities of Afro-Southern life that he described and highlighted in his writings as a site for rich political theorizing about the nature and consequences of oppression and domination and the forms of social and political agency that are

available to its victims. To do so, I offer an interpretation of Washington's political vision as outlining a form of politics and practice that begins with the condition of total or near-total domination, the lives and aspirations of those enmeshed in a web of oppression and exploitation, and those who would seemingly embody the very antithesis of politics much less a civic life. To bring to the forefront what is most distinct and important in Washington's thought, I, at times, will contrast his political vision and the strategies he advocated with the political thought of Douglass and Du Bois. I do so to remind my readers that the African American intellectual tradition is not an uninterrupted line that ran from Douglass to Du Bois to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Washington was and remained well into the twentieth century the most important African American political theorist and activist since Douglass.

Washington stressed situated political action. He insisted that Afro-Southerners had no choice but to be sensitive to the violent context of the postemancipation South. Thus only through a rich historical contextualism can we fully appreciate his thought, specifically why he insisted on certain strategies and responses and not others. I interpret Washington as advancing a public philosophy intended to speak to those living under oppression and persecution. Washington, as an African American leader in the post-Reconstruction South, was also living and thinking and writing under Jim Crow disenfranchisement, segregation, and the persistent threat of violence. He thus had to evaluate both the ethical appropriateness *and* practical efficacy of every word he would publically speak and every action he would advocate. A misstep would mean not just his demise but could lead to a collective massacre. Washington's writings and speeches not only outlined a pragmatist call but also expressed and thus performed the

practical wisdom and resolute realism necessary to survive and subvert white supremacy. I will show that Washington was a master at balancing ideals against survival, principle against compromise, when to stand straight and look one in the eye and when to hold out for a better day, when to speak up and when to bite one's tongue.

In public interactions, such praxis placed great currency on patience, survival, strategy, skill, cunning, and dissimulation as means toward achieving better conditions. Behind his mask of public compliance, he outlined a more complex political program: one that could draw on the political skills, values, and relationships that the race had developed during slavery. This was more than an instrumental politics. Washington's uplift politics also sought intrinsically valuable ends; it called for the cultivation of a sense of individual and collective agency essential for political action. Washington was the most important and misunderstood architect of this mode of politics, and he went the farthest in pragmatically realizing uplift politics through his institutionalism.

In the following chapters, I will demonstrate how Washington's intellectual interventions informed the everyday political strategies that Afro-Southerners employed in their struggle against Jim Crow and how he conducted complex discursive dialogues with his contemporaries in the North: in particular, with Du Bois and advocates, progressives, and philanthropists. Washington, I argue, was a political theorist profoundly concerned with the organization of power, the material and symbolic nature of white supremacy, the social bases of freedom, and how sociopolitical institutions enable or constrain the acquisition of the basic capabilities essential for citizenship and standing, including those of status and economic

independence. In doing so, I bring Washington, a historically marginalized political thinker—marginalized even within African American political thought—into dialogue with American political theory.

From the outset, I reject the liberal-integrationist framework that views Washington as a normative protoliberal who merely described obvious injustices, such as the denial of rights and practices of exclusion. Such a frame takes the solution to be evident: recognition of liberal rights, inclusion, and assimilation. In contrast, I show that Washington did not simply illustrate obvious injustices but identified often-ignored forms of oppression and domination in the private sphere and provided a pragmatic vision and tools for subverting and eroding them. I therefore simultaneously challenge the prevailing interpretation of Washington as having counseled African Americans to forego politics and focus on economic empowerment instead. I contend that, in fact, Washington's emphasis on social and economic empowerment was deeply political. Washington's uplift politics aimed to challenge racial oppression and subjugation through a protracted and strategic struggle. His vision detailed not only social and economic goals—the achievement of standing or recognition and of better income and living conditions—but also nurtured politically transformative aims. Washington conceived of political freedom as requiring the elimination of oppression, paternalism, and domination in the social and economic realms.

My combined focus on historical and theoretical works foregrounds Washington's often-implicit philosophical logic. I show that he stressed the historical and material conditions of political freedom. Washington envisioned a complex and multidimensional strategy. Given the incomplete character of Reconstruction,

Washington reasoned, racial justice would require the following: formal equality and liberation from the oppressive sharecroppers' lien, the right to vote and its robust legal enforcement, ownership of land and state protection from the lynch mob, and craftsmen's skills and liberal arts education. Further, Washington dared to play a sophisticated game with his Northern philanthropic supporters. On the surface, he spoke in moderate tones of racial reconciliation; in the background, and at times in secret, he used their funds to build up an autonomous black nation-state within the Jim Crow South. He transformed the Tuskegee Institute into a formidable political engine that generated several thriving black newspapers, an entire generation of black schoolteachers, a chain of significant constitutional and statutory challenges to Jim Crow in the courts, and a corps of educated black leaders—skilled artisans and agricultural technicians—who would go on to found virtually self-sufficient African American rural cooperative towns in the South.

My revisionist approach to Washington aims to rehabilitate his thinking as a powerful resource for contemporary political theory. I bring to light those nonconventional sites of black politics—subaltern spaces like autonomous rural schools, farmers' and workers' alliances, and newspapers—that enabled Afro-Southerners to reconstitute themselves as meaningful political agents. We too often neglect the possibility of political thought and practice among the truly disempowered and can tend to view their conditions as impermeable barriers to social cooperation and reflective participation in modern society. This view typically relegates them to a premodern and prepolitical mudsill. Washington sought, instead, to build a black

politics unseen—in the teeth of formidable Jim Crow brutalities and injustice—that would endure because it would be solidly anchored in autonomous institutions.

I argue that when Washington is remembered as an assimilationist and an easily manipulated pawn of the white elite, we are receiving caricatures that were built upon inadequate engagements with the original documents. This is largely because of the framework we have inherited from Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, where Du Bois, writing in his early Romantic period, launched a blistering attack on Washington along these lines. Few readers acknowledge the humble retractions that Du Bois issued in his later socialist and black-nationalist period. Inspired by the later Du Bois, I offer a balanced and comprehensive account of Washington's thought. Adopting Washington's own historicist methodology, my work reads his texts as situated within their historical-social context. For example, I sharply contrast Washington's uplift politics with the heroic and defiant visions offered by the early Frederick Douglass and the young Du Bois. I then show that the late writings of Douglass deeply shaped Washington's political thought. Washington persuasively argued that if we take the full measure of institutionalized racist violence into account, we would not responsibly endorse frontal assault strategies. In other words, Washington insisted on the virtue of political judgment and the importance of promoting the security of his people, even if it meant conceding some ground to paternalism.

My project's originality and significance lie in the fact that it offers a systematic reconstruction and critical examination of Washington's political thought that is sensitive to the sophistication of his political views in light of the sociopolitical context of the Jim Crow South. Washington is essential to a historical understanding

of African American and American political thought. His work is crucial to a rethinking of the politics of the disenfranchised and to a reconsideration of democratic theory writ large, yet too many people get him wrong; he is often considered as little more than a foil to Du Bois, or worse—as a forerunner to late twentieth-century neoliberals. I therefore engage with Washington’s thought in order to improve our understanding of domination, freedom, and resistance, especially in the context of enduring discriminatory sociopolitical regimes.

In this vein, I seek to make three major contributions. First, I retrieve an interpretation of Washington that reflects the actual historical record. I challenge the predominant assumption that accommodation and resistance, economic empowerment and political activism, separatism and social equality are radically opposed political strategies. This assumption frames our understanding of American political thought more generally and in particular of African American political theory. The Washington that I am recovering deserves to be recognized as a major thinker in his own right; in this sense, my research enriches African American studies as well as the broader history of intellectual thought. Second, I put Washington’s own capacious understanding of the “material” domination of the freedmen to work. Guided by his historicist methodology, I underline the fact that genuine political freedom has, as its crucial preconditions, the right to be secure from arbitrary assault, the right to enter property contracts and to have them equitably enforced in a court of law, the right to participate in a wage labor market under fair terms, the right to education, and the rights to association and free speech. Finally, I attend to the multiple modalities of modern society: the persistence and strengthening of Jim Crow within an

industrializing, urbanizing, and imperial United States, and to the “hidden transcripts” of resistance on the social margins under conditions of extreme domination.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. Political Thought under Oppression**

In 1884, in a speech he delivered before the National Educational Association in Wisconsin, Washington said that “any movement for the elevation of the Southern Negro, in order to be successful, must have to a certain extent the cooperation of the Southern whites. They control government and own the property.”<sup>7</sup> The social and political context of white supremacy in the postemancipation South constrained not only expressions of black political agency but also Washington’s own political thought and action, what he could publically say in his speeches and writings. Washington’s moderate and judicious language was self-consciously strategic. That Washington’s leadership was based in the rural South among the black masses meant that he had little choice but to express himself in such a way as to calm white Southerners’ fear of African American challenges to the economic, social, and political status quo.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Washington also found novel ways to convey to African Americans and sympathetic whites the substance of his political vision, as well as his more severe criticism of the economics and politics of white supremacy—specifically, its exploitative labor arrangements, political disenfranchisement, racial segregation, and

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<sup>6</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Speech before the National Educational Association, Madison, Wisconsin, July 16, 1884,” *BTWP*, 2:256

<sup>8</sup> White supremacists and Southern politicians persistently targeted Washington. For a discussion of the violent response Washington drew from white politicians in the South, see Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 238–62.

lynching. But he had to do so without igniting the already-explosive condition. His was an unenviable job. He argued that the best possible response to white supremacy was for African Americans in the South to prioritize social and economic empowerment by taking advantage of what little political opportunity was available in the South. His was a politics of the possible, one that sought to identify and develop the best political response among a repertoire of bad options.

Washington often pointed his readers to the violent context within which he was speaking and writing and organizing and institutionalizing black politics. It is therefore imperative that we read him as a theorist and political activist encamped in the heart of Jim Crow; he lived from 1881 until his death in 1915 in Tuskegee, Alabama, where he founded Tuskegee University in 1881. By reading Washington within this context and its constraints, it becomes clearer that he had to be careful in how he expressed his own social agency, as well as how much attention he wanted to call to the subversive possibilities of his uplift politics. The work of Booker T. Washington is therefore that of thinking and acting in dark times, building freedom unseen under conditions of extreme domination and persecution.

Washington was explicit that he had to appeal to and appease multiple constituencies with irreconcilable social views and political goals, both of which rested on starkly contrasting views as to the “place” African Americans should be made to occupy in the new social order of the South. In *My Larger Education*,

Washington explained the complex challenge of dealing “with public opinion on the race question” in the South.<sup>9</sup>

I found myself, as it were, at the angle where these opposing forces [Southern whites, Northern whites, and black Southerners] met. I saw that, in carrying out the work I had planned, I was likely to be opposed or criticised at some point by each of these parties. On the other hand, I saw just as clearly that in order to succeed I must in some way secure the support and sympathy of each of them.... Still it was often a puzzling and a trying problem to determine how best to win and hold the respect of all three of these classes of people, each of which looked with such different eyes and from such widely different points of view at what I was attempting to do.<sup>10</sup>

For example, take the policy of public education and race. Washington acknowledged that Southern whites were “opposed to any kind of education of the Negro,”<sup>11</sup> which was evidenced by the fact that Southern states had effectively defunded public education for African Americans. The consequence was that public education for black Southerners was now wholly dependent on private funding, which would take the form of philanthropic support from Northern industrialists and liberal whites. Washington said that both “these different views,” those of white Southerners and white Northerners, “were deeply tinged with racial and sectional feelings.”<sup>12</sup> Northern whites had their own ideas about how to educate African Americans. Washington said that they insisted that black Southerners remain “mere ‘hewer of wood and drawer of water.’”<sup>13</sup> In other words, African American education should be vocational and

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<sup>9</sup> Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education: Chapters from My Experience* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–40.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

industrial. Education should equip blacks with the skills and competencies necessary for occupying the lower rungs of an industrializing Southern economy.

Most importantly, Washington had to petition and recruit from a third constituency, black Southerners. His leadership was predicated on the support of black Southerners and thus required their enthusiastic embrace of his vision and program of racial uplift as the most feasible political strategy for overcoming the social and economic legacies of slavery, as well as surviving and undermining the politics and culture of Jim Crow. He noted the difficulty when he reminded his readers that Afro-Southerners “had recently lost, to very large extent, their place in the politics of the state [and] were greatly discouraged and disheartened. Many of them feared that they were going to be drawn back into slavery.”<sup>14</sup> Washington’s rise to leadership and his profound influence were both predicated on his acute ability to formulate into a coherent formula the intuitions and goals held by black Southerners. He took black Southerners’ unarticulated and unrealized ideals and goals and fashioned them into a concrete political vision, one to be realized through a politics predicated on social and economical uplift. Through collective self-organizing, African Americans would create institutional spaces that make possible social, economic, and cultural practices that would, over time, enable social and economic empowerment.

To return to the contextual constraints under which Washington wrote and spoke, let us look at Washington’s most famous speech, which he delivered at Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition on September 18, 1895. The Exposition was intended to promote Atlanta as the economic center of the postwar

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 38–39.

South and an industrial South as the economic future of the country. The goal was to attract investment from the North to diversify the region by bringing manufacturing centers to the South's traditional agrarian economy. Industrialists would be rewarded with easy profits, given the large and available body of white and black labor and the relative absence of labor unions. Another goal was to alleviate concerns over the fears raised by the populist victories in the state.<sup>15</sup> It was therefore important to portray the South as politically and socially stable, a place safe for investment and development. The exhibits attracted around thirteen thousand visitors a day by November and over a million visitors in total.<sup>16</sup> While the overwhelming majority of the visitors were Southern whites, the Exposition drew national attention from journalists. Washington was well aware of both the purpose of the Exposition and its national importance. But he was also acutely alert to the fact that he had to walk a tightrope. The overwhelming majority of his audience, which reached the thousands, was white and Southerner and unfailingly committed to Jim Crow, and they would be listening to a speech from a black man on an integrated stage in the heart of the segregated South.

Washington noted that it "was the first time in the history of the South that a Negro had been invited to take part on a program with white Southern people on any important and national occasion."<sup>17</sup> He said that the speech required a sense of

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<sup>15</sup> Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 322.

<sup>17</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 1:70.

“delicacy and responsibility.”<sup>18</sup> And Washington was uncensored in regard to the fears and worries that accompanied the task of a black man addressing a largely white audience in the South.

I felt a good deal as I suppose a man feels when he is on his way to the gallows. In passing through the town of Tuskegee I met a white farmer who lived some distance out in the country. In a jesting manner this man said: “Washington, you have spoken before the Northern white people, the Negroes in the South, and to us country white people in the South; but in Atlanta, to-morrow, you will have before you the Northern whites, the Southern whites, and the Negroes all together. I am afraid that you have got yourself into a tight place.” This farmer diagnosed the situation correctly, but his frank words did not add anything to my comfort.<sup>19</sup>

It is significant that Washington placed these words in the mouth of a “white farmer who lived some distance out in the country.” This was the most complex constituency for black Southerners, because it was a natural class ally against the planters and industrialists. And there were moments of interracial class alliances, especially among the populists and, in particular, in the state of Georgia. But Washington had little faith in poor whites; he considered them untrustworthy allies and unreliable political partners. The persistence of lynching did little to quell his concerns and only proved that while whites could be radical, black Southerners could not.

Washington’s challenge was to speak before an audience that included poor whites and other factions of white Southerners as well as Northern investors in the South while not affronting any one group and thus leaving Afro-Southerners in worse off. Washington said,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 327–28.

I knew that what I said would be listened to by Southern white people, by people of my own race and by Northern white people. I was determined from the start not to give undue offense to the South and thus prevent it from thus honoring another Negro in the future. And at the same time I was equally determined to be true to the North and to the interests of my own race. As the 18th of September drew nearer the heavier my heart became and the more I felt my address would prove a disappointment and a failure.<sup>20</sup>

His trial was not whether he could escape unscathed this dangerous test but whether he could squeeze something out of each faction that when taken together would yield moderate social and economic opportunities for black Southerners. He had to envision what was possible in the impossible and dispiriting condition and how best to articulate it and encourage the multiple factions present to agree with him.

Washington began his speech by appealing to the South to invest in job opportunities and public schooling for African Americans. He argued that they were vital to the economic growth and prosperity of what Henry Grady, the influential editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, provided in the most succinct view of the “New South,” a South that would remain socially traditional and unapologetic for its racial past and present and ready to take its place in a modern and industrial economy.<sup>21</sup> It was not the scene to outline an appeal for social justice but rather one ripe for engaging white Southerners’ narrow self-interests. Economic “opportunity here afforded will awaken among us a new era of industrial progress,” he shouted to the audience.<sup>22</sup> “No enterprise seeking the material, civil, or moral welfare of this section

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<sup>20</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 71.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Grady, *The New South: Writings and Speeches of Henry Grady* (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1971), 11–12.

<sup>22</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 73.

can disregard this element of our population and reach the highest success.”<sup>23</sup> And he said to the African Americans in attendance that it would be wise to seek out and exploit what possibilities there were in the South, because they would remain in the South for the near future. “Cast down your bucket where you are,” Washington insisted.<sup>24</sup>

Washington’s advocacy for job opportunities and education for blacks had to be expressed in such a way as not to fuel Southerners’ fear of black economic and social advancement. What stands out in Washington’s speech is just how the terror of white supremacy hung over every word and gesture. Georgia was one of the hardest-hit states by the devastating economic conditions of the 1890s, which intensified the fear of black competition. Between the years of 1889 and 1900, 2,522 African Americans were lynched.<sup>25</sup> And only in Mississippi were more African Americans lynched than in the state of Georgia.<sup>26</sup> Thus Washington warned African Americans not to “underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations” with white Southerners, but he also said that they should do so in “every manly way.”<sup>27</sup> Black Southerners had little choice, he insisted, since they were “surrounded” by hostile whites and constrained by economic and political forces beyond their control.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years Lynching: In the United States 1889–1918* (New York: Negro University Press 1919).

<sup>26</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 73–74.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

To the white planter-class and industrialists, Washington said they should seek out African American workers. One of Washington's concerns was the inflow of European immigrants. Because they were white, they would be hired over blacks, thus making an already-miserable economic condition more depressing. Washington had to therefore make a case for black labor as more desirable.

To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket where you are." Cast it down among the 8,000,000 Negroes whose habits you know.... Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand, and heart, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste place in your fields, and run your factories. While doing this, you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen.<sup>29</sup>

Appealing to the self-interests of whites in attendance, Washington was on safe ground. In this petition, Washington tried to accomplish three goals: (1) he made a case for African American workers over immigrant labor; (2) he asked for investment in public education for blacks; and (3) he stressed public education as necessary for the economic prosperity of the South, downplaying its threat to the social order of white supremacy.

Because the Exposition was intended to stage the economic possibilities of the New South, Washington made clear that Afro-Southerners could significantly influence the economic development of the region. Washington said the race would "*buy* your surplus, make productive your land, and *run* your factories." He was not

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 74–75.

bartering for menial positions. He was clearly asking for real economic opportunities. But Washington also warned the South not to take African Americans for granted. Though African Americans were disenfranchised and segregated, they could still derail the economic development of an industrial South. So long as whites were willing to pursue mutual economic development with African Americans, he said the race would be “patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful.” But Washington was clear that there would be consequences if the South continued to defund or remain unwilling to fund public education for African Americans and continue to deny African Americans an equal opportunity to compete for employment. “Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upwards,” Washington warned, “or they will pull against you the load downwards.”<sup>30</sup>

“There is no security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all. If anywhere there are efforts tending to curtail the fullest growth of the Negro,” Washington further argued, “let these efforts be turned into stimulating, encouraging, and making him the most useful and *intelligent citizen*.”<sup>31</sup> It is significant that Washington appealed to the language of African American citizenship. He did this in this context in Atlanta no less, especially given the precipitous rise of political disenfranchisement. Washington then turned to the social question of segregation, which was the most explosive and thus complicated subject for a black man to publically navigate before a Southern white audience. To do so, Washington delivered what would become his most famous and infamous sentence: “In all things that are

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”<sup>32</sup> These twenty-seven words did not only thrust Washington into history but would also determine his political and intellectual place in American thought.

The speech was widely praised by both his white and black contemporaries. Many whites embraced the Gilded Age assumption that markets were better arbiters of social problems and thus read Washington as voicing a laissez-faire solution to Jim Crow. To this end, Washington did a splendid job. Grover Cleveland wrote, “I thank you with much enthusiasm for making the address.... Your words cannot fail to delight and encourage all who wish well for your race.”<sup>33</sup> Clark Howell, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, said that the speech was “the beginning of a moral revolution in America.”<sup>34</sup> The *Texas Freeman* wrote that the speech “stamps [Washington] as a most worthy representative of a large part of the country’s citizenship. Without resort to hyperbolic exaggeration, it is but simple justice to call the address great. It was great.” The *Richmond Planet* called it “[c]alm, dispassionate, logical.”<sup>35</sup> The *New York World* wrote that “it was as if the orator had bewitched them.”<sup>36</sup>

Congratulations also poured in from notable African Americans. Washington’s prudence was a thing of collective pride. Du Bois wrote to Washington saying: “[Let] me heartily congratulate you upon your phenomenal success at Atlanta—it was a word

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Letter from Grover Cleveland to BTW, October 6, 1895,” *BTWP*, 4:50.

<sup>34</sup> Clark Howell, *New York World*, September 18, 1895.

<sup>35</sup> *New York World*, September 19, 1895.

<sup>36</sup> “South’s New Epoch,” *New York World*, September 19, 1895.

*fitly* spoken.”<sup>37</sup> Timothy Thomas Fortune, the civil rights activist and editor, said: “[It] looks as if you are our Douglass and I am glad of it.”<sup>38</sup> Edward W. Blyden, the black-nationalist, shot off a letter that said: “[Your] address was an inspiration” and by a “singular coincidence you are the namesake, not probably by inheritance but by gift of the ‘Father of his country.’ But your work in some respects is greater than his. He freed one race from foreign domination, leaving another chained and manacled. But your words and your work will tend to free two races from prejudices and false views of life.”<sup>39</sup>

Not everyone was so thrilled with Washington, however. Interestingly, African Americans were largely in consensus that given the context, Washington’s speech was a phenomenal success. Liberal whites were most disappointed in Washington’s speech and perplexed by his seeming capitulation to racial segregation. Ellen Collins, a white activist and reformer who had worked in tenement houses in New York, wrote Washington and asked him whether he was being “too generous.” She continued, “[Perhaps] you might have been a little more independent; in view of the long, long suffering of your people a little irritation would have been pardonable.”<sup>40</sup> Washington’s use of the metaphor of a hand is often interpreted as affirming Jim Crow segregation. But his use of the term “social equality” could not have meant what we mean by the term today. He wrote to Ednah Dow Cheney, a leader of the women’s

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<sup>37</sup> “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to BTW, September 24, 1895,” *BTWP*, 4:26.

<sup>38</sup> “Letter from T. Thomas Fortune to BTW, September 26, 1895,” *BTWP*, 4:31.

<sup>39</sup> “Letter from Edward Wilmot Blyden to BTW, September 24, 1895,” *BTWP*, 4:27.

<sup>40</sup> “Letter from Ellen Collins to BTW, September 24, 1895” and “Letter from Ellen Collins to BTW, September 28, 1895,” *BTWP*, 4:25 and 33.

rights movement, educational philanthropist, and intellectual, who had voiced concerns, explaining the term's meaning in the idiom of the Jim Crow South.

In referring to the social conditions I simply meant to emphasize the condition which I think obtains throughout the world, that is, I simply meant to say that each individual regulated his own social intercourse.... Now of course I understand that there are a great many things in the south which southern white people class as social intercourse that is not really so. If anybody understood me as meaning that riding in the same railroad car or sitting in the same room at a railroad station is social intercourse they certainly got a wrong idea of my position.<sup>41</sup>

Social equality was not civil equality. As Washington made clear, he did not endorse segregation.

In fact, the speech had itself drawn a distinction between *civil equality* and *social equality*. "As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past ... so in the future ... we shall stand by you ... interlacing our industrial, commercial, *civil*, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."<sup>42</sup> "Social" was widely recognized in the postemancipation South as synonymous with "private," even intimate, relations. Kelly Miller, an African American educator-activist and contemporary of Washington and Du Bois, wrote that social equality "cannot be defined according to the ordinary import and weight of words."<sup>43</sup> Du Bois explained the two uses of "social equality" in 1921 in the *Crisis*. "Social equality may mean two things. The obvious and clear

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<sup>41</sup> "Letter from BTW to Ednah Dow Littlehale Cheney, October 15, 1895," *BTWP*, 4:57.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Kelly Miller, *Radicals and Conservatives and Other Essays on the Negro in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 123–32.

meaning is the right of a human being to accept companionship with his fellow on terms of equal and reciprocal courtesy.”<sup>44</sup> This conception, he added, is the “foundation of democracy.”<sup>45</sup> “But there is another narrow, stilted and unreal meaning that is sometimes dragged from these words, namely: Social Equality is the right to demand private companionship with another.”<sup>46</sup> In a letter to Francis Grimke, Washington further stressed the context of the speech and made clear its meaning. “You can easily see that I had rather a difficult task,” he wrote. “There were some things that I felt should be said to the colored people and some others to white people; and aside from these considerations I wanted to so deport myself as not to make such an impression as would prevent a similar opportunity being offered some other colored man in the South.”<sup>47</sup>

Du Bois later acknowledged that Washington’s metaphor of the hand “was capable of serious differences of interpretation.”<sup>48</sup> He wrote that it was “the first time since emancipation [that] the Negro race was officially addressing the South at the South’s own invitation,” and to “the surprise of the world Mr. Washington said what the South wanted to hear, but said it with rare tact” when he “touched the keynote not only of the exposition but of the growing American thought on the Negro problem” with his sentence, “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the

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<sup>44</sup> Du Bois, “President Harding and Social Equality,” *Crisis*, December 1921.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> “Letter from BTW to Francis James Grimke, September 24, 1895,” *BTWP*, 4:25.

<sup>48</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington” (unpublished in Du Bois’s life but recently published in *Du Bois Review* 8, no. 2 [Fall 2011]: 367–76).

fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential for mutual progress.”<sup>49</sup> Du Bois recalled that the “sentence seized the imagination of the nation” and added: “I recognized, even then, that the phrase was capable of serious differences of interpretation.”<sup>50</sup> Du Bois said that his initial reaction to the speech was to write “to the New York AGE, then the leading Colored weekly, commending Mr. Washington’s stand and saying, ‘Have we not here the basis of honorable compromise with the South?’”<sup>51</sup>

Du Bois did not end his reconsideration there. He stressed *how* each constituency present interpreted Washington. “The Colored people could and would say as I said: the fingers of the hand are in pretty close touch with each other and equal in general esteem if not in ability and prominence. Their separation, moreover, while real, is not great enough to preclude them from being one hand.”<sup>52</sup> But the metaphor was dangerously ambivalent and was received in contradictory ways. “The South on the other hand could and did put an interpretation on the speech which came seriously to alarm me and all Colored people. The Negro, it said, has come to his senses. He is willing to surrender political and civil rights; he is going uncomplainingly to work and going to give up agitation for impossible things.”<sup>53</sup>

But historians have nevertheless insisted that on that afternoon in Atlanta, Washington articulated the constitutive *compromise* of post-Reconstruction race

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

relations in the South. Rayford Logan argues that Washington led during the “nadir” of race relations, his term, and he therefore had to take a “position ... far different from the unequivocal standard for equal citizenship advanced by Douglass.” “Washington was convinced, and rightly so, that it would have been folly to ask in 1895 for equal rights for Negroes,” insists Logan.<sup>54</sup> C. Vann Woodward said that in Atlanta, Washington “framed the *modus vivendi* of race relations in the New South.”<sup>55</sup> But as Barbara Fields rightly reminds us, “the *modus vivendi* itself had been determined, as it would continue to be, by means of crop lien and sharecropping, law and constitution,” and lynching.<sup>56</sup>

### **3. Inheriting Washington**

The scholarship on Washington has three recurring images: the capitalist compromiser, the political realist, and the corrupt leader. Materialism, realism, and institutional power dominate the literature. But Washington’s stress on material conditions (understood broadly as structural conditions including but not reducible to economic arrangements), political judgment and opportunity or his “realism,” and his concentration on institution-building and collective-organizing are rarely brought together into a single, coherent analysis that elucidates how each relate to the other so as to offer a framework for how they fit together analytically, normatively, and

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<sup>54</sup> Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life: The Nadir, 1877–1901* (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1954), 275–76.

<sup>55</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South: 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 356.

<sup>56</sup> Barbara Fields, “*Origins of the New South* and the Negro Question,” *Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 4 (Nov. 2001): 811–26, fn 3.

practically as part of a political vision. One goal of this thesis is offer such a framework.

The prevailing image of Washington is that of a capitalist who advanced a politics of accommodation. He prioritized economic opportunity and mobility above social and political equality. Washington's public statements and clichés are taken as straightforward evidence of his ethical and political commitments; this is independent of the contexts within which he expressed his thoughts and the form those expressions took. Thus we get the folksy prophet of black conservatism who preached a doctrine of self-help and hard work. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois painted this portrait of Washington. He said that Washington's thought amounts to "a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life."<sup>57</sup> Du Bois then argued that in the Afro-American intellectual tradition, Washington represents the "old attitude of adjustment and submission," an outlook that "accepts the alleged inferiority" of the race and "withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens."<sup>58</sup> Washington's philosophy bartered away the "higher aims of life" for the opportunity to earn a dollar; it values economic mobility over social and political equality. And in the face of increasing segregation, disenfranchisement, and lynching, Washington advises submission, silence, and patience. This image of Washington has two broad strokes: he privileged economics over politics, *and* he formulated, practiced, and institutionalized

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<sup>57</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *W. E. B. Dubois: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 398.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

accommodation and compromise as a collective response to white supremacy and its devastating consequences.

In his definitive study of African American history, first published in 1947, John Hope Franklin argued that “Washington believed that the Negro, starting with so little, would have to work up gradually before he could attain a position of power and respectability in the South.”<sup>59</sup> White Southerners “liked his relative disinterest in political and civil rights for Negroes,” and they “admired his tact and diplomacy with which he conciliated all groups, North and South.”<sup>60</sup> The basic idea is that Washington’s emphasis on economic opportunities—and, to some degree, a stress on social uplift in the form of educational attainment—is logically and inextricably tied to his accommodationist politics or quiescence. Most historians have agreed with Du Bois and Franklin. “Washington held up the self-made black capitalist as a hero of his race. The businessman’s gospel of free enterprise, competition, and laissez-faire never had a more loyal exponent than the master of Tuskegee,” C. Vann Woodward wrote.<sup>61</sup> His economic thought “was a compound of individualism, paternalism, and antiunionism in an age of collective labor action.”<sup>62</sup> The leading historians of the era have, for the most part, agreed with this line of interpretation.<sup>63</sup> Wilson Jeremiah

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<sup>59</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 390.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>61</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 356.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>63</sup> Rayford W. Logan affirmed the same reading. “Washington unmistakably accepted a subordinate position for Southern Negroes. This position was far different from the unequivocal standard for equal citizenship advanced by Douglass in 1889.... In return he asked for a chance to gain a decent livelihood.” Logan, *The Negro in American Life*, 275–76. And in an early study of Du Bois, Francis L. Broderick struck the same familiar chord: “Washington was leading his people into a blind alley: in exchange for paltry support of industrial education, Washington was bartering away the claim to political and civil rights; indeed he was even surrendering their manhood.” Washington “felt that the

Moses writes that Washington believed the “Negro in America was to advance himself by free competition in an open market.”<sup>64</sup> Washington’s philosophy was an “essentially laissez-faire formulae for black advancement through individual commitment by individual blacks to the gospel of work and wealth.”<sup>65</sup> But Moses updated his earlier assessment, arguing that Washington’s thought amounted to an “ethic of achievement” that “promoted a (1) practical code of ethics, aimed at increasing the efficiency and affluence of Afro-Americans, [and] (2) an accommodationist morality that included pietism as a facilitator of assimilation.”<sup>66</sup> Joel Williamson said Washington’s thought was “relatively accommodative,” that his politics “featured pride, solidarity, and self-help.”<sup>67</sup>

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temporary suspension of political and social rights was not too high a price for the attainment of this economic shelf.” Francis L. Broderick, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), 40. August Meier also concluded that Washington’s political philosophy merely epitomized the broader trends in black politics in post-Reconstruction America. “Washington’s emphasis on economic activity was the hallmark of the age.” “Negro thought generally veered from emphasis on civil rights, political activity, and immediate integration,” he wrote. “Negro thinking was largely motivated by economic realities.” And thus to “Washington the solution of the race problem lay essentially in an application of the gospel of wealth,” so he stressed “material prosperity.” Moreover, he “deprecated politics” and denied “any interest in social equality.” August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 86, 100–101. Then there are those who take the reading of Washington as a compromiser quite far. Of course there are those who have very strong views on Washington. Grace Elizabeth Hale writes: “If there ever was a master of minstrel performance, it was Booker T. Washington.” *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 24.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 96.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncles Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982), 86–88.

<sup>67</sup> Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 70–74. Roy L. Brooks reads Washington as having insisted that African Americans “must establish an independent economic base as a prerequisite to political and social advancement in an integrated society. Roy L. Brooks, *Integration or Separatism: A Struggle for Racial Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 126. Raymond Smock writes that “Washington thought like a capitalist.” *Booker T. Washington: Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 125.

Marxist historians have also offered similar but more direct judgment of Washington's thought.<sup>68</sup> And Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton reached a devastating conclusion: they argued that Washington's "philosophy encouraged black people to concentrate their time and energy on developing their educational and economic potential. It de-emphasized political activity." "Washington pursued what we call a 'politics of deference.'" That is, his politics is to be understood as a form of "indirect rule"; he was one of those "captive leaders."<sup>69</sup> "A modus operandi had been reached between Tuskegee blacks and whites," concluded Ture and Hamilton.<sup>70</sup>

There are, of course, those who have offered more provocative accounts of Washington's economic thought. Heather Cox Richardson interprets Washington's economic thought as "defending the old idea of free laborers" rather than the emerging laissez-faire individualism of the Gilded Age.<sup>71</sup> And Moses once again revised his view of Washington: now Washington is no longer a laissez-faire individualist but a

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<sup>68</sup> Herbert Aptheker, a close colleague of Du Bois and the literary executor of his papers, wrote in 1951 that "Washington's policy amounted objectively to an acceptance by the Negro of second class citizenship"; moreover, Washington's "influence coincided with and reflected the propertied interests' resistance to the farmers' and workers' great protest movements in the generations spanning the close of the nineteenth and the opening of the twentieth centuries." Aptheker further argued that "American imperialism conquers the South during these years and Mr. Washington's program of industrial education, ultra-gradualism and opposition to independent political activity and trade unionism assisted in this conquest." Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), 84. So, upon Aptheker's interpretation, Washington assisted in the escalation and supremacy of Jim Crow, as well as capitalist expansion into the South. An unapologetic Marxist, Aptheker denied anyone who was not a card-carrying communist access to Du Bois's papers, thus perpetuating a simplistic vision of black political thought and an even more crude view of Washington. It seems that Marxists like looking for enemies within traitors. Oliver C. Cox, in the same year, said Washington was a "collaborator" who "functioned as a restraint upon the Negroes' democratic progress." Cox argued that slaves 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," and he "never fully lost the attitude of the favorite slave."

<sup>69</sup> Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 124, 10, and 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>71</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4–5.

black Benjamin Franklin. “New England Protestant ethic ... lay at the basis of Washington’s later economic/industrial theory.”<sup>72</sup> Woodward drew a devastating conclusion, arguing that the “shortcomings” of Washington’s thought, “whether in education, labor, or business, were the shortcomings of a philosophy that dealt with the present in terms of the past.”<sup>73</sup> His “philosophy was an anachronism.”<sup>74</sup> That is, Washington’s economic thought reflected antebellum rather than Gilded Age ideas. Even David Levering Lewis said that Washington “spoke ... for the early industrial past.”<sup>75</sup>

This body of work often leaves implicit the normative and analytical relationship between Washington’s economic thought and his politics, meaning that they seldom demonstrate how his alleged capitalist conviction necessarily lead to his politics of accommodation and submission. According to this line of interpretation, Washington is to be understood as a laissez-faire liberal individualist. Because of his laissez-faire principles, he advocated for free-market solutions to racial injustice. Washington thought of competition as the only morally permissible way to remedy the inequalities and injustices tracking black life, or so goes the reasoning. For example, Ayers writes that “Washington believed in the market as a color-blind arbiter that would eventually award its benefits without concern for race.”<sup>76</sup> This remains the conventional view of Washington, which has led some to view him as the forerunner

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<sup>72</sup> Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151.

<sup>73</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 356.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>75</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1993), 502.

<sup>76</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 324.

to black neoliberals like Thomas Sowell and Walter E. Williams.<sup>77</sup> Washington provided plenty of evidence for this conclusion; he liked to say that “there is little race prejudice in the American dollar.”<sup>78</sup> “On the other hand, as there is little prejudice against a man in business,” he would just as quickly say, “there is also little prejudice in his favor.”<sup>79</sup> But that’s not all Washington used to enjoy saying about the market. “More and more thoughtful students of the race problem are beginning to see that business and industry constitute what we may call the strategic points in the solution.”<sup>80</sup> From “these fundamental professions ... we shall gradually advance to all rights and privileges which any class of citizens enjoy.”<sup>81</sup>

This brings us to the second reading of Washington, which views him as a political realist who sought feasible responses to Jim Crow. This view conceives of his politics as strategy and tactics, means rather than ends. It takes Washington to have held the same broad and noble goals that Du Bois held. In sum, it says that given the limitations Jim Crow imposed on Afro-Southerners, Washington decided it was more feasible to move the struggle for racial justice onto less dangerous ground, which he judged to be the market. This was a tactician that saw the market as the least precarious way to uplift the race. The most famous version of the realist reading is put

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<sup>77</sup> See Thomas Sowell, “Culture—Not Discrimination—Decides Who Gets Ahead,” *U. S. News and World Report*, October 12, 1981; *Race and Economics* (New York: David McKay, 1975); Walter Williams, *The State Against Blacks* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982). For a criticism of the “black libertarian” tradition, see Bernard Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1992), 19–51.

<sup>78</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Wichita: De Vore and Sons, Inc., 1992 [Hertel, Jenkins & Co., 1907]), 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

forth by Houston Baker Jr., who argued that Washington had perfected the mask as a space of habitation that can voice and veil radical critique.<sup>82</sup> Baker has argued that Washington manipulated stereotypes and appropriated racist imageries toward a “liberating manipulation of masks and a revolutionary *renaming*” and thus makes *Up from Slavery* a “record and representation of Afro-America’s mastery of form.” Baker identified *Up from Slavery* as inaugurating the African American literary modernism.<sup>83</sup> And Lewis argues that Washington was the “Machiavelli of the Black Belt.”<sup>84</sup> Both Baker and Lewis capture an essential and defining feature of Washington’s political thought and practice, that is, Washington’s use of deception in public to mask his more subversive aims. They rightly stressed Washington’s realism and political judgment. In the following chapters, especially chapters three and five, I draw on Baker and Lewis to further develop Washington’s political realism. Many historians have noted, often in passing, that Washington had little choice but to seek pragmatic goals.<sup>85</sup> It is a line of interpretation that essentially says that Washington did

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<sup>82</sup> Houston A. Baker Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). But Baker later backed away from this reading, arguing that Washington was, essentially, only concerned with his own power. *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-reading Booker T.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>83</sup> Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 15–22 and 35–36.

<sup>84</sup> Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 259.

<sup>85</sup> Robert J. Norrell, who recovers the vitriolic racism and the fact that Washington was often a target of white supremacist forces and thus had to maneuver dangerous waters, has joined the most recent version of the school of thought. He gives special attention to what he calls “white nationalist” politicians (*Up from History*). His study differs only in emphasis and evidence, but its central claim is that Washington had little choice but to be pragmatic and realist in his pursuit of higher ideals. Most of the early literature and those staying with prevailing interpretation of Washington as an accommodationist noted his realism. Rayford Logan wrote that “Washington was convinced, and rightly so, that it would have been folly to ask in 1895 for equal rights for Negroes.” Logan, *The Negro in American Life*, 275–76. Spencer said Washington’s “policy was distinctly realistic.” Samuel R. Spencer Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Negro’s Place in American Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 108. “Washington was essentially a realist,” Joel Williamson said, and he added, what he “gave up were claims to things that blacks in a large measure had already lost in fact if not in law:

not simply champion a laissez-faire ethics blind to the conditions of black life but that his emphasis on the market was tactical.

The third line of interpretation was outlined by August Meier. Upon discovering Washington's secret civil rights campaign and backroom politics, Meier said it was now difficult to argue that Washington was not committed to racial equality and justice.<sup>86</sup> "Although overtly Washington minimized the importance of the franchise and civil rights," Meier showed, "covertly he was deeply involved in political affairs and in efforts to prevent disenfranchisement and other forms of discrimination."<sup>87</sup> Washington was "secretly engaged in attacking the disenfranchisement constitutions by court action."<sup>88</sup> And he spent a considerable portion of his personal savings for these campaigns.<sup>89</sup> Yet the conclusion was a strange one. Meier's study becomes almost wholly consumed with Washington's personality. "It was his quasi-dictatorial power as much as anything else that alienated W. E. B. Du Bois from Washington and his program."<sup>90</sup> Like the *political realist*

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physical integration and full political participation." *The Crucible of Race*, 410. Edward Ayers says, "Washington dug in for a long war on white racism." *The Promise of the New South*, 326. Smock says, "Tuskegee was the perfect, segregated, self-contained briar patch from which to work, plan, and scheme on behalf of the race." *Booker T. Washington*, 143.

<sup>86</sup> Meier, *Negro Thought in America*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* "In areas other than politics Washington also played an active behind-the-scenes role. On the Seth Carter (Texas) and Dan Rogers (Alabama) cases involving discrimination in the matter of representation on juries, Washington worked closely with the lawyer Wilford Smith and contributed liberally to their financing. He was interested in preventing Negro tenants who had accidentally or in ignorance violated their contracts from being sentenced to the chain gang. He was concerned in the Alonzo Bailey Peonage Case, and when the Supreme Court declared peonage illegal, [he] confided in friends that he and his associates had been working at the case for over two years." 110–13.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 115. Smock agrees: "It offered Washington the public mantle of a prominent educator while hiding his aggressive and sometimes ruthless actions as a political boss who operated on both sides of the color line." *Booker T. Washington*, 143.

reading, Washington the *power broker* clandestinely pursued those broader political ideals, but at the end of the day he cared more for his own power and influence. Those who read Washington as a realist do not always provide evidence for his “true” preferences but rather seem to simply deduce it or read between the lines. Those who insist Washington was a power broker do have evidence of his broader and more noble vision for the race—they know of his civil rights campaign, for example—but they focus almost entirely on his personality and what drove his alleged insatiable appetite for power.

Louis R. Harlan’s two-volume biography of Washington—the finest biography of Washington—provides an abundance of evidence for the reading of Washington as a power broker. Harlan’s research is impeccable, and no one can write on Washington without owing the greatest debt to Harlan, especially since he also edited the fourteen volumes of the *Booker T. Washington Papers*. My central criticism of Harlan is that he was too willing to map onto Washington a personality type, the corrupt politician. What we get is a Washington who had broad aspirations for his race but is also overconsumed by his personal desire for prestige and power. “His aim was not intellectual clarity, but power. His genius was that of stratagem. His restless mind was constantly devising new moves and counter moves ... this thirst for power and gift for manipulating others matured into a lasting pattern of life and mode of thought.”<sup>91</sup> So obsessed was Washington that any sign of a threat to his power brought out the most ruthless retaliations, including using spies. Harlan thus molded his work into a

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<sup>91</sup> Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 92.

narrative of the “master of the Tuskegee plantation,” an “Uncle Tom in his own house,” “some frightened little man like the Wizard of Oz, or, as in the case of an onion, nothing—a personality that had vanished into the roles it played.” Harlan concluded that Washington’s “methods were too compromising and unheroic to win him a place in the black pantheon, but it is also because he was so complex and enigmatic” and the “source of this complexity, no doubt, was being a black man in white America.” “He was not an intellectual.... Ideas he cared little for,” as his mind revealed a “bag of clichés,” Harlan insisted.<sup>92</sup>

In American political thought, Herbert Storing wrote the lone essay on Washington. “The School of Slavery” appeared in 1964 to cool the tempers of those protesting for civil rights and especially their leaders, understood to be the NAACP. Storing in an amazing act of revisionist history dug deep into the African American past and pulled out Booker T. Washington as a model to emulate a more patient, less rebellious, and less “ungrateful” character.

It was the school of slavery that gave Washington his deep understanding of and sympathy for the burden of the whites—a burden of guilt for past wrongs; of fears for the future, reasonable and unreasonable; of hate and prejudice. He took care not to add to that burden unnecessarily and to lighten it when he could. Washington did not give major emphasis to the wrongs done to Negroes, not fundamentally out of prudent reticence, but because Negroes were not the sufferers of the deepest wrong. It is on the side of the masters that the net disadvantage of slavery is to be counted. Through slavery the

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<sup>92</sup> Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, vii–viii, a57, a60, 227. In Baker’s later work, he agrees with Harlan, writing that Washington “opened too few doors toward his followers’ most sought-after goals; in fact, he closed the doors and barred the shutters on all that lay beyond the ultimate welfare and informing philosophy of his own autonomous, somewhat mechanical institution.” While Baker initially challenged Harlan’s reading of Washington, he in the end repudiated Washington for not doing enough. Houston A. Baker Jr., “Men and Institutions: Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery*,” in *Long Black Song: Essays in Black Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972), 95. And later he argued a similar line in “Meditation on Tuskegee: Black Studies and their Imbrication,” *Journal of Black in Higher Education*, no. 9 (Autumn 1995): 52–59.

Negro found it had thrust upon him freedom and civilization; his master betrayed them.<sup>93</sup>

For Storing, Washington understood that blacks were not prepared for citizenship. On the face of it, there is nothing wrong with this claim if one understands it to be addressing the intellectual and psychological consequences of slavery, its social and economic legacies and its political consequences, still felt. But Storing seemed to have read out of Washington an argument about black pathology and, moreover, a politics that begins from a central concern with the “burden of the whites” because it is “on the side of the masters that the net disadvantage of slavery is to be counted.”

“But why approach these questions through Booker T. Washington instead of looking at present-day leaders addressing themselves to present-day problems?”<sup>94</sup> Storing answered his own question: the civil rights movement “relies heavily for its higher justification on its early leaders and they, in turn, defined their position against the background that Washington provided.”<sup>95</sup> Storing’s central claim is an answer to a second rhetorical question: “what constitutes the ‘advancement’ of colored people?”<sup>96</sup> His answer: “Washington sought to work out that destiny within the limits set by the primitive condition of the Negro and the prejudice of the white.”<sup>97</sup> In Storing’s reading, Washington thought blacks were politically premature and had to be uplifted to a level where they would be better prepared for citizenship. “The Negro duty was to

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<sup>93</sup> Herbert Storing, “The School of Slavery: A Reconsideration of Booker T. Washington,” in *One Hundred Years of Emancipation*, ed. Robert A. Goldwin (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), 191–92.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

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

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

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

make himself fit, and that is the basis of Washington's efforts to turn Negroes from political to economic activity."<sup>98</sup> Adolph L. Reed Jr. shares, to a degree, Storing's interpretation of Washington's political thought and thus rightly criticized Washington. "Washington symbolized an approach that focused on 'social rehabilitation,' a concrete project of expunging the 'social primitivism' that had taken root among blacks largely because of the slave experience."<sup>99</sup>

Wilson Carey McWilliams, in *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (1973), argued that "modern black political history begins" with Washington.<sup>100</sup> McWilliams starts from the proposition that the recuperation of Washington as a Black Nationalist or proto-nationalist is deeply misguided. "Washington's leadership was a prolonged experiment in the social philosophy of liberalism," he insisted.<sup>101</sup> "Individualism, competition, and the struggle with nature were all key principles of Washington's thought and tactics," and to the degree that Washington offered some concessions to "racial separation" he only did so as "temporary expedients."<sup>102</sup> McWilliams then grounds Washington's accommodationist politics in his liberalism. "Washington's liberalism blinded him to the independent possibilities of politics."<sup>103</sup> "Believing in progress," McWilliams added, "Washington was especially susceptible to that form of 'realism' which consists of short-term accommodations, confident that the long term

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>99</sup> Adolph L. Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 61.

<sup>100</sup> Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 598.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 599.

will take care of itself.”<sup>104</sup> McWilliams concluded by saying that “Washington was the prototype of all those political leaders who Carmichael and Hamilton classify as ‘indirect rulers.’”<sup>105</sup> John Patrick Diggins echoes this view when he says that in African American thought, there is a tradition that runs from “Frederick Douglass to Booker T. Washington to our contemporaries Shelby Steele and Thomas Sowell,” which “emphasizes a liberal-individualism based on initiative in the private sphere, self-development, work and thrift, the rationality of economic life, personal responsibility, and integration with the larger white society.”<sup>106</sup> He calls this “Black Lockeanism” or laissez-faire liberalism.

Though Washington has garnered little attention by students of American political thought, most scholars of Afro-American political thought have recognized the gravity of Washington’s thought and his intellectual range. Few doubt that he is one of the three most important theorists in the history of Afro-American political and social thought; the other two are widely recognized as Douglass and Du Bois. Harold Cruse offered one of the most provocative and controversial revisionist accounts of Washington. At the height of the Black Power Movement, Cruse, who was sympathetic to the cause and its ends, argued that its unacknowledged founder is none other than Washington. “Washington is the root of Afro-American nationalism,” insisted Cruse.<sup>107</sup> The reason few have considered Washington’s nationalist tendencies

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 599–600.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln and the Foundations of American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 274.

<sup>107</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From Its Origins to the Present* (New York: Williams Morrow & Company, Inc., 1967), 344.

and credentials is because black thinkers “who do fit into the Communist stereotype of Negro heroes are ignored or downgraded.”<sup>108</sup> He then combined Washington’s materialism with his realism. “This was the typical Washington attitude—a bourgeois attitude, practical and pragmatic,” but Cruse added that this outlook was “based on the expediencies of the situation.”<sup>109</sup>

Cornel West, for instance, argues: “The Du Bois–Washington debate set the framework for inclusionary African practices in the United States in this century. The numerous black ideological battles between integration and nationalism, accommodation and separatism are but versions and variations of the Du Bois–Washington debate.”<sup>110</sup> West insists that Washington “preserves an important place for skilled workers and entrepreneurs, who have close contact with ordinary black people.”<sup>111</sup> In his study of Du Bois’s early political thought (specifically, *The Souls of Black Folk*), Robert Gooding-Williams outlines what he calls the “Afro-modern tradition of political thought, an impressively rich body of argument and insight” that is “bound together by certain genre-defining thematic preoccupations (e.g., the political and social organization of white supremacy, the nature and effects of racial ideology, and the possibilities of black emancipation), preoccupations that distinguish it from other traditions and genres of political philosophy.”<sup>112</sup> This tradition includes

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<sup>108</sup> Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1968), 81–82.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>110</sup> Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 163n13.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2–3.

Martin R. Delany and Frederick Douglass, as well as Booker T. Washington and Du Bois.

Glenn C. Loury offers a sympathetic account of Washington as a laissez-faire theorist of uplift. “Washington saw two factors preventing blacks from enjoying the status in American society that was their due: actual defects of character, as manifested in patterns of behavior and ways of living among the black masses, and the racist attitudes of whites.”<sup>113</sup> According to Loury, Washington’s uplift politics begins with this central insight that “racial oppression tangibly diminishes its victims, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, the construction of new public identities and the simultaneous promotion of self-respect are crucial tasks facing those burdened with a history of oppression. Without this there can be no genuine recovery from past victimization.”<sup>114</sup> Loury says Washington held the view that “the attainment of true equality with the former oppressor cannot depend overtly much upon his generosity; it must ultimately derive from an elevation of their selves above the state of diminishment.”<sup>115</sup>

One must operate at two levels, playing the “inside game” and the “outside game.” The outside game aims to secure one’s rights by petitioning for redress of grievances. Booker T. Washington thought this could wait; he may have been tragically wrong, but we have since made up for his omission.... The philosophy of self-help, of good old-fashion “uplift,” applies this principle to the inside game, the striving for moral reform within the black community. Working diligently to overcome the profound pathology to be found in some quarters of contemporary black life establishes what too often is only asserted.... As are free human agents, blacks are obligated to strive to reverse the

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<sup>113</sup> Glenn C. Loury, *One By One from the Inside Out: Essays and Reviews on Race and Responsibility in America* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 66–70.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

debilitating patterns of social life that limit our progress.... The inside game is critical, because much of what needs doing cannot be done by outsiders.... Any internal effort to reform the ways in which people live is not a task for the state in our liberal society.... Finally, self-help is critical to securing the sympathetic support of the rest of the political community.<sup>116</sup>

He says Washington had the courage to express a “hard truth about the conditions of his people,” but he did so because he knew that for emancipated blacks to be able to “look their former masters in the eye, they must first raise themselves from their current level.”<sup>117</sup> Bernard Boxill argues that Washington is seen as the founder of “black libertarianism,” but Washington’s emphasis on correcting injustices makes him, at best, an ambivalent representative of the laissez-faire politics of contemporary neoliberals.<sup>118</sup> Boxill notes, for example, that Steel, Sowell, Williams, and Loury all “emphasize that blacks must help themselves.”<sup>119</sup> My intention here is not to weigh in on who gets Washington right or the merits and demerits of each reading but rather to illustrate how beholden both critics and champions of Washington are to Du Bois’s interpretation.

Tommie Shelby offers the most suggestive and promising reading of Washington. He identifies four core themes in Washington’s thought, the first being Washington’s stress on practical education for “entering the workforce and undertaking entrepreneurial enterprises.” The goals were self-reliance and economic independence, which Shelby notes that both were “paramount for Washington, as the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 78–80.

<sup>117</sup> See, for example, Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001); John McWhorter, *Winning the Race* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006).

<sup>118</sup> Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, 19–51.

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

foundation of many things that are valuable in life.”<sup>120</sup> Second, Washington insisted on “moral virtue,” which included “a sense of dignity in labor and an appreciation for hard work” and moral development, more broadly conceived by Washington, that required the cultivation of “virtues of patience and generosity. It involves a willingness to make sacrifices in the short term for greater gains in the future.”<sup>121</sup> Shelby draws the familiar conclusion: “Perhaps most importantly, it requires that individuals cultivate a sense of personal responsibility.”<sup>122</sup> Perhaps.

Third, Washington’s “self-help philosophy is institution building and racial self-organization. In particular, he encouraged blacks to develop profitable businesses that would cater to the needs of black people. He supported the idea of black newspapers and educational institutions.”<sup>123</sup> But again, Shelby draws a familiar conclusion: Tuskegee’s “racial uplift ... cultivated in its students the petit bourgeois virtues of hard work, thrift, self-sacrifice, efficiency, cleanliness, and patience. In his view, this collective project of institution building and race-based organizing was a way of making forced segregation work in favor of black interests instead of seeing it as solely a limitation and intolerable constraint.”<sup>124</sup>

Fourth, “Washington emphasized economic advancement rather than political agitation and protest.”<sup>125</sup> Shelby says the first through the third steps (earning-focused

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<sup>120</sup> Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 72.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–73.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

education, virtues of patience, generosity and sacrifice, and autonomous black institutions) “served as steps toward the goal of economic advancement, which, according to Washington, is the true road to independence and freedom.”<sup>126</sup>

Washington advocated land ownership and the accumulation of capital, and he encouraged blacks to save and invest rather than spend money on entertainment and luxury goods. His economic approach to racial uplift eschewed direct political agitation for civil rights, which he believed would be futile and self-defeating under such oppressive conditions.<sup>127</sup>

While Shelby identifies the recurring and essential themes in Washington’s work, he interprets them within a liberal framework that views Washington as advocating for equality of opportunity. Shelby does not emphasize the historical context, and he thus glosses over the constraints placed on Washington’s politics, yet he does provide important insights, most significant of which is thinking about how all four themes can yield a framework for viewing Washington’s thought. This thesis draws on the insights and work of Baker, West, Lewis, and Shelby to develop a more nuanced and complex interpretation of Booker T. Washington and his place in African American and American political thought.

#### **4. The Plan**

Chapter 1 provides a brief biography of Washington’s early life. It traces Washington’s life as a slave on a plantation in Virginia, his early life as a freedman working in the salt and coal mines of West Virginia, his student and teaching days at

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Hampton Institute, and, finally, his founding of Tuskegee Institute. One of the aims of this chapter is to draw attention to Washington as a former slave, as his experiences in bondage were formative to his later social criticism and political thought. The ultimate goal is to introduce Washington and the conditions of his early life that shaped his concerns and strategies. In later chapters, I more fully explicate the substantive theoretical foundations of Washington's thought and politics.

Chapter 2 reconstructs Du Bois's evolving view of Washington, taking as a given that most of us have derived our view of Washington from Du Bois's pen, and specifically *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).<sup>128</sup> I begin with Du Bois prior to my close engagement with Washington's own theoretical work to rehearse the conventional and marginalizing interpretation of Washington's thought within African American and American political theory. Few have considered the textual, rhetorical, and theoretical roles that Washington serves in *Souls*. I argue that Du Bois's early thought, specifically *Souls*, drew radical philosophical and political distinctions between Washington and Du Bois. Du Bois intended his earlier critique to be more broadly directed toward Afro-Southerners and often blamed them for the emergence of Washington as the leader of the race. I proceed to show that, as few scholars have noted, Du Bois's later thought converges with Washington's uplift politics. I offer close readings of the textual, rhetorical, and analytical role of Washington in both *Souls* and Du Bois's *Dusk of Dawn* (1940),<sup>129</sup> and note that in *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois's argument, political prescriptions, strategic concerns, and normative ideals

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<sup>128</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

<sup>129</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1986).

reflect Washington's political thought, espousing views that Washington had developed four decades prior.

The chapter begins with two observations—a contextual note and a textual claim—before turning to the main argument, which unfolds over four substantive sections that reinterpret Du Bois's criticism of Washington in *Souls* as a struggle for exactly that: the *souls* of black folk. Most have overlooked this central organizing metaphor of the text and Du Bois's religious and classical images that structure his critique of Washington: the story of Exodus to symbolically portray Washington as a figure of a regressive movement from slavery to corruption rather than forward toward freedom, and the use of "meat" as a recurring metaphor for materialism and "golden apples" to signify corruption. The metaphors of meat and golden apples convey Du Bois's central criticism in *Souls*, beyond his perception that Washington was willing to trade away African Americans' collective goals of social equality and political rights for economic opportunity—that black Southerners themselves were too preoccupied with their own material comforts and conveniences rather than the higher aims of life, citizenship and culture, rights and recognition. This reading recovers and synthesizes Du Bois's early view of the failures of Washington's—and black Southerners'—alleged materialist and accommodationist politics. Finally, I turn to Du Bois's later work to show a radical change in *Dusk of Dawn*. Instead of an emphasis on the moral consequences of racial oppression, Du Bois now stressed its material consequences. Moreover, Du Bois sketched a strategy for combating Jim Crow that was almost indistinguishable from Washington's uplift strategy, which was laid out decades prior.

The chapter thus concludes by bringing forward Du Bois's own turn to materialist and realist politics as one that led him to adopt Washington's views.

Chapter 3 draws out the forgotten intellectual relationship between Frederick Douglass and Washington. I begin by reframing the familiar reading of Douglass, by arguing that Washington's thought stood in creative conflict with that of Douglass's. Douglass is credited as having defined slavery as a condition of extreme personal domination. This has led to the interpretation of Douglass as a liberal theorist whose commitment to freedom as self-ownership was clearly expressed in his literary depiction of slavery's denial of bodily integrity and its extortion of black labor. Washington sought to legitimize his leadership by projecting himself as continuing the work of Douglass while suggesting that Douglass's approach was ill-suited to effective confrontation of white supremacy. In short, Washington sought to make clear that he was the legitimate heir of Douglass while also displacing Douglass. In so doing, Washington was also responding to Du Bois, who insisted that Douglass's protest politics were sufficient for combating Jim Crow.

The central claim of this chapter is that Douglass's work deeply shaped Washington's thought. Washington held that what remained relevant from Douglass's work was not his defiant protest or his liberalism but his emphasis on structural inequalities and his portrayal of political judgment as an essential virtue of the politics of the dominated. These latter themes in Douglass's thought have been overlooked, in part because scholars have been beholden to Douglass's second autobiography, *My*

*Bondage and My Freedom* (1855).<sup>130</sup> Scholars have ignored or simply assumed that his third autobiography, *Life and Times* (1881), picked up his life's story where *My Bondage and My Freedom* left off.<sup>131</sup> Significantly, Washington was most influenced by *Life and Times*, because in this account Douglass not only narrated the challenges facing emancipated blacks but also revised his description of slavery to speak to the "Negro Problem." In effect, one's understanding of Douglass depends strongly upon *which* autobiography of Douglass one draws on. Intending *Life and Times* as an address to present problems, Douglass emphasized the structural and relational inequalities that marked slavery as an institution and the importance of cultivating political judgment for sustaining a subversive politics. I close the chapter by tracking the theorization of structural domination in Douglass and then Washington, emphasizing Washington's argument that Douglass had identified political judgment as the most important virtue for the enslaved.

Chapter 4 takes up Washington's structural analysis of white supremacy. I argue that what is most important in Washington's descriptions of white supremacy is not solely their content but his delineation of how the different features of white supremacy hang together so as to constitute a coherent and ideological system where the economic, political, and social institutions and practices of white supremacy reinforce and strengthen one another, resulting in a system against which a frontal attack would prove fruitless. I interpret Washington's descriptive accounts of white

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<sup>130</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994).

<sup>131</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994).

supremacy as a system of oppression anchored in what today we might call the “basic structure” of society. That is to say, Washington details white supremacy as the foundation of the South’s predominant economic arrangements, major political and social institutions and practices, and civic habits and norms, which *taken together* constitute the background condition against which black Southerners had to carry out their lives.<sup>132</sup> I further argue that Washington’s observations of the political and socioeconomic conditions of the postemancipation South rest on a conception of racial oppression that bears great resemblance to Iris Marion Young’s understanding of oppression as “systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions.”<sup>133</sup>

In step with Washington’s methodology, this chapter first addresses his descriptions of the economic, political, and social structures subtending white supremacy before turning to his thoughts on implications. I recover Washington’s argument that the failure to provide the freedmen and women land and access to the material conditions necessary for their protection from the worst forms of economic exploitation resulted in the overwhelming majority of black Southerners becoming ensnared in economic arrangements best described as conditional bondage. Second, I turn to his discussion of the political oppression of the freedmen and women, which

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<sup>132</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 7–11, 54–58.

<sup>133</sup> Washington’s conception of Jim Crow mirrors Iris Marion Young’s definition of oppression. She argues that “oppression refers to systematic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant. Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people’s choices or policies. Its causes are enmeshed in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules,” and therefore “oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions.” Oppression “names in fact a family of concepts and conditions” that we can “divide into five categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.” Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 40–41; see chapter 2 (“Five Faces of Oppression”).

examines how extra-legal violence, disenfranchisement, and the defunding of education reinforced and strengthened already-exploitative and oppressive conditions. Notably, poor whites had to sanction and enforce these transformations; they had to embrace a system that also exploited them. This brings us to Washington's third theme. He often stressed the enduring role of racial caste in America as providing the ideological foundation for white supremacy. In section four, I draw out Washington's main conclusion: if one truly understood the nature of white supremacy, then it would become clear that those advocating a frontal assault on Jim Crow by black Southerners were likely engaging in hollow moralizing or simply asking them to risk their lives for a political program that was certain to fail. He arrived at this conclusion after describing how deeply embedded white supremacy is in the South's economy, politics, and social order. In a word, I explicate why Washington thought white supremacy invulnerable to an abolitionist politics primarily based in protest and why Jim Crow's entrenchment in the economic, political, and sociocultural structures of the New South made it resilient against reason and criticism.

Chapter 5 provides an analytical synthesis of Washington's uplift politics, which I then reinterpret as a politics of individual and collective transformation and empowerment. This chapter shows that Washington's thought reflects a deep and abiding concern with cultivating economic, social, and civic capacity under domination. I begin with a rather simple but oft-overlooked question: *What is the normatively and strategically appropriate political response for a racial minority living under conditions of regional violent subjugation?* Jim Crow exemplified such domination. I show in chapter four that protest politics made little sense given the

external constraints of legal and extra-legal racist violence, as well as the deepening dependency and powerlessness of the black peasantry. This was the era of lynching, race riots, state oppression, and the legal extortion of black labor. Under these circumstances, Washington turned to collective self-empowerment, namely, the building up of civic capacity as the best means for political empowerment. Thus, understood in context, racial uplift hardly amounts to a bourgeois ethics of self-help. Uplift politics has three recurring lines: (1) it starts with the present *material* reality of black life in the South, including social and political institutions and not only economic conditions; (2) it stressed political judgment, a realist and pragmatic politics that looked for what political opportunities might be had from a repertoire of terrible options; and (3) it emphasized communal practices, institution-building, and collective self-organizing as the most effective response. This response to conditions of oppression has *intrinsic* as well as instrumental value.

The prevailing interpretation of Washington and Afro-American uplift politics in the era of Jim Crow is that they both represent a retreat from politics, a cowardly acquiescence to white supremacy. I make clear that Washington's uplift politics sought to cultivate civic capacity among Afro-Southerners, most of which remained in conditions not dissimilar to slavery. Where the previous chapters bring to the fore a condition most marked by an asymmetry of power and powerlessness, yielding a dependency that constrained political voice and action, this chapter illustrates the political agency of the oppressed. It does so not to celebrate it but to inquire after the form of politics available to the disenfranchised. If we take protest politics as the only

expression of social agency and collective capacity, then we are complicit in an occlusion of the political lives of black Southerners.

My central focus is on political and social agency as well as individual efficacy under extreme conditions. I ask: Why uplift? Why turn inward to communal practices of institution- building and collective self-organizing? Why self-help, self-development, and self-discipline? Uplift has been widely dismissed as submission and accommodation, a shameful antipolitics, as quiescence or mere mimicry of bourgeoisie values. I show that uplift institutions and practices provided a vital institutional context for the acquisition of important capacities, skills, and resources. The everyday practices in these institutions allowed black Southerners to reconstitute their sense of personhood, belonging, and individual and collective agency. Uplift was intrinsically important and instrumental for political action.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Early Life of Booker T. Washington

The great always introduce us to facts; small men introduce us to themselves.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>1</sup>

Booker T. Washington was not an easy person to know. He was wary and silent. He never expressed himself frankly or clearly until he knew exactly to whom he was talking and just what their wishes and desires were.

—W. E. B. Du Bois<sup>2</sup>

#### **Introduction**

The image of the tactician is all that seems to survive of Booker T. Washington. He was certainly not an easy person to get to know. Washington was an unyielding realist who knew that a slip of his tongue or a misplaced look could destroy everything he had worked for, if not land him on the wrong side of a rope. But he also had a broad and complex political vision. That vision, however, has to be deduced from the body of his work, not just his writings but also his activism and especially his institution building. It is worth reiterating that his environment was one of unfathomable racism and inescapable violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Thoughts on Modern Literature,” *Dial I* (Oct 1840): 147.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy of Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 243.

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief biography of Washington's early life. The chapter sketches Washington's childhood, education, and early work at Tuskegee Institute, the university he founded in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1881. It traces Washington's life as a slave on a plantation in Virginia, his early life as a freedman working in the salt and coal mines of West Virginia, his student and teaching days at Hampton Institute, and, finally, his founding of Tuskegee Institute. One of the aims of this chapter is to draw attention to Washington as a former slave as his experiences in bondage were formative to his later social criticism and political thought. The chapter also stresses the fact that Washington came of age in the perilous times of Reconstruction without displacing his thought into his personality or dissolving his political vision into his social position in the postemancipation South. The ultimate aim is to introduce Washington and the conditions of his early life that shaped his concerns and strategies. In later chapters, I more fully explicate the substantive theoretical foundations of Washington's thought and politics.

### **1. Of Slavery and its Subversion**

Washington was born a slave in 1856 and emancipated in 1865 when a Union officer read the Proclamation Emancipation on the plantation where he was held in bondage. Washington's childhood as a slave profoundly shaped his political thought. Recalling his inauspicious origins, he wrote: "My life had its beginning in the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings."<sup>3</sup> Washington said that he was "not quite

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<sup>3</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 1:215.

sure of the exact place or exact date” of his birth,<sup>4</sup> but we now know that it was in the spring of 1856 when James Burroughs’s plantation in Franklin County, Virginia, unceremoniously received its newest piece of property—Booker Taliaferro.<sup>5</sup> Washington was the third child of Jane, a slave whose own “addition to the slave family” had “attracted about as much attention as the purchase of a new horse or cow.”<sup>6</sup> Washington also added that he did not know who his father was. “I do not even know his name. I heard reports to the effect that he was a white man who lived on one of the near-by plantations.”<sup>7</sup>

In his first and widely ignored autobiography, *The Story of My Life and Work* (1900), Washington described an experience in slavery that he said left the “deepest impression” on him. “The thing in connection with slavery that left the deepest impression was the instance of seeing a grown man, my uncle, tied to a tree early one morning, stripped naked and someone whipping him with a cowhide. As each blow touched his back the cry ‘Pray, master! Pray, master!’ came from his lips, and made an impression upon my boyish heart that I shall carry with me to my grave.”<sup>8</sup> But in *Up from Slavery*, which was taken from a serialized account of his life for *The Outlook* magazine, Washington said his owners were not “especially cruel” as compared with

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1:216. For demographic information on Washington’s birthplace and a biographical description of his owners, the Burroughs, see Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 3–27; “An Item from the Census: The Slaves of James Burroughs,” *BTWP*, 2:5–6; “An Item from the Census: The James Burroughs Farm,” *BTWP*, 2:7–9.

<sup>6</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 215.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>8</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 1:12.

others.<sup>9</sup> This may well be true, depending on what constitutes cruelty. The South was in the throes of the Civil War for nearly half of Washington's life, and while the battles never reached Franklin County, the war's effects were fully felt on the Burroughs plantation. Washington's master, James Burroughs, died in 1861, and by the close of the war his two sons had met a similar fate: William perished in battle in 1863 and Christopher died in a Union prison in 1865.<sup>10</sup> Their deaths meant that no males were around to execute the more spectacular forms of violence. Or maybe Washington's owners were paternalist slaveholders, benign and reluctant drivers of men.<sup>11</sup> Despite the "lack of cruelty" or the prevalence of the whipping post, Washington's condition was one of wretchedness. "I had suffered for want of a place to sleep, for lack of food, clothing, and shelter."<sup>12</sup> "During the period that I spent in slavery," he recalled, "almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labour."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to his natal alienation, exploitation, and general suffering, Washington stressed the denial of formal education to him and all slaves, which makes sense given that he was a college president and a lifelong educator. Washington recalled that he used to "accompany the white children of the plantation to the schoolhouse" to "carry their books, to carry their wraps, or their lunches" but that he

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<sup>9</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 215.

<sup>10</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 1:15; Harlan, Booker T. Washington, 21–23.

<sup>11</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 3–158.

<sup>12</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 360.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

“was never permitted to go farther than the schoolroom door.”<sup>14</sup> He said, “We played and chatted together” and “yet, for some reason I did not understand, I was debarred from entering the little schoolhouse with the children of my master.”<sup>15</sup> Puzzled, his mother explained to him literacy’s subversive power.

The thing made such an impression upon my mind, that I finally asked my mother about it. She explained the matter to me as best she could, and from her I heard for the first time that learning from books in a schoolroom was something that, as a rule, was forbidden to a Negro child in the South. The idea that books contained something which was forbidden aroused my curiosity and excited in me a desire to find out for myself what it was in these books that made them forbidden fruit to my race and me.<sup>16</sup>

Providing the “forbidden fruit” of education became Washington’s life’s work and lasting legacy. “From the moment that it was made clear to me that I was not to go to school, that it was dangerous for me to learn to read, from that moment I had resolved that I should never be satisfied until I learned what this dangerous practice was like.”<sup>17</sup> The desire for learning is a common trope in the slave narrative. Frederick Douglass came to the same conclusion after witnessing his master reprimanding his own wife for teaching the young Douglass how to read: “‘Very well,’ thought I. ‘Knowledge befits a child to be a slave.’ I instinctively assented to the proposition, and from that moment I understood the direct pathway from slavery to freedom.”<sup>18</sup> Douglass said it was the “first decidedly anti-slavery lecture” he heard.<sup>19</sup> Washington was explicit that

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<sup>14</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2009), 261–62.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, in *Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 527.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

his story was also the story of his fellow bondsmen and women. “What was true in my case has been true in the case of thousands of others,” he exclaimed.<sup>20</sup>

Washington learned other lessons on the Burroughs’s plantation, including insights into the inner lives of the enslaved and how to practice the sort of resistance available to the oppressed. During the “preparation for the Civil War and during the war itself,” Washington wrote, “I now recall the many late-at-night whispered discussions that I heard my mother and other slaves on the plantation indulge in. These discussions showed that they understood the situation, and that they kept themselves informed of events by what was termed the ‘grape-vine’ telegraph.”<sup>21</sup> He said that he, too, occupied a central link in the chain of subversion: “I was required to go to the ‘big house’ at meal-times to fan the flies from the table.... Naturally much of the conversation of the white people turned upon the subject of freedom and the war, and I absorbed a good deal of it.”<sup>22</sup> At an early age, Washington was an apprentice to slave politics, learning how to carve out a little freedom from the most unyielding of systems. Few historians doubt that slaves had complex political lives.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Washington, *The Story of the Negro*, 261–62.

<sup>21</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 218.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> This classic work is, of course, John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Eugene Genovese, drawing on insights from Antonio Gramsci, reconstructs the ideological foundations of slavery—its production of an insidious form of “paternalism”—and, more importantly, how slaves negotiated, exploited, and subverted the slaveholder’s ideology and other more tangible instruments of power (*Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 585–660). Two important works on slave culture are Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. 3–97, and Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). For a widely recognized classic on how slaves were nevertheless able to retain family life under the cruelest conditions, see Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976). For the religious life of the slave and the complex role of the black church, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Yet subverting slavery required more than sabotage, breaking a tool, slowing your work, or participating in other forms of small-scale resistance.<sup>24</sup> Whatever desires for freedom the slave harbored, she had to be sure to mask them under the outward appearance of compliance. Evoking the eve of emancipation, Washington said the moment came when the slave could shake off her mask and reveal who she was and what she had looked for all along.

Finally the war closed and the day of freedom came. . . . As the great day drew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom. True, they had sung those same verses before, but they had been careful to explain that the “freedom” in these songs referred to the next world, and had no connection with life in this world. Now they gradually threw off the mask, and were not afraid to let it be known that the “freedom” in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world.<sup>25</sup>

This is both less and more than Washington’s memories of slavery or his personal history, for that matter: it is his reclaiming the experience of collective trauma and, one suspects, its symptomatic aftermath.<sup>26</sup> This passage tells us that Washington, like

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<sup>24</sup> James C. Scott has written what is often considered the most important theoretical work on resistance, specifically of those in peasant economies: *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990). On slavery and resistance, especially the role of enslaved women, see Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 224.

<sup>26</sup> Dwight A. McBride has outlined the challenges of bearing witness to slavery in *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). The literature that is most insightful on the hermeneutic difficulties of bearing witness to historical trauma is that of the Holocaust. In particular, Dominick LaCapra has written the best work on collective trauma and its aftermath, specifically the challenges the aftermath of trauma poses for historical writing, reception, and interpretation (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001], 1–113; *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994], 1–168; *History and Memory After Auschwitz* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998], 1–138). See also Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and Truth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). For a synthesis on the merits of this approach, see Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma Studies: Its Critics and Vicissitudes,” in *History in Transit: Experience,*

all the other slaves on the Burroughs's plantation, had to master two subjectivities at once: he had to perfect the look of subservient, thoughtless slave while secretly cultivating skills necessary for coping with and subverting slavery. His own stealing of information required of him important political skills, even if he was not at the time fully conscious of the mask he had to form and perfect.

Washington did not have to strike the abolitionist tone or perform its work, for slavery had been abolished for over three decades when he published his autobiographies. Washington was interested in a usable past. He elucidated the enduring features of oppression, slavery's vestiges and, in particular, those conditions that made the postemancipation world seem like slavery by other means: economic exploitation, social subordination, political disenfranchisement, and racial oppression. Washington stressed the place of enforced ignorance within the logic of slavery to illustrate the insurrectionary power of education for oppressed people. He especially emphasized an education that could enable social mobility and increase economic advancement for black workers, tenant farmers and sharecroppers, and, most of all, their children. Those who could read and reckon were less likely to enter or remain in exploitative jobs, and, moreover, literacy allowed for the publicizing of injustice, advertising achievement, and imagining community. Washington understood that his

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*Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 106–43, and for an insightful discussion on the relationship between traumatic experience and identity, see 35–71. For a consideration of whether narratives enable or undermine empathy, see Carolyn J. Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). For what can be troubling political consequences of constitutive narratives of injury or trauma, which can be converted into injury or “wounded attachment,” read Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Carolyn J. Dean, *Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim after the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

postemancipation audience would directly relate the conditions and injustices of slavery to the present and persistent forms of exploitation and oppression.

Admittedly, it is uncommon for a historian of political thought to spend time on the early life of his subject. Then again, few politicians had to live with the remains of slavery. Upon Washington's own account, his early years as a slave on James Burroughs's plantation profoundly shaped his thought and politics. The historian Steven Hahn, for example, argues that slavery vitally shaped postemancipation black politics. This becomes clear once we begin to imagine slaves as "political actors."

For it seemed increasingly apparent that slavery was not mere background or prologue; it was formative and foundational. In countless ways freed people built and drew on relations, institutions, infrastructures, and aspirations that they and their ancestors had struggled for and constructed as slaves. Without this legacy, activism and mobilization could not have taken place so rapidly after slavery had been abolished; and without consideration of this legacy, we cannot begin to understand how activism and mobilization did take place, and around what sorts of issues. It seemed, in short, that a serious study of African-American politics during this era had to look out from slavery onto the postemancipation world, and that once we did so, that world would appear very different.<sup>27</sup>

Slavery had left more than scars on Washington's back. Washington attested to the fact that he had learned the politics of the unfranchised, such as how to use strategic silence and subversive obedience, patience, and judgment. He also learned how to organize and mobilize, to build a social and political world within and under conditions of extreme domination. The politics he mastered as a slave proved most valuable for surviving and eroding Jim Crow.

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<sup>27</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

## 2. Between Slavery and Freedom

Washington was nine years old when the Union officer arrived at the Burroughs's plantation and read aloud the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring Washington and his fellow slaves to be free.<sup>28</sup> While there was "great rejoicing," Washington said it "lasted but for a brief period" because the "great responsibility of being free" took "possession" of the freedmen and women and questions of "a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches" descended upon them.<sup>29</sup> Emancipation was certainly momentous, but it was accompanied by bewilderment and distress—"a deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters."<sup>30</sup> Washington said that there "were two points with which practically all the people" were in agreement: "that they must change their names, and that they must leave the old plantation."<sup>31</sup> Movement and self-ownership: reclaiming one's identity and integrity by renaming one's self. Even if the freedmen and women did not know where to go or what they would or could do, emancipation nonetheless meant that they had gained what they only once dreamed of, freedom—the freedom "to move, to earn, to learn," as Toni Morrison aptly puts it.<sup>32</sup> These are precisely the themes Washington stressed.

In the fall of 1865, Jane moved Booker, his brother, John, and his sister, Amanda, to Malden, West Virginia, where Jane's husband, Wash Ferguson, worked in

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<sup>28</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 225.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>32</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 64.

a salt furnace. Washington soon discovered that the road to freedom led to the bottom of a coal mine. While he was formally free and had moderate access to basic necessities, Washington remained unfree. Washington said that his working life was even more arduous and dangerous than when had been a slave. “I had been working in a salt-furnace for several months, and my stepfather had discovered that I had a financial value,” so “when the school opened, he decided that he could not spare me from my work.”<sup>33</sup> “After I had worked in the salt-furnace for some time, work was secured for me in a coal-mine,” Washington said.<sup>34</sup> But he insisted that his life in those early days of freedom was representative of the average African American adolescent in the South.

The work was not only hard, but it was dangerous. There was always the danger of being blown to pieces by a premature explosion of the powder, or being crushed by falling slate. Accidents from one or the other of these causes were frequently occurring, and this kept me in constant fear. Many children of the tenderest years were compelled then, as is now true I fear, in most coal-mining districts, to spend a large part of their lives in these coal-mines, with little opportunity to get an education.... They soon lose ambition to do anything else than to continue as a coal miner.<sup>35</sup>

In this passage, we witness the oppressive labor conditions of the postemancipation South and their physical, emotional, and intellectual consequences through a movement from slavery down into a dark cave. Washington essentially reversed Douglass’s conception of emancipation as the “glorious resurrection, from the tomb of

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<sup>33</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 231.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

slavery, to the heaven of freedom.”<sup>36</sup> Washington and many emancipated slaves found themselves, though liberated, certainly not free.

Poverty and intimate patriarchal authority instead of law now barred Washington from education. Initially, Washington was not allowed to attend school. Either the family desperately needed his meager earnings or his stepfather was simply exploitative, or maybe both. The effect was the same. The desperate conditions of Washington’s family members led them to calculate that exploiting his labor power was more essential than educating him. This only led to a worse craving for education. “From the time I can remember having any thoughts about anything,” Washington said, “I recall that I had an intense longing to learn to read. I determined, when quite a small child, that, if I accomplished nothing else in life, I would in some way get enough education to read common books and newspapers.”<sup>37</sup> Washington soon found creative ways to fulfill that yearning.

For instance, he eventually convinced his mother to dedicate a small portion of his earnings, all of which went to his stepfather, toward the purchase of evening lessons, which proved inadequate because his tutors were barely ahead of him. In time, Washington struck a bargain with his stepfather. “Finally I won and was permitted to go to the school in the day for a few months, with the understanding that I was to rise early in the morning and work in the furnace [from four] till nine o’clock, and return immediately after school closed in the afternoon for at least two more hours

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<sup>36</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* in *Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 65.

<sup>37</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 228.

of work.”<sup>38</sup> In a striking passage, Washington said it was in the schoolroom that he named himself, essentially reclaiming his identity.

By the time the occasion came for the enrolling of my name, an idea occurred to me which I thought would make me equal to the situation; and so, when the teacher asked me what my full name was, I calmly told him “Booker Washington,” as if I had been called by that name all my life; and by that name I have been since known.... I think there are not many men in our country who have had the privilege of naming themselves in the way that I have.<sup>39</sup>

What is significant is Washington’s identifying education as a means of self-transformation or self-recovery. By doing so, he underscored the importance of education for individual and social empowerment. Unfortunately, the arrangement did not last: “My step-father was not able, however, to permit me to continue in school long, even for half a day at a time. I was soon taken out of school and put to work in the coal mine.”<sup>40</sup>

In 1867, at the age of eleven, Washington got an unexpected break when he went to work as a domestic servant for General Lewis Ruffner, the owner of the salt furnace and coal mine.<sup>41</sup> Despite the paternalism, the job afforded Washington an opportunity for formal education. Lewis Ruffner was no abolitionist; he was, in fact, a former slave owner. But he registered his objection to secession by joining the Union Army, the Republican Party, and later helping to form the new state of West Virginia. Viola Ruffner, his second wife, was from a New England family of artisans. She to some extent became Washington’s first patron, in large part due to her republicanism,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>40</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 235.

especially the dignity it assigned to free labor. According to Washington, she insisted that “the difference in social conditions is principally the result of intelligent energy.”<sup>42</sup> But she also believed that education and free labor were preconditions for personal and social transformation, Washington recalled, and so she “encouraged and sympathized with [him] in all [his] efforts to get an education.”<sup>43</sup> Viola Ruffner later recalled that she had tutored Washington, as she was moved, in part, by his peculiar determination.<sup>44</sup>

However encouraging, the Ruffner’s home did not shield Washington from the vicissitudes of postemancipation politics. In 1869 the Gideon’s band of the Ku Klux Klan rode into town and taught the young Washington an important civic lesson when they violently attacked African Americans. General Ruffner intervened but was struck in the back of the head by a member of the mob. The general lay in critical condition for several days and never fully recovered. The social message was clear. If the town’s wealthiest and most influential resident could not stand up to the forces of white supremacy, then even an isolated African American man who was fortunate enough to be his protégé had no chance. Washington concluded that “there was no hope for our people in this country,”<sup>45</sup> and many Afro-Southerners echoed that judgment. Yet a black politics of patronage was unavoidable. Washington spent much of his later life

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>44</sup> Viola Ruffner later affirmed the sentiment when she said she had supported Washington’s desire to learn “to read, which he readily accepted” and which she would “help and direct.” She later recalled that Washington “seemed peculiarly determined to emerge from his obscurity. He was very restless, uneasy, as of knowing that contentment would mean inaction.” Quoted in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*.

<sup>45</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 255.

cultivating linkages with strong white leaders as part of his strategy for slowing the advancement of white supremacy. As his future critic Du Bois later noted, Washington “became during the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft, from 1901 to 1912, the political referee in all Federal appointments or action taken with reference to the Negro and in many regarding the white South,” and it was not only presidents but also “governors and congressmen” who sought his counsel.<sup>46</sup> But Washington knew it was not enough, even for extraordinarily promising blacks, to put their social and political fate in the establishing of ties with white “bosses” or political leaders.

### **3. The Education of Booker T. Washington**

In the fall of 1872, at the age of sixteen, Washington left Malden to attend Hampton Institute, a Normal School in Virginia. He said he was, at the time, in “the darkness of the mine” when he heard two miners talking about a new school that allowed impoverished students to work in exchange for board and tuition.<sup>47</sup> Not “even heaven,” he recalled, “presented more attractions for me at that time than did the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute.”<sup>48</sup> In describing his trip to Hampton, Washington said he had left with little money because most of his earnings had been taken by his “stepfather and the remainder of the family, with the exception of a few dollars.”<sup>49</sup> He only got as far as Richmond before finding himself penniless. He said

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<sup>46</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 606.

<sup>47</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 236.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

he had “crept under the sidewalk and lay for the night upon the ground,” and nearly “all night [he] could hear the tramp of feet over [his] head.”<sup>50</sup> He was literally being stepped on, and it is not insignificant that the last paragraph of *Up from Slavery* begins with: this “time I am in Richmond as the guest” and closes with “I delivered my message.”<sup>51</sup> Washington’s life, or how he chose to at least tell and remember it, is a climb up from slavery, and this strenuous and slow rise is clearly intended to narrate the collective struggle of the race.

Washington soon arrived at Hampton Institute, where he fell under the spell of General Samuel Chapman Armstrong (1839–1893). Like many new colleges established in the mid-nineteenth century, Hampton expressed its founder’s vision. Washington said one could remove “from Hampton all the buildings, class-rooms, teachers, and industries, and given the men and women there the opportunity of coming into daily contact with General Armstrong, and that alone would have been a liberal education.”<sup>52</sup> An American Missionary official echoed the sentiment when he observed that it “is a sorry caricature of the original impulse of Hampton to define it in the terms of a pedagogical idea. It is rather a man incarnate—Armstrong himself, multiplied and in action.”<sup>53</sup> To appreciate Hampton, one has to know Armstrong; the institution embodied his social thought.<sup>54</sup> General Armstrong was born in Maui. His

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861–1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>54</sup> For Armstrong’s views on education, see Samuel C. Armstrong, *Armstrong’s Ideas on Education for Life* (Hampton, VA, 1940). For the Hampton model, see *Annual Reports of the Principal to the Board of Trustees, 1868–1915* (Huntington Collins Library Archives, Hampton University, Hampton, VA).

father was a missionary, and his mother, Clarissa, was a former schoolteacher. In 1830 they moved to the Hawaiian Islands to serve as missionaries, where Samuel was born. Richard Armstrong was not your middling missionary. He was influential in establishing the first sugar plantations and sawmills on the islands and became the minister of public instruction and then president of the Board of Education.<sup>55</sup> His philanthropic zeal was matched by his paternalist racism. “My general plan is to aim at the improvement of the heart, the head and the body at once. This is a lazy people and if they are ever to be made industrious the work must begin with the young.”<sup>56</sup>

The American Missionary Association did most of the educating of the freedmen and women. After emancipation, former abolitionists, mostly women, turned their convictions to educating and uplifting the freedmen and women. No doubt these reformers were paternalists and moderate racists, but it would be simplistic and dismissive to view their work only through that prism. These, mostly women, were “soldiers of light and love,” as Jacqueline Jones appropriately titles them, and they were encouraged by moral conviction and an unrelenting commitment to see the work of emancipation completed, which intensified with the attacks on their students and schools by white nationalists, but, as Jones also shows, they could easily become blinded by their own sense of righteousness.<sup>57</sup> If you dismiss these early missionaries,

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For Armstrong’s life and work as an educator, see Edith Armstrong Talbot, *Samuel Chapman Armstrong: A Biographical Study* (New York: Doubleday & Page, 1904).

<sup>55</sup> Talbot, Samuel Chapman Armstrong.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>57</sup> Jacqueline Jones has written the best single volume on the role of Northern teachers after the Civil War. Specifically, she focuses on the lives of almost four hundred women from New England who went to Georgia right after the war with several different freedmen’s aid societies to teach black children and

you will certainly fail to see how they shaped the educational development of the South and Washington's own thought, in promising and troubling ways.<sup>58</sup>

This missionary ethos can be seen in Washington's later work, and in my opinion it has left a lasting tension at the heart of his thought and politics. Washington insisted that building up the civic, economic, and social capacity of the race was a precondition to political emancipation and social integration. He swore that to do so, the creation and maintaining of black institutions were vital. The assumption is that only through institutions can individuals and communities cultivate essential capabilities and acquire resources necessary for self-transformation toward self-rule, individually and collectively. This line of thought is based in the conviction that only as a member of institutions and organizations can one acquire preconditions for and exercise effective and meaningful freedom. But my question is: *Why did former slaves place such a premium on institutional life?* Like Washington, almost all Afro-Southerners were either former slaves or only one generation removed. How did their lives in that *one*, peculiar institution, slavery, and its immediate vestiges shape the desire for a different form of collective belonging? Answering this question will, I am sure, allow us to better understand the distinct harms of Jim Crow segregation and exclusion. Institutions were so vital to collective self-development that Washington

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adults in Georgia. *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865–1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> In addition to Jacqueline Jones, see Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1966) and his *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), especially 111–19; Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 78–119; Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 97–132.

was willing to employ paternalist and semi-authoritarian means for achieving what were ultimately noble ends. He had no problem bending the Bible to his aims.

But the apostle's impulse most strongly took hold in the work of Samuel Armstrong.<sup>59</sup> He expressed the aspirations and contradictions of the abolitionist; he was a Christ-like soldier who mobilized after the war out of a sense of service, religious and ethical conviction, and the desire to be a good antebellum republican. Prior to his days as a reformist pedagogue, Armstrong was an abolitionist soldier. At twenty-six years old, he became one of the youngest generals in the Civil War, where he led the 8th U.S. Colored Troops. Convinced that the struggle for emancipation did not conclude with the close of the war, he sought out a position with the Freedmen's Bureau, where he served as a general agent in Virginia, administering land returns. "Most of the land was given back to the owners by Government, under our direction," Armstrong said.<sup>60</sup> He said this was done "unless some public need demanded their appraisal and purchase."<sup>61</sup> "It was hard on the colored people often," he recalled; "I was sorry for them and would have liked sometimes to do differently."<sup>62</sup> Confiding in

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<sup>59</sup> The best study of Samuel C. Armstrong's educational thought and its place within the larger debates on race and education in postbellum America is Robert Francis Engs, *Educating the Disenfranchised and Disinherited: Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Hampton Institute, 1839-1893* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999). Engs does not deny that Armstrong was a paternalist, and maybe even a racist, but he nevertheless offers a more complex picture of Armstrong's thought and goals. James D. Anderson locates the Hampton model within the broader educational trends in the South and the place of education in race relations in the postemancipation South. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 33-78, and for how the Hampton model shaped Washington's Tuskegee model, see 79-109. Two far less nuanced studies are Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, 13-42, and William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teacher College, Columbia University, 2001), 43-61.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, *Personal Memoirs and Letters of General Samuel Chapman Armstrong: Hawaii, Williams, War, Hampton*, ed. Helen Ludlow (Ludlow Collection, Hampton Institute), 3:515.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

his mother as he often did, Armstrong described the implications of policy as enabling a “species” of slavery—landlessness led to a precipitous rise in tenancy. He told his mother that the “freed people are crushed by high rents, often from one quarter to one half the value of the land and houses they occupy ... [and] have to put their children out to service to their employers to make up rent.” Armstrong concluded that it amounts to a “species of slavery for both the parents and children, putting them completely in the power of white men.”<sup>63</sup> What made this all the worse was that the “colored people ... feel keenly their condition” and “were it not for the suffrage would be practically slaves,” he said.<sup>64</sup> His work at the Freedmen’s Bureau made clear that the struggle for emancipation was far from over.

While Armstrong thought slavery was an injustice, he was an ambivalent abolitionist and no racial egalitarian. During the war, he wrote to a friend: “I am sort of an abolitionist, but I haven’t learned to love the Negro.”<sup>65</sup> He embodied the liberal racism of his era, condemning slavery while explaining away the disadvantages and inequalities tracking black life as the results of an inferior natural and moral constitution.<sup>66</sup>

His worst master is still over him—his passions. This he does not realize. He does not see “the point” of life clearly; he lacks foresight, judgment, and hard sense. His main trouble is not ignorance, but deficiency of character; his grievances occupy him more than his deepest needs. There is no lack of those who have mental capacity. The

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Talbot, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, 86.

<sup>66</sup> George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1971).

question with him is not one of brains, but of right instincts, of morals and of hard work.<sup>67</sup>

“Freedmen as a class,” he insisted, “are destitute of ambition; their complacency in poverty and filth is a curse,” but “discontent would lead to determined effort and a better life.”<sup>68</sup> They “are eye servants [will only work under the fear of a master’s gaze], and worth little or nothing.”<sup>69</sup> They “have no aspirations, or healthy ambitions; everything about them, their clothes, their houses, their lands, their fences all bear witness to their shiftless propensity.”<sup>70</sup> It was in this context that “black pathology” as a discourse on inequality first emerged, a set of beliefs and assumptions that still has resonance for contemporary conservatives. Armstrong, then, moved from outrage at injustice to blaming the victims. “I believe” that the land redistribution “was on the whole better for them,” he wrote to his mother regarding the initial Reconstruction proposals.<sup>71</sup> But he went on to reason that the Civil War had abolished all external constraints on the freedmen and women and therefore any inequalities that persist had to be evidence of their inferior nature: the “North generally thinks that the great thing is to free the Negro from his former owners,” he said, but “the real thing is to save him from himself.”<sup>72</sup> “Prejudice is one thing,” Armstrong further reasoned, but “race

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<sup>67</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, *Southern Workman*, December 1877, 94.

<sup>68</sup> Talbot, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, 148.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Armstrong, *Personal Memoirs and Letters of General Samuel Chapman Armstrong*, 3:515.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Talbot, *Samuel Chapman Armstrong*, 150.

instincts or tendencies are another; the former will be, or ought to be, transient; the latter are of their nature permanent.”<sup>73</sup>

From this conviction is born the Hampton Institute. Armstrong would twice turn down the presidency of the recently founded Howard University, because, I suspect, it would have been difficult to establish his model in Washington, DC, among a large black population, most of whom have always been free. He opted instead to found Hampton Institute in 1868 with the aid of the American Missionary Association and the Freedmen’s Bureau. His 1876 “Annual Report” expressed clearly Hampton’s social mission. “The past of our colored population has been such that an institution devoted especially to them must provide a training more than usually comprehensive, must include both sexes and a variety of occupation, must produce moral as well as mental strength, and while making its students first-rate mechanical laborers must also make them first-rate men and women.”<sup>74</sup> Its goal was to cultivate in African Americans the “general deportment” and “habits of living and of labor,” as well as the “right ideas of life and duty,” that are necessary for inclusion in a liberal republic.<sup>75</sup> Armstrong therefore argued that “the training of the hand was at the same time a training of the mind and will.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, training students to become industrious—that favorite term of antebellum liberals—did more than prepare them for economic success; it fundamentally reshaped their constitutions by inducing new habits and values.

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<sup>73</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, *Southern Workman*, January 1879, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, “Annual Report of 1876,” in *Annual Reports of the Principal to the Board of Trustees, 1868–1915* (Huntington Collins Library Archives, Hampton University, Hampton, VA).

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> F. G. Peabody, *Reminiscence of Present-Day Saints* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 244.

Armstrong's experience in Hawaii shaped his educational outlook.<sup>77</sup> He argued that the "chief difficulty" with African Americans was "deficient character," as it was with Hawaiians.<sup>78</sup> And he insisted that "there was worked out in the Hawaiian Islands the problem of emancipation, and civilization of the dark-skinned Polynesian people" who, he insisted, were "in many respects like the Negro race."<sup>79</sup> "This race presents many discouraging aspects," argued Armstrong, "but it is saved and continually improved by a leaven of good and true men whom schools and seminaries of learning yearly supply."<sup>80</sup> The "thing to be done," he said, "is clear: to train selected Negro youths who shall go out and teach and lead their people" and help "build up an industrial system."<sup>81</sup> Armstrong insisted that "the negro teacher is the hope of his race" because he is the primary agent of personal transformation. "Let us make teachers and we will the people," said Armstrong.<sup>82</sup> As the aforementioned evidence makes clear, Armstrong certainly had a paternalist uplift politics, one based on a liberal racism, but he nevertheless provided for Washington a model for uplifting the race.

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<sup>77</sup> There "were two institutions: the Lahaina-luna (government) Seminary for young men, where, with manual labor, mathematics and other higher branches were taught; and the Hilo Boarding and Manual Labor (missionary) School for boys, on a simpler basis.... As a rule, the former turned out more brilliant, the latter, less advanced but more solid, men." In "making the plan of the Hampton Institute, that of the Hilo School seemed the best to follow," he concluded. What struck Armstrong, as the most important aspect of the Hilo School, was the "system of training the hand, head, and heart. Its graduates are to be not only good teachers, but skilled workers, able to build homes and earn a living for themselves and encourage others to do the same." Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, 118.

<sup>78</sup> Talbot, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, 150.

<sup>79</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 38.

<sup>80</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, *Southern Workman*, July 1878, 50.

<sup>81</sup> Peabody, *Reminiscence of Present-Day Saints*, 189.

<sup>82</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, *Southern Workman*, December 1877, 94.

Despite assumptions to the contrary, Hampton was a teachers college and did not offer a vocational major until 1895. A condition for admission was a commitment to teaching. Approximately 84 percent of Hampton's first twenty graduating classes became teachers.<sup>83</sup> Washington was impressed with the fact that Hampton was alert to the actual conditions and needs of the race and had a commitment to the worse off. He later recalled that he "was among the youngest of the students who were in Hampton at that time. Most of the students were men and women—some as old as forty years of age.... Many of them," he said, "were as poor as I was, and, besides having to wrestle with their books, they had to struggle with a poverty which prevented their having the necessities of life. Many of them had aged parents who were dependent upon them, and some of them were men who had wives whose support in some way they had to provide."<sup>84</sup> Hampton provided training for women, but it is clear that equal education of women was driven more by historical contingency and the moral imperative to discipline Christian values and domesticity rather than a commitment to the worse off. For example, Armstrong said that the "condition of women is the test of progress. The family is the unit of Christian civilization. Girls make mothers. Mothers make the home."<sup>85</sup>

There is little doubt that Armstrong was influential and an inspiration to Washington. Some have stressed the personal relationship Washington had with

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<sup>83</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 246.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, "Annual Report of 1879," in *Annual Reports of the Principal to the Board of Trustees, 1868–1915* (Huntington Collins Library Archives, Hampton University, Hampton, VA).

Armstrong. In *Up from Slavery*, Washington displayed what seems like an unreserved admiration for Armstrong:

I have spoken of the impression that was made upon me by the buildings and general appearance of the Hampton Institute, but I have not spoken of that which made the greatest and most lasting impression upon me, and that was a great man—the noblest, rarest human being that it has ever been my privilege to meet. I refer to the late General Samuel C. Armstrong.... I do not hesitate to say that I never met any man who, in my estimation, was the equal to General Armstrong.<sup>86</sup>

Of course a passage like this is gold for a biographer. “Not only in a Freudian but in a literal sense, General Armstrong became the illegitimate mulatto boy’s father, the ‘most significant other,’ his paternal protector, fosterer, and guide not only during his school days but for the rest of his life,” writes Louis R. Harlan.<sup>87</sup> Houston Baker Jr. also finds irritable psychoanalytical explanations, concluding that there “existed a deeply homoerotic bond between Booker T. Washington and *all* white men—but in particular and most expressly between the Wizard of Tuskegee and General Armstrong.”<sup>88</sup> Men who came of age in the Victorian era often used effusive language to express sentiments of deep admiration and friendship, especially for military courage and camaraderie. Armstrong may well have satisfied a paternal need in Washington’s life, and as for the idea that Washington’s gushing prayers for his teacher is testimony that there existed a “deeply homoerotic bond between Washington and *all* white men” is at best interesting.

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<sup>86</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 242.

<sup>87</sup> Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 58.

<sup>88</sup> Houston Baker Jr., *Turning South: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 73; emphasis original.

Washington was his own thinker. The literature on black education tends to push the opposite idea, that Washington's Tuskegee Institute merely extended the Hampton's model to rural Alabama, that Armstrong was the thinker behind Washington's work.<sup>89</sup> Washington did not completely abandon the Christian evangelical dimensions of Armstrong's social uplift. Washington said that he "emphasized industrial, or hand, training as a means of finding the way out of present conditions."<sup>90</sup> Where he seemed to break most starkly with the missionary model was with its colonial—and later imperial—drift. In 1896 Washington wrote an article, "Christianizing Africa," where he asked:

What is the crime of these heathen? Why are they thus shot down—mowed down by the acre simply because God has given them land that some one else wants to possess—simply because they are ignorant and weak. On the very day, perhaps at the very hour that the British troops are mowing down those Africans simply because they tried to defend their homes, their wives and children, hundreds of prayers were being offered up in as many English churches that God might convert the heathen in Africa and bring them to our way of thinking and acting. What a mockery! Have not these Matabele warriors as much right to lay claim to the streets of London, as the English have to claim the native land of these Africans? What England has done every Christian nation in Europe has done. On one ship half dozen missionaries go to use the Bible and prayer book—in the next ship go a thousand soldiers to use the rifle.<sup>91</sup>

In 1889 Washington directly addressed the colonization in the Pacific. *The Congregationalist* reported Washington as saying: "We went to the Sandwich Islands

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<sup>89</sup> For a reading of Tuskegee as an extension of Hampton, see Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*; Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876–1980* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 115–152; Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (New York: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1965), 288–309; Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*; Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*.

<sup>90</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Future of the American Negro* (Boston: Boston, Small & Company, 1900), 111.

<sup>91</sup> Booker T. Washington, "Christianizing Africa" *Our Day*, 16 (Dec. 1896) in *BTWP*, 2:252, 674–75.

with the Bible and Prayer-Book in our hands to win the souls of the natives; we ended by taking their country without giving them the privilege of saying yea of nay.”<sup>92</sup> The Indianapolis *Freeman* also reported that Washington spoke against the acquisition of the Philippines, arguing that “the Philippine Islands should be given the opportunity to govern themselves.”<sup>93</sup> Washington advanced an ideology of redemptive republicanism, but he nevertheless remained in the thorns of a missionary framework that carried the traces of colonization and always threatened to undermine his more noble intentions.

Armstrong, then, sets up a model and a problem for Washington’s framework of uplift politics. It was the practical rather than philosophical mission of Hampton that impressed Washington most. Washington never attempted to institute the Hampton model, in large part because it was based in a racial hierarchy that he found offensive and politically regressive. Washington’s time at Hampton and Armstrong’s influence were formative. It was at Hampton that Washington began to develop his ideas about uplift, but his efforts should not be read as mere continuation of Armstrong, whose influence is undeniable. Washington took from and opposed Armstrong; drawing on Old Testament themes of struggle and tribulations, discipline and suffering, he refigured Armstrong’s missionary model toward social and democratic transformation. In fact, one way to understand the literary role of Armstrong in *Up from Slavery* is to attend to the way in which Armstrong epitomizes the ideology of postemancipation paternalism, which, like its older and more brutal

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<sup>92</sup> *The Congregationalist*, 83, September 1, 1898; see, *BTWP*, 4:460–61n1.

<sup>93</sup> Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 24, 1898, quoted in the Springfield *Republican* in *BTWP*, 4:460–61n1.

forms, still reinforced racism and subordination. Because Southern states had effectively defunded black education, black activists and reformers had to ally themselves with white liberal paternalists in order to acquire financial support for African American schools. Washington's relationship with Armstrong expresses the deeply ambivalent nature of uplift politics as morally tragic but politically necessary. Washington and his contemporaries faced a repertoire of bad choices, each of which carried political remorse and ethical compromise.

#### **4. In Search of Vocation**

After graduating from Hampton Institute, Washington returned to Malden, West Virginia, in the fall of 1875. Soon thereafter, he was elected as the teacher of the school he had intermittently attended as a child.<sup>94</sup> Washington said, "I now felt I had the opportunity to help the people of my home town to a higher life."<sup>95</sup> Though only nineteen years old, Washington knew firsthand the needs and wants of his neighbors and their children. He also brought with him an unrelenting enthusiasm for education and community. "Without regard to pay and with little thought of it," Washington later recalled, "I taught any one who wanted to learn anything that I could teach him."<sup>96</sup> His day school had a regular attendance of nearly ninety students, and the night school he organized was equally popular, drawing almost equal numbers. Most of the night students were full-time miners, domestics, and farmers, and their educational needs were basic. Numeracy empowered them to follow the landlord and shopkeeper's

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<sup>94</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 24–27.

<sup>95</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 253.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

accounting, while literacy allowed them to read tenancy and other employment contracts. Additionally, reading newspapers enabled workers and farmers to better “know what [was] going on in the outside world.”<sup>97</sup> Washington also gave “private lessons to several young men” who wanted to attend college.<sup>98</sup> In a letter to the *Southern Workman*, he wrote, “I enjoy teaching now as I never did before. My scholars all seem anxious to learn, and this gives me pleasure and patience to labor with them.”<sup>99</sup> The historical evidence, though sparse, is still enough to show Washington’s passion, which we can presume made him an encouraging and effective teacher.<sup>100</sup> “I recall those early school days,” William T. McKinney, one of his former students from Malden, wrote to him in 1911, and “I think of how proud we boys were to have one of us, who had been to ‘college,’ come back and teach us. How our hearts swelled with the feeling that some day we would do likewise.”<sup>101</sup>

Washington took to the role of reformer early. He “established a small reading-room and a debating society,” taught “two Sunday-schools,” and served as the clerk for two churches.<sup>102</sup> He was not exaggerating when he said, “I began my work at eight o’clock in the morning, and, as a rule, it did not end until ten o’clock at night.”<sup>103</sup> “One thing that gave me a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure in teaching this school was the conducting of a debating society which met weekly and was largely

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<sup>97</sup> Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 83.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>100</sup> Two of his students became lawyers and public officials and a third went on to graduate from Harvard Medical School. *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>101</sup> “Letter from William T. McKinney to BTW,” *BTWP*, 11:308.

<sup>102</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 253.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

attended both by the young and the older people,” Washington remembered.<sup>104</sup> He said the “debating society would very often arrange for debates with other similar organizations in Charleston and elsewhere.”<sup>105</sup> His student McKinney’s recollection stressed the political dimensions of these meetings. McKinney wrote to Washington that these “meetings furnished many occasions for the display of ‘eloquence’ and references to ‘parliamentary practice.’ Often the members would get into a tangled web over some question as to whether it was debatable or not, or whether it was an amendment or a substitute.”<sup>106</sup> What seemed like an innocent if not backwoods school was in fact a critical discursive arena where African Americans were being trained for effective democratic participation, the cultivation of critical thinking, and the valuing of free speech. Even if they were not able to look whites in the eye because of the vitriolic racism of the day, this arena must have nevertheless been a welcome alternative to the dehumanizing ethics of Jim Crow.

Malden, like many mining towns in the South, was a place in social and political upheaval. The effects of the depression from 1873 to 1879 were part of daily life, and labor strife and violence became routine. The use of imported African American strikebreakers added to whites’ status anxiety and inflamed their racial hatred.<sup>107</sup> These feelings often spilled over into lynching and murders.<sup>108</sup> Washington

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<sup>104</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 24.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> “Letter from William T. McKinney to BTW,” *BTWP*, 11:305–06.

<sup>107</sup> Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 89.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

later recalled that the “‘Ku Klux Klan’ was in the height of its activity” in Malden,<sup>109</sup> and he added that they “made the nights hideous with torture and murder, when the shot gun policy and school house burning prevailed to the extent that no man counted his life safe, when among many it was a question whether to drive the Negro from the country or murder him in the land of his birth.”<sup>110</sup> Their sole purpose, he said, was political exclusion, “preventing the members of the race from exercising any influence in politics.”<sup>111</sup> “Their objects, in the main,” he argued, “were to crush out the political aspirations of the Negroes, but they did not confine themselves to this, because school-houses as well as churches were burned by them, and many innocent persons were made to suffer. During this period not a few coloured people lost their lives.”<sup>112</sup> Washington’s student McKinney parted by saying: “I can now recall with appreciation how strangely you always seemed and how different you were from the rest of the boys. As I can now remember it, you always appeared to be looking for something in the distant future. There was always seen a future look in your eyes.”<sup>113</sup>

In 1877 Washington turned to party politics and then law. He worked for a year stumping for the Republican Party “in connection with the removal of the capital.”<sup>114</sup> He said that the reputation he “made during this campaign induced a number of persons to make an earnest effort to get” him “to enter political life,” but in the end he “refused, still believing” that he “could find other service which would

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<sup>109</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 254.

<sup>110</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Speech before the Boston Unitarian Club,” 1888, *BTWP*, 2:500.

<sup>111</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 254.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 254–55.

<sup>113</sup> “Letter from William T. McKinney to BTW,” *BTWP*, 11:308.

<sup>114</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 26.

prove of more permanent value” for the race.<sup>115</sup> Washington, a keen social observer, must have read the writing on the wall. Reconstruction’s collapse in the same year, 1877, made clear that electoral politics was a dead end for Afro-Southerners. His work in politics, he said, “fired the slumbering ambition he had had for some time to become a lawyer.” After the campaign was over, Washington said he “began in earnest to study law [and] in fact read Blackstone and several elementary law books preparatory to the profession of the law.”<sup>116</sup> “But not withstanding [his] ambition to become a lawyer,” Washington said he suspected he would not have had “the opportunity to practice law.”<sup>117</sup>

Whether it was the conditions of the postemancipation world or the yearning for a vocation that would allow him a fuller sense of service or religious leadership being one of the few positions an educated black man could aspire to with some hope of success, in 1878 Washington enrolled at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C., but he left the seminary within the year and never explained in published or unpublished writings why he entered religious service and left so abruptly.<sup>118</sup> He did stay long enough to inherit a lasting contempt for organized religion. Washington would time and time again challenge the religious status quo among African Americans in the South, suggesting that the church was an inadequate arena for social transformation. “From the nature of things, all through slavery,” Washington wrote, “it

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<sup>115</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 263.

<sup>116</sup> “A good deal of this reading of the law was done under the kind direction of the Hon. Romeo H. Freer, a white man and a prosperous lawyer in Charlestown and who has since become a member of congress.” Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 26.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 24.

was life in the future world that was emphasized in religious teaching rather than life in this world.”<sup>119</sup> At the “religious meetings in ante-bellum days the Negro was prevented from discussing many points of practical religion which related to this world.... And it is description of the glories of heaven that occupy most of the time of ... sermon.”<sup>120</sup>

In 1890 Washing published an article in Lyman Abbott’s *Christian Union* titled “The Colored Ministry: Its Defects and Needs.” In it, he angered black clerical leaders, saying that their main motivation is “their salary” and that they cared little for schools and “public enterprises.”<sup>121</sup> The young activist and fellow Southerner Ida B. Wells wrote to him saying, “I have long since seen [as] that some one of the name and standing of yourself, *among ourselves*, must call a halt and be the Martin Luther of our times in condemning the practices of our ministers, and I know no one more fitted for the task than yourself.”<sup>122</sup> Washington’s criticisms reflected the emerging social gospel, which reached a new pitch a few years later with Josiah Strong’s *Our Country* (1885).<sup>123</sup> Washington often said that it is “a pretty hard thing to make a good Christian of a hungry man.”<sup>124</sup> What he meant was that the religious emphasis of the black church was losing touch with the immediate needs and desires of the masses, a criticism he would repeatedly emphasize. He therefore challenged the clerical leadership to concentrate on social and economic as much as spiritual salvation.

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<sup>119</sup> Washington, *The Future of the American Negro*, 48.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Booker T. Washington, “The Colored Ministry: Its Defects and Needs,” *BTWP*, 3:71–5.

<sup>122</sup> “Letter from Ida. B. Wells to BTW,” *BTWP*, 3:108–09.

<sup>123</sup> Strong was a fellow member of the Phil-African Liberators’ League, *BTWP*, 4:225.

<sup>124</sup> Washington, *The Future of the American Negro*, 121.

Upon Washington's account, then, the current emphasis on the otherworldly made the church an inadequate institution for fostering the kinds of practices and programs necessary for social and economic advancement. Uplifting the race, he believed, would require a secular institution that had a unifying mission—a mission insulated from fractious denominational politics. The school, Washington insisted, had to become the new political hub of the black community. This was a half-truth. During slavery, the church had been the invisible but only institution,<sup>125</sup> and we know that the black church continued to provide an important political space for black communities, especially in the South.<sup>126</sup> For example, Evelyn Higginbotham has shown that the church remained a subversive space for black women,<sup>127</sup> and Albert J. Raboteau has insisted that black theology always carried a deep social and political resonance.<sup>128</sup>

Washington returned to Malden to teach. He concluded either that teaching was in fact his calling or that other pursuits were simply too dangerous. Either way, his turn to teaching affirmed the widely held view that education is the way to social mobility. Maybe it was the dangers of being a teacher or simply a desire for more schooling, but either way Washington returned to Hampton as a “post-graduate”

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<sup>125</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*.

<sup>126</sup> For a general introduction of the role of the church, see Paul E. Johnson, ed., *African-American Christianity: Essays in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>127</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>128</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). Also see Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr., eds., *African American Religious Anthology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). For the role of prophetic religion and its political uses during the Civil Rights Movement, see David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). For the role or prophesy in race and American thought, see George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). And the classic study of religious speech in American politics and culture is, of course, Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

student in the fall of 1880. Armstrong saw in Washington a protégé and began to train him in earnest. Washington took supplementary courses and worked as the main instructor and house resident for Hampton's newly formed night school, which was designed to serve those who came to Hampton "with no capital but their determination to get an education, and hands that could work for it."<sup>129</sup> Their earnings went to the bursar for current and future tuition and boarding. If those students survived the demanding schedule, balancing work, and academics, then they transitioned to full-time students. Washington again illustrated his talent as a teacher when all of his night students matriculated to full-time day students the following year. It was, however, Washington's time at Hampton that took a fascinating turn when he took over the role of instructor and mentor for Hampton's "experiment" in educating Indians who were "secured from the reservations," as he put it.<sup>130</sup>

Richard Henry Pratt, a former captain in the Army, wrote to General Armstrong asking him to receive Indians for reeducation.<sup>131</sup> Federal troops captured, bound, transported, and imprisoned seventy-five Indians in Ft. Marion, Florida. Pratt was tasked with supervising the prisoners when he decided that their heathen souls needed saving. Pratt thus argued that the government must "kill the Indian to save the

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<sup>129</sup> Booker T. Washington, "The Plucky Class," *Southern Workman*, November 1880, *BTWP*, 2:92.

<sup>130</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 265.

<sup>131</sup> For a discussion of Richard Henry Pratt's role as the pioneer of Indian education, see Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classrooms: Four Decades with the American Indians, 1867–1904* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964); Elaine Goodale Eastman, *Pratt, the Red Man's Moses* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935); Helen W. Ludlow, "Incidents of Indian Life at Hampton," *Southern Workman*, April 1879; Daniel E. Witte, "Removing Classrooms from the Battlefield: Liberty, Paternalism, and the Redemptive Promise of Educational Choice," *BYU Law Review* (2208); Helen W. Ludlow, "Captain Pratt's Campaign," *Southern Workman*, December 1878.

man.”<sup>132</sup> To do just that, in the spring of 1878 Pratt had brought the prisoners to Hampton to make the Indian his “soil-tilling, white brother.”<sup>133</sup> He later recalled that his mission was animated by the simple idea that to “civilize the Indian, [one must] get him into civilization.”<sup>134</sup>

A few weeks later, Armstrong met with Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior, and suggested the experiment “be tried more fully.” He asked Schurz to fund a campaign to secure or capture younger Indians and girls.<sup>135</sup> Because “husband and wife advance together with common interests,” Armstrong said, the experiment needed equal representation so that the men did not “return home to mate themselves with savages.”<sup>136</sup> He said a “home will be established on their return to the reservation, and their future will be comparatively secure.”<sup>137</sup> The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior appropriated the funds, and Pratt returned with forty boys and nine girls.<sup>138</sup> Using the success at Hampton as a basis, Pratt secured the support of Schurz and the secretary of the War Department to turn a deserted military base into a reforming school. In fall of 1879 he opened the Carlisle

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<sup>132</sup> For Richard Henry Pratt’s role as the pioneer of Indian education, see Pratt, *Battlefield and Classrooms*, 201–04.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

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

<sup>135</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong in *Twenty-Two Years’ Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute* (Hampton, VA: Hampton Normal School Press, 1893), 314.

<sup>136</sup> Armstrong, “Annual Report of the Principal, 1879,” in *Annual Reports of the Principal to the Board of Trustees, 1868–1915* (Huntington Collins Library Archives, Hampton University, Hampton, VA).

<sup>137</sup> Samuel C. Armstrong, “Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1884,” Secretary of the Interior, Federal Government Archives.

<sup>138</sup> Paulette Fairbanks Molin and W. Roger Buffalohead, “A Nucleolus of Civilization: American Indian Family at Hampton Institute in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 35, no. 3 (1996).

Indian Industrial School, which became the model for twenty-six Indian boarding schools created by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1902.

Washington's role may seem minor, but the year he spent in this experiment was significant. I believe it shaped his assumption that he belonged to a caste superior to that of the Indian. His role and his view of it comes to light in large part because of his column "Incidents of Indian Life at Hampton," which he wrote regularly for the *Southern Workman* in the fall of 1880 and the spring of 1881. In one column, he said to compare the Indians now "with their arrival here two years ago [and h]ow different their dress, their walk, their language, their thoughts, their actions, their intentions [are]."<sup>139</sup> Citing a student who wrote home, Washington said, the student wrote, "We must encourage our fellow men to labor. We know that it is the only way to get along..."<sup>140</sup> The student then ties free labor to a moral foundation for membership and collective self-rule when he says that we should "not allow those who do not work to impose on us."<sup>141</sup> Echoing Locke and Jefferson, he said, "I hope they will all agree ... to go to work and make laws for our government, and authorize the chiefs to put these laws in force, so all of us may be protected in possession of our property and in our person."<sup>142</sup> Washington said, "Instead of a tomahawk, he takes back a chest of carpenter's tools."<sup>143</sup> And like so many who professed the racially redemptive powers of republicanism—the idea is that regardless of your race, economic independence and

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<sup>139</sup> Washington, "The Plucky Class," 2:94–95.

<sup>140</sup> Booker T. Washington, "Incidents of Indian Life at Hampton," *Southern Workman*, December 1880, *BTWP*, 2:97.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>143</sup> Booker T. Washington, "Incidents of Indian Life at Hampton," *Southern Workman*, May 1881, *BTWP*, 2:128.

self-rule secures you from domination—Washington noted: “Who knows but that the capturing of Bears Heart and his associates marked the beginning of the Indian Question? Brave Bears Heart! Noble little chief! Praised be all that band of prisoners, for the transformation begun in your Florida prison has roused the nation to think it is its duty to educate all your brethren.”<sup>144</sup> What he did not foresee was that the transformation was to be short lived.<sup>145</sup> Three of his students, Brave Bears Heart, Ziewie Davis, and Laughing Face, all of whom arrived at Hampton in 1878, returned home in 1881. Bears died in 1882 at the age of thirty-three; Davis, one of the first female Indian students, also died in 1882, at age twenty-three; and Laughing Face was also twenty-three when he died in 1882.<sup>146</sup>

Hampton’s “experiment,” I am suggesting, was the model for the Dawes Act of 1887. President Theodore Roosevelt later explained the policy. “In my judgment the time has arrived when we should definitely make up our minds to recognize the Indian as an individual and not as a member of a tribe. The General Allotment Act is a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass. It acts directly upon the family and the individual.”<sup>147</sup> The allotment movement really began at Hampton.<sup>148</sup> Over the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>145</sup> Cora M. Folsom’s 1928 study tracked 460 Indians in their native situation after Hampton. See also Armstrong in *Twenty-Two Years’ Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute*, 315–46. For a similar study of the *Chilocco Indian Agriculture, School Graduates, 1890–1915*, see *The Indian School Journal*, volumes 14–22. Chilocco (Oklahoma: Chilocco Indian School, 1993).

<sup>146</sup> Armstrong in *Twenty-Two Years’ Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute*, 332, 313, 398.

<sup>147</sup> Theodore Roosevelt added, “Under its provisions some sixty thousand Indians have already become citizens of the United States. We should now break up the tribal funds, doing for them what allotment does for the tribal lands; that is, they should be divided into individual holdings.... A stop should be put upon the discriminate permission to Indians to lease their allotments. The effort should be steadily to make the Indian work like any other man on his own ground. The marriage laws of the Indians should be made the same as those of the whites. In the schools the education should be elementary and largely industrial. The need of higher education among the Indians is very, very limited. On the reservations

next forty years, 1,388 Indians went through the Hampton program, which became the model the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Congress made federal policy with the passage of the Dawes Act or General Allotment Act (1887).<sup>149</sup> Many of the architects of the policy had been abolitionists who fought slavery on the ground that the institution violated the idea of free labor. The ideas were rooted in the Jeffersonian republican tradition; the policy was aimed at turning Indians into individual property holders. Private property *as* education would serve as an assimilation. This was, of course, devastating to Indians, who valued collective ownership and the primacy of the tribe. It is in this light that we might understand how Washington will later be able to attack colonialism and yet send Tuskegee graduates to the German colony of Togo to work with colonial authorities to develop cotton cultivation.<sup>150</sup>

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care should be taken to try to suit the teaching to the needs of the particular Indian. There is no use in attempting to induce agriculture in a country suited only for cattle raising, where the Indian should be made a stock grower. The ration system, which is merely the corral and the reservation system, is highly detrimental to the Indians. It promotes beggary, perpetuates pauperism, and stifles industry. It is an effectual barrier to progress. It must continue to a greater or less degree as long as tribes are herded on reservations and have everything in common. The Indian should be treated as an individual—like the white man....” Theodore Roosevelt, State of the Union Message, December 3, 1901.

<sup>148</sup> On allotment and the Dawes Act, see Leonard A. Carlson, *Indians, Bureaucrats, and Land: The Dawes Act and the Decline of Farming* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981); D. D. Otis, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Fayette Avery McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 6. (May 1914): 761–72.

<sup>149</sup> Donald F. Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877–1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Fairbanks Molin and Buffalohead, “A Nucleus of Civilization: American Indian Families at Hampton Institute in the Late Nineteenth Century”; Paulette Fairbanks Molin, “‘Training of the Hand, Head and the Heart’: Indian Education at Hampton Institute,” *Minnesota Historical Society* (Fall 1998); Samuel C. Armstrong, “The Education of Indians at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Hampton Virginia: Results of Four Years’ Work,” *Southern Workman*, vols. 28–42; William H. Robinson, “Indian Education at Hampton Institute,” in *Stoney the Road: Chapters in the History of Hampton Institute*, ed. Keith L. Schall (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1977), 1–33; *Annual Report of the Principal to the Board of Trustees, 1868–1915* (Huntington Collins Library Archives, Hampton, VA: Hampton University Archives).

<sup>150</sup> Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, & the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). For a more political complex reception of Washington’s thought in Africa, see Manning W. Marble, “Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism,” *Phylon* 35 (1974): 398–406.

## **5. Pedagogue of the People**

From 1881 to 1895, Washington was a largely unknown principal at an obscure normal and industrial school in rural Alabama. That all changed in 1895 when he gave a speech before the Atlanta Exposition and followed up six years later with his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901). But behind Tuskegee's walls, Washington had developed a specific strategy for social, economic, and political uplift. His uplift politics drew on the missionary model of liberal paternalists like Armstrong, his mentor, and yet it aimed to transcend the limits underling much of liberal paternalism. Washington created an educational institution to meet the actual needs of its students, and toward this end he fashioned a curriculum attentive to the concrete conditions and the local political economy from which the students came and were likely to return. He also emphasized extension work and social service, and organized local farmers, workers, and women in order to both address the immediate needs of black rural communities and provide critical training in uplift politics for students at Tuskegee Institute. As I will later show, working with the black masses had the effect of developing practices and strategies for the subversion and erosion of domination in the agrarian economy.

In 1881 Washington, on the endorsement of Armstrong, was chosen to lead an industrial school in rural Alabama. However, when he arrived in Tuskegee he was surprised to learn that there was no school. The idea for the college was the byproduct of back-room politics. African Americans were promised a normal school in return for

votes.<sup>151</sup> The formal funding conditions for the college all but guaranteed it would remain an abstraction. “The money allotted for the school [\$2000 annually] could only be used for the payment of instructors and could not be used for the procuring of land or daily operations,” Washington learned.<sup>152</sup> The act that created the school, House Bill No. 165, also prohibited the charging of tuition.<sup>153</sup> There was nothing, none of the fundamentals of a college: land, boarding halls, blackboards, even food and beds. And none of these things could be financed with the appropriated funds. Washington therefore took a loan from Hampton Institute and made an offer on an old farm of one hundred acres. He then made a politically shrewd decision: “In the case we get it, we expect to have it deeded so that the state will have no control over the land ... then in case the state withdrew its appropriation at any time the school could still live.”<sup>154</sup>

The ultimate end was to provide an education that would empower black Southerners, economically and socially. Having secured the property, Washington recalled: “It seemed perfectly plain that there was a condition” in the rural South “that could not be met by the ordinary process of education.”<sup>155</sup> But the prevailing “missionary effort ... was to try to force each individual into a certain mould,

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<sup>151</sup> The origins of the school were political. Wilbur F. Foster of Macon County “had agreed in his campaign for the Senate in 1880 to sponsor a bill for a colored normal school in Tuskegee in return for black support in the election” The statute read: “There shall be established, at Tuskegee, in this state, a normal school for the education of colored teachers. Pupils shall be admitted free of charge for tuition in the school, on giving an obligation in writing to teach in the free public schools in this State for two years after they become qualified ... the sum of two thousand dollars, annually, for the maintenance and support of the school.... The school shall not be under the direction, control and supervision of a board of three commissioners” (“The Alabama Statute Establishing Tuskegee Normal Institute,” *BTWP*, 2:107–09). See also Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 113–14.

<sup>152</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 273.

<sup>153</sup> Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 114–15.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>155</sup> Washington, *The Future of the American Negro*, 90.

regardless of the condition and needs of the subject or of the ends sought ... without paying attention to the actual life and needs of those living in the shadow of the institution and for whom its educational machinery must labor.”<sup>156</sup> “At Tuskegee,” Washington argued, “we became convinced that the thing to do” was to “make a careful, systematic study of the conditions and needs of the South, especially the Black Belt, and to bend our efforts in the direction of meeting these needs.”<sup>157</sup> Washington opened the school on July 4, 1881, and only “thirty students reported for admission,” most of whom “were public-school teachers, and some of them were nearly forty years of age.”<sup>158</sup> Since black education was not funded by the states, most of the students were not “able to remain during the nine months’ session for lack of money, so we felt the necessity of having industries where the students could pay a part of their board in cash.”<sup>159</sup>

Washington would bend Armstrong’s ideas to meet the needs of Afro-Southerners, and in doing so he did nothing short of performing an educational revolution similar to the work of Jane Addams in Chicago, William Torrey Harris, Calvin M. Woodward of Washington University (St. Louis), John D. Runkle at MIT, A. D. White and Hyde Bailey at Cornell, and the Wisconsin University system. The substance of Washington’s program rested on the view that the theoretical and practical had to be united by closing the intellectual gap between the head and the hand, pure and practical reasoning. In *Working with the Hands*, Washington argued:

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<sup>156</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 15.

<sup>157</sup> Washington, *The Future of the American Negro*, 90–91.

<sup>158</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 280.

<sup>159</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 31.

“Knowledge of things near at hand should be acquired first, and later things more distant ... [are] made the basis of the teaching.”<sup>160</sup> One observer notices in passing that “Washington’s formula takes on a Heideggerian quality as he seeks to ground thought in reality of the ‘close-at-hand’ rather than the ‘distant.’”<sup>161</sup>

I am not sure it is Heidegger as much as it might be the complex and mixed legacies of Jefferson, Jacksonians, Whigs, and Lincoln, not to mention Martin R. Delany, Douglass, and Henry McNeal Turner. Washington gave emphasis to the political consequences and physical and intellectual effects of free labor rather than mere profit making, efficiency, or utility. “The very effort to do something, to make something ... regardless of intrinsic value of the thing produced or achieved, has been helpful and developing in its tendencies.”<sup>162</sup> As Daniel T. Rogers has shown in his study of the work ethic in America, “for those who saw their world beset with temptations and dangers, the sanitizing effects of constant labor offered at once a social panacea and a personal refuge ... work as a creative act.”<sup>163</sup> Washington’s views on labor were steeped in the antebellum republican ideals of Lincoln, the Jacksonians, and Jefferson.<sup>164</sup> The political relationship between education and labor

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<sup>160</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 92.

<sup>161</sup> Tim Armstrong, *The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 81–84.

<sup>162</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 88.

<sup>163</sup> Daniel T. Rogers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 12.

<sup>164</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Rosanne Currarino, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); for the place of earning in the

within the producerist ideology was given its fullest articulation in 1859 by Lincoln in his “Address before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society.” Lincoln argued, “Every blade of grass is a study; and to produce two where there was one is both a profit and a pleasure.”<sup>165</sup> Washington understood the conditions of the oppressed black masses and the possible avenues for resistance in far more complex terms than had been recognized. His goal was not wealth but *independence*.

Washington’s educational work at Tuskegee was inspired by Douglass as much as it was by Armstrong. In *The Story of My Life and Work*, Washington quoted at length Douglass’s letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe on March 8, 1853. Douglass wrote in response to Stowe’s request as to how best to donate money to the cause of free African Americans. Douglass responded that she could help establish an industrial school, a school that would provide competitive training for African Americans. In the letter, we see one of the earliest articulations of African American uplift politics being tied to economic competitiveness. Douglass wrote, “I assert, then, that *poverty, ignorance, and degradation* are the combined evils” of the race and “to deliver them from this triple malady is to improve and elevate them, by which I mean simply to put them on an equal footing with their white fellow-countrymen in the sacred right to ‘*Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*’”<sup>166</sup> Douglass then proposed an industrial school. “What can be done to improve the condition of the free people of color in the

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American conception of citizenship, see Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>165</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Address before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society,” in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology*, ed. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 662–66.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted by Washington in *The Story of My Life and Work*, 56.

United States? The plan ... is the establishment ... of an INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE.”<sup>167</sup>

Douglas then explained why this was important:

Denied the means of learning useful trades, we are pressed into the narrowest limits to obtain a livelihood. In times past we have been the hewers of wood and the drawers of water for American society, and we once enjoyed a monopoly in menial employments, but this is so no longer. Even these employments are rapidly passing away out of our hands.... We must become mechanics; we must build as well as live in houses; we must make as well as use furniture; we must construct bridges as well as pass over them; before we can properly live or be respected by our fellow-men.... To live here as we ought we must fasten ourselves to our countrymen through their everyday, cardinal wants. We must not only be able to black boots, but to make them.

Douglass stressed that this request was fair, within liberal terms. “I am for no fancied or artificial elevation, but only ask for fair play.”<sup>168</sup> While Washington drew inspiration from Douglass, Tuskegee Institute became primarily a training college for teachers. Its economic uplift work was done as extension projects. Tuskegee Institute quickly became the center of uplift. It organized farmers alliances and annual conferences. It also established workers’ conferences and women’s conferences.

Washington’s mission comes into better focus when we look at what others say. Let us take one example: Max Weber and his wife, Marianne, who visited Tuskegee in 1904. After their visit, Max Weber wrote to Washington, saying: “It was—I am sorry to say that—*only* at Tuskegee I found *enthusiasm* in the South at all.”<sup>169</sup> The word “enthusiasm” carried deep meaning for Weber. Weber also observed the “socially and intellectually free atmosphere,” practical vocational training, and the

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Quoted in Lawrence A. Scaff, *Max Weber in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 98.

“conquest of the soil.”<sup>170</sup> In fact, Weber later reflected on “the influence of the Old Testament spirit on the Puritan vocational ethic” and noted the difference between this and the “parasitic missions found in every age.” He said the former was “delightfully portrayed by Booker Washington.”<sup>171</sup> Washington’s ethical concerns were not confined to only the suffering in the Black Belt.

Many of the graduates of Tuskegee Institute identified with the lifeworlds of the poor Black farmers and artisans; they were the daughters and sons of these men and women and were but a few years removed from such conditions. Washington thus tells his students: “I want to see you go out through the South and establish local conferences. Call them together, and teach the same kind of lessons that we teach at these gatherings at Tuskegee.”<sup>172</sup> As “soon as the teacher goes into a community, he should organize the people into an educational society or club,”<sup>173</sup> and in “every way there will be an opportunity for that person to revolutionize the community.”<sup>174</sup> “Are you going to suffer for your own people until they can receive the light which they so much need? Most certainly do I hope that you are going to carry out into these dark communities the light which you receive here from day to day.”<sup>175</sup> Upon graduation, his students were expected to venture back into the Black Belt and reconstitute the

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<sup>170</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 109–11.

<sup>171</sup> David J. Chalcraft and Austin Harrington, eds., *The Protestant Ethic Debate: Max Weber’s Replies to His Critics, 1907–1910*, trans. Austin Harrington and Mary Shields (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 129.

<sup>172</sup> Washington, Booker T. Washington, *Character Building: Being Addressed Delivered on Sunday Evening to the Students of Tuskegee Institute* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1903).

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

communities and local institutions in order to enable the capacities presupposed in democratic citizenship.

## **Conclusion**

As the rest of this thesis will show, underlying Washington's educational efforts at Tuskegee Institute was the broader aspiration for self-development and self-determination. Schools did more than provide practical skills and training for economic competitiveness; they were sites of development and empowerment that trained black teachers who could serve as the practical centers of self-sufficient rural communities. They were subversive spaces that simultaneously enabled the emergence of autonomous and democratic subjects despite their humble walks of life and brutal exclusion from Jim Crow society. Democracy, above all, means participation in meeting the felt needs of the community, a craft that depends on the cultivation of practical skills, competency, cooperative responsiveness, and the ability to balance competing interests, all of which are anchored in bodily practices and material reality. The skills and virtues that sustain liberal democracy are not only acquired from active participation in formal politics; those skills, habits, and orientations can and were cultivated through the establishment and running of local institutions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### From Matthew to Marx: Booker T. Washington in the Work of W. E. B. Du Bois

Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

—Matthew 6:25

The revolution, which finds here not its end, but its organizational beginning, is no short-lived revolution. The present generation is like the Jews whom Moses led through the wilderness. It has not only a new world to conquer, it must go under in order to make room for men who are able to cope with a new world.

—Karl Marx

Thus we have two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought and ethical strivings; the danger of the one lies in anarchy, that of the other in hypocrisy. The one type of Negro stands almost ready to curse God and die, and the other is too often found a traitor to right and a coward before force; the one is wedded to ideals remote, whimsical, perhaps impossible of realization; the other forgets that life is more than meat and the body more than raiment.

—W. E. B. Du Bois<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

On November 3, 1952, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote to Arna Bontemps, one of Booker T. Washington's earlier biographers, who was at the time working on a comparative biography of Frederick Douglass, Washington, and Du Bois:

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *W. E. B. Dubois: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 502–03.

[M]y career did not end with Booker T. Washington, and that if, therefore, you are still working on these comparative biographies I hope you will not either over-stress that earlier part of my career or forget that latter part. There seems to be a considerable number of persons who think that I died when Washington did, which is an exaggeration.<sup>2</sup>

In the anticommunist spirit of the 1950s and early 1960s, many liberals were becoming ever more alienated from an increasingly socialist Du Bois. No longer at the NAACP and a regular target of the federal government's intimidation, Du Bois was rightly worried about his intellectual and political legacy. As surprising as it may sound, at the very end of his life he still thought that history would judge him as little more than a footnote to Booker T. Washington. A few months before his death, Du Bois, who was at the time living in Ghana, was interviewed by Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*. When the interview turned to the subject of Washington, Du Bois said Washington "died in 1915. A lot of people think I died at the same time."<sup>3</sup> Before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, Washington remained the definitive black leader, and as late as the 1950s, Du Bois still struggled with his legacy.

Maybe it was his anxiety over his place in the American intellectual tradition; maybe it was the fear that his work over the previous forty-eight years would be forgotten and he would be remembered as but one side of a fight with a great leader. Whatever it was, Du Bois was determined to shape how future generations would think of him, and in doing so he achieved in death what he never did in life: he made

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Arna Bontemps, November 3, 1952, *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>3</sup> The interview was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* 216, no. 5 (November 1965): 78–81.

himself the preeminent voice of African Americans. Du Bois was a prolific writer and profound thinker—maybe the most important in American thought. Most have ignored his formative role in shaping the history of his era not simply through his books but as the last remaining actor of that dramatic and powerful moment in American politics and thought. As I have shown previously, Du Bois shaped the historical reception of not only himself but also of Washington. His private correspondence with Washington’s early biographers and a generation of young scholars who would write the definitive studies of the era—historians such as C. Vann Woodward, Eugene Genovese, Herbert Aptheker, and John Hope Franklin, among many others—illustrates the formative role Du Bois played in determining how we view Washington and his own role in the early struggle against Jim Crow. Unsurprisingly, Du Bois emerges as the one heroic figure that continued the democratic and defiant vision embodied by Frederick Douglass. He has become the seeming lone moral voice in the long struggle for racial justice, the one uncompromising leader who struggled mightily against the accommodationist politics of Washington and the corrupt vision of Marcus Garvey.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Gooding-Williams has noted that it was Du Bois who famously outlined in *The Souls of Black Folk* three traditions of black political thought.<sup>5</sup> Du Bois argued that there were three responses to slavery: (1) “revolt and revenge,” (2) “an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group,” or (3) “a

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), and Herbert Aptheker, *Afro-American History: The Modern Era* (Syracuse: The Citadel Press, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite the environing opinion.”<sup>6</sup> Rejecting the revolt tradition, Du Bois insisted that African American thought, at the time, was ultimately a choice between the two latter traditions, both of which shared the same normative goals of integration and assimilation but stressed different political strategies: active protest or accommodation. “Douglass,” Du Bois wrote, “bravely stood for the ideals of manhood,—ultimate assimilation *through* self-assertion, and on no other terms,” whereas Washington “represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission.”<sup>7</sup> Du Bois went to great efforts to draw a radical distinction between the political thought of Douglass and that of Washington so as to argue that he, Du Bois, was in fact carrying on the work of Douglass.

In doing so, Du Bois severed Washington from Douglass and replaced the Douglass-Washington intellectual relationship with a Du Bois-Washington (and later Garvey) conflict. Notice that Du Bois did not deny that Douglass and Washington sought the same ultimate goals for African Americans, but he instead argued that their strategies were fundamentally different: Douglass sought principled means, whereas Washington’s strategy was compromising. The question that often goes unnoticed is why Du Bois felt he needed to claim Douglass to legitimize his own place in the black tradition. Regardless, the result was the same: Du Bois’s reconstruction of black political traditions, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, had resulted in the lifting of Washington out of his intellectual context and resituating him within a minor disagreement with a fairly unknown young scholar, Du Bois.

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<sup>6</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 395–96.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

As a result, most contemporary scholars continue to read Washington through the frame created by Du Bois. They ignore the most obvious facts, such as chronology. Du Bois emerged as a serious contender for national black leadership against Washington only after 1910, five years before Washington's death. Many students of American political thought read the African American intellectual tradition through the "two traditions thesis." The two-traditions thesis holds that African American political theorists fall into one of two dominant traditions: an integrationist strain or a separatist-nationalist strain where the former runs, for example, from Douglass to Du Bois to Martin Luther King Jr., and the latter includes Martin R. Delany, Alexander Crummell, Washington, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Black Power. (Note that Douglass is isolated in an intellectual and strategic disagreement with Delany over assimilation or separatism; the next instance of the same struggle unfolds between Du Bois and Washington and then Du Bois and Garvey.)

Bernard Boxill has provided the most succinct version of this popular thesis in his essay "Two Traditions in African American Political Philosophy," where he argues that the "history of African-American political thought can be divided into two great traditions—the assimilationist and the separatist."<sup>8</sup> Boxill notes that sometimes "the differences between the traditions are only strategic, as, for example, where an ostensibly separatist theory recommends self-segregation as a means to an eventual assimilation."<sup>9</sup> But the difference can stem "from conflicting philosophical views

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Boxill, "Two Traditions in African American Political Philosophy," in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman (New York: Routledge, 1997), 119.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

about morality and human nature.”<sup>10</sup> For Boxill, Douglass was representative of the assimilationist tradition, whereas Martin L. Delany exemplified the separatist tradition.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, Harold Cruse argued that the split resulted less from political principles and more from a disagreement over economic strategies.<sup>12</sup> Tradition-making is always replete with interpretive problems and can obscure more than it illuminates.<sup>13</sup> The two elements in the dual traditions trope, integrationism and assimilationism, owe their coherence to substantial rhetorical manipulation, including erasure and ungrounded analogies. Indeed, the continuities that are alleged to run through “separatism” are often difficult to locate in actual texts and practices.<sup>14</sup> We

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Boxill further discusses “separation or assimilation” in his *Blacks and Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992), 173–85.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Cruse, for example, argued in his influential work, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, that the integrationist tradition is widely understood as a “direct line from him [Douglass] to the NAACP and the modern civil rights movement.”<sup>12</sup> But there is also “the rejected, nationalist strain that exists today and can be traced back to ... Martin R. Delany, Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, Henry M. Turner...” Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From Its Origins to its Present* (New York: Williams Morrow & Company, Inc., 1967), 5. But for Cruse, the division arises out of a disagreement over what economic strategies best advance black equality: “The basic underlying issues that gave rise to this Washington-Du Bois-Garvey continuum were fundamentally economic.” Cruse added that “bourgeois integrationism becomes a tactic which aims for *economic integration*” whereas bourgeois-separatism emphasizes economic nationalism. Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Company Inc., 1968), 156 and 240.

<sup>13</sup> John G. Gunnell, “The Myth of the Tradition,” *The American Political Science Review* 72, no. 1 (1978): 122–34. See also J. G. A. Pocock’s review of Gunnell’s *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1979), *Political Theory* 8, no. 4 (1980): 563–67.

<sup>14</sup> “Black nationalism has many forms,” argues Wilson Jeremiah Moses. His central thesis is “that classical black nationalism was absolutist, civilizationist, elitist, and based on Christian humanism. After the First World War, new tendencies arose that were relativist, culturalist, proletarian, and secular.” Moses includes, for example, the late Du Bois in the nationalist tradition. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 7–19. Recently, Tommie Shelby has called for a reconsideration of black nationalism by arguing that there is a “strong/classical” and a “pragmatic” strain of black nationalism, the former resting on the view that “black solidarity and voluntary separation under conditions of equality and self-determination is a worthwhile end in itself, a constitutive and enduring component of the collective self-realization of blacks as a people,” whereas “weak” or “pragmatic” black nationalism insists that “black solidarity and group self-organization functions as a *means* to create greater freedom and social equality for blacks.” Pragmatic nationalism, embodied by Delany, and favored by Shelby, is “concerned with achieving practical results in light of the contingent and changing features of the context.” Tommie Shelby, *We*

should therefore caution against interpreting the discourses of the past through the categories of the present.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter reconstructs Du Bois's evolving view of Washington. I argue that Du Bois's early thought, specifically *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), drew a radical distinction between Washington and Du Bois, and I further contend that Du Bois's later thought converges with Washington's uplift politics, which few scholars have noted. Du Bois himself never fully acknowledged this point, but when we closely read *Dusk of Dawn* it becomes clear that Du Bois's ideas and politics veered toward a place where Washington had already been four decades prior. The first section offers two observations—a contextual note and a textual claim—before turning to the chapter's main argument, which unfolds from section 2 to section 5. Section 2 reinterprets Du Bois's criticism of Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk* as a struggle for exactly that—the *souls* of black folk. Most have overlooked the central and organizing metaphor of the text and how Du Bois used religious and classical images to structure his critique of Washington. Du Bois's central claim in *The Souls of Black Folk* is that Washington bartered away the birthright of race for mere morsels of meat. The third section outlines the political consequences of Washington's politics according to Du Bois's reading in *The Souls of Black Folk*. I then turn to Du Bois's later work and argue that Du Bois's critique of Washington radically changes in *Dusk of Dawn*. Instead of an emphasis on the moral consequences of racial oppression, Du Bois now

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*Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 27–30.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

stressed its material consequences. And, moreover, Du Bois sketched a new strategy for combating Jim Crow that was almost indistinguishable from Washington's uplift strategy. Section 5 looks at how Du Bois then reconsidered Washington in light of his own turn to a more materialist and realist politics.

### **1. An Ambivalent Adversary**

Two observations are worth making prior to diving into an interpretation of Du Bois's texts. One is that Du Bois was in a real struggle for power against Washington, who, upon Du Bois's own account, was the preeminent black leader of his day. That struggle should always be kept in mind when we read Du Bois—or Washington, for that matter—because it means that Du Bois was not writing anything from an objective viewpoint of the conflict; he was making a case for his own leadership and, later, his place in history. The second observation is that in Du Bois's books, Washington often served as a rhetorical device, a stand-in or a placeholder for a set of ideas and values that ought to be refuted and rejected.

“The South was Washington's specialty,” writes David Levering Lewis in his biography of Du Bois.<sup>16</sup> Washington had a “three-ness,” Lewis continues, “the consciousness of being an American, a Negro, and, more perilously yet, an American Negro in the South.”<sup>17</sup> When Washington spoke, he spoke for the “impoverished, agrarian South, with its monocrop economy and biracial demographics.”<sup>18</sup> “Du Bois

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<sup>16</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1993), 256.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 502.

spoke for and mobilized those whose socioeconomic profile was mainly Northern, urban, college-educated, professional, and light-skinned. Washington spoke for farmers, domestics, and tradespeople located principally in the South, but fairly broadly dispersed geographically.”<sup>19</sup> Lewis also notes that in the 1930s, Du Bois’s thought increasingly turned to questions of political economy and uplift. “His was to be a new race-centered political economy that could be said to combine cultural nationalism, Scandinavian cooperativism, Booker Washington, and Marx in about equal parts.”<sup>20</sup> Du Bois, in his 1934 article “Segregation” in *The Crisis*, argued that while racial integration remains a long-term goal, segregation can be positive, and opposition to it is not “or should not be [from] any distaste or unwillingness of colored people to work with each other, to cooperate with each other, to live with each other.”<sup>21</sup> Du Bois said that it would be the “race-conscious black man cooperating together in his own institutions and movements who would eventually emancipate the race.”<sup>22</sup> “Ferdinand Morton, the New York civil service commissioner, wrote to Du Bois and confessed of being ‘unable to distinguish’ Du Bois’s proposals from certain of those put forward by Booker T. Washington.”<sup>23</sup> Du Bois replied, “I am simply changing because I had to.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2000), 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>21</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Segregation,” *The Crisis*, January 1934.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century*, 346.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 348.

Cornell West observed that the “Du Bois-Washington debate set the framework for inclusionary African practices in the United States in this century. The numerous black ideological battles between integration and nationalism, accommodation and separatism are but versions and variations of the Du Bois-Washington debate.”<sup>25</sup> He argued that they

differed on content: Washington favored self-help initiatives in the economic sphere and promoted a slow agrarian proletarianization process tied to increased Afro-American property holdings and wealth acquisition, whereas Du Bois opted for upward social mobility in the social and political spheres and supported a protest movement that would achieve equal legal, social, and political status for Afro-Americans in American society.<sup>26</sup>

Lewis argues that contrary “to what Du Bois later claims, the initial conflict with Washington had been professional and then bitterly personal before it became ideological. Ideological estrangement and the fundamental and enduring rift it created among African-Americans were more in the nature of a consequence rather than a cause.”<sup>27</sup> He said a “good deal of their growing opposition to Booker T. Washington was visceral, simply a matter of who they were and who he was.”<sup>28</sup>

And as intensely personal and egocentrically articulated as it had been, the controversy was really not about Du Bois and Washington in an ultimate sense, and would have emerged inevitably in one form or another. Essentially, the Talented Tenth and the Tuskegee Machine were responses by two African-American leadership groups to white supremacy as it existed in two regions of the United States. In that sense, Washington’s impoverished, agrarian South, with its monocrop economy and biracial demographics, was no fit arena for the high minded, cultural and exigent civil agenda of the people for whom Du

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<sup>25</sup> Cornell West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–40.

<sup>27</sup> Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 286.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

Bois spoke. Conversely, the lowest-common-denominator realities and patient abnegation embraced by Washington was no program for racial advancement in the urban, industrial, multiethnic North. Du Bois and Washington, in speaking for two dissimilar socioeconomic orders, were really speaking past each other rather than to the same set of racial problems and solutions; but Du Bois, for all his Victorian sensibilities and elitism, had the advantage of speaking to the future, while Washington, business oriented and folksy, spoke, nevertheless, for the early industrial past.<sup>29</sup>

The temptations of biography are many. But the most significant threats are deducing Du Bois's and Washington's thoughts from their personalities or subsuming their political visions into their social contexts. Lewis does neither, but since both men were utterly fascinating and lived in one of the most complex moments in American history, the temptation remains.

It is worth noting that Du Bois used autobiographical narrative as a medium for philosophical reflection and a vehicle for social criticism and political inquiry. Yet his use of the first person is seldom commented on. Du Bois would have found this odd. He dedicated prime space in his latter two autobiographies to warn readers that he might not be the most dependable narrator. On the first page of *Dusk of Dawn*, he wrote that in his "own experience, autobiographies have had little lure; repeatedly they assume too much or too little: too much in dreaming that one's life has greatly influenced the world; too little in the reticences, repressions, and distortions which come because men do not dare to be absolutely frank."<sup>30</sup> Autobiographies are overdetermined by an inflated sense of the meaning of one's life for the world or replete with enigmatic whispers and distortions.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>30</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 551.

In *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, Du Bois warned us again. This time, he insisted that autobiographies are unreliable. “Autobiographies do not form indisputable authorities. They are always incomplete, and often unreliable. Eager as I am to put down the truth,” Du Bois acknowledged, “there are difficulties; memory fails especially in small details, so that it becomes finally but a theory of my life. Mostly my life is a mass of memories with vast omissions, matters which are forgotten accidentally or by deep design.”<sup>31</sup> He even suggested that we, his readers, view the “varying views” across his autobiographies “as contradictions to truth, and not as final and complete authority” but instead “what he would like others to believe.”<sup>32</sup> This is the sort of honesty that comes with a long life.

The failures of memory have left “but a theory of my life,” suggested Du Bois. This is not altogether right. He confessed that his autobiographies had “vast omissions” that were forgotten by “deep design.” Fading memories do not give birth to theoretical accounts of life, whether that life is yours or another’s. We do not unconsciously reach for concepts and abstractions, ideas and theories to fill out or limn the fading features of events long gone or persons forgotten. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois placed his doubts about the genre under the title of “Apology.”<sup>33</sup> To use the events in your life to scaffold a philosophical account of the world is an odd thing to do, to say nothing of the ego such an act requires.

My life had its significance and its only deep significance because it was part of a Problem; but that problem was, as I continue to think, the central problem of the greatest of the world’s democracies and so the

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<sup>31</sup> Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 551.

problem of the future world.... I have written then what is meant to be not so much my autobiography as the autobiography of a concept of race, elucidated, magnified and doubtless distorted in the thoughts and deeds which were mine.<sup>34</sup>

With lucidity and intensity, Du Bois brought to philosophical light the problem of the color line. He said, “I have essayed in a half century three sets of thought centering around the hurts and hesitations that hem the black man in America.”<sup>35</sup> To be sure, few other lives could have served such an end; Du Bois lived a long and prophetic life. He was born in the aftermath of the Civil War (1868) and died the night before the march on Washington (August 27, 1963); his life paralleled the history of Jim Crow.

Du Bois moved, successively and rapidly, between the self and society, describing intimate events, psychological states, and professional experiences to reflecting on sociological, political, and economic conditions and questions. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois recounted a childhood experience that made him aware of the meaning of being black in America. Du Bois said that when a white playmate “refused” his visiting-card, “it dawned upon” him that he “was different from the others ... shut out from their world by a vast veil.”<sup>36</sup> But in a mere few sentences, we get a proposition about the psychological cost of being black in the modern world.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 364–65.

Race and racism almost always bridge the personal and the public. Not he alone suffers from a “double consciousness,” for it afflicts the entire race or those who live on the color line. In Du Bois’s narratives, his general claims, his arguments, are not logically, theoretically, or empirically grounded in the events of his life. They stand on their own. His life aesthetically and visually frames concepts and abstractions with poignancy and weight they would otherwise lack.

The deeper distinction that Du Bois outlined is often missed when we read *The Souls of Black Folk* as solely an argument against Washington’s leadership. The choice between Du Bois and Washington often absorbs and deceives us. In what follows, I ask you to concentrate on the politics Du Bois subscribed to Washington. In other words, I consider Washington as he *figures in* Du Bois’s work as an analytical device that Du Bois employed to elucidate a particular politics.

## **2. The Struggle for the Souls of Black Folk**

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (hereafter *Souls*), Du Bois outlined a philosophical account of the meaning of racial oppression. As noted earlier, Du Bois argued that there are three dominant responses to slavery in the history of African American thought. He then drew a further distinction between black Northerners and Afro-Southerners as representing two “divergent ethical tendencies, the first tending toward radicalism, the other toward hypocritical compromise.”<sup>38</sup> Du Bois said that Douglass and the integrationist tradition, which he now represents, lie in the middle; the principled

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 503.

integrationist resists both the nihilism of the nationalist and the comforts and conveniences that entice the compromiser. Dismissing the nationalist tradition, Du Bois said that African Americans are faced with a choice of either Washington, who “represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission” or himself, whose principled protest follows Douglass in demanding “ultimate assimilation *through* self-assertion.”<sup>39</sup> Upon Du Bois’s account, Washington exemplified and amplified the status quo of black politics: what Du Bois disparagingly called the “accommodationist” tradition. Washington was not its author but merely its most eloquent spokesman, authorizing and legitimizing a set of ideas and practices that desacralizes politics.

In *Souls*, Washington is a rhetorical placeholder, one that enabled Du Bois to offer a wider critique of black Southerners, specifically their falling prey to the materialism and commercialism of the era. Du Bois said that “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.”<sup>40</sup> And black Southerners, spurred on by Washington, turn all their thought and energy toward the acquisition of necessities, comforts, and conveniences: land, houses, food, and clothing. Du Bois thought their enthusiasm and vigor for such necessities was reasonable, especially given the psychological, social, and economic vestiges of slavery. But he feared that such pursuits would evolve from desire for means to ultimate goals. He said he felt as though he was witnessing the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 396–98.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 398.

“transformation of a far-off ideal of Freedom into the hard reality of bread-winning and the consequent deification of Bread.”<sup>41</sup> This change threatened to frustrate the pursuit of justice. The legacy of Douglass and the integrationist tradition were immune to such venality and therefore offered a corrective to this trend.

In what follows, I offer an interpretation of Du Bois’s critique of Washington. Du Bois argued that a strategy or means, even if successful in achieving its ends, could nevertheless cause irremediable harm to one’s character, imagination, and sense of efficacy. In this sense, his critique of Washington is not consequentialist; yes, he did say that Washington’s leadership was costly for African Americans, but that was an additional and secondary rather than a primary concern. *Souls*’s central claim is that Afro-Southerner’s materialism marks a movement from oppression to corruption. And Washington’s leadership exemplified this regressive movement. In developing this line of argument, Du Bois used the language of *souls*, specifically, he drew a radical demarcation between the body and the soul, assigning economic pursuits and social necessities to the former and higher civic and cultural ideals to the former.<sup>42</sup> He also used the metaphors of *meat* and *golden apples* to emphasize defilement, corruption, and desecration.

Michael Walzer’s *Exodus and Revolution* is a helpful starting point.<sup>43</sup> Exodus, more than any other work, has left an indelible mark on the African American intellectual tradition; it has shaped African American responses to slavery,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>42</sup> Du Bois’s distinction is not quite that of Hannah Arendt’s between the “social” and the “political.” Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>43</sup> Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

emancipation, white supremacy, and the continued struggle for freedom and equality. In *Souls*, Du Bois drew heavily on the symbolism of Exodus, but he layered the story's central insight with imagery from the New Testament.<sup>44</sup> It is therefore worth taking a brief look at Walzer's reading of Exodus as a political history. Walzer writes that the "book of Exodus describes a people weighed down by oppression, crushed, frightened, subservient, despondent."<sup>45</sup> When we encounter the Israelites, they are anything but free. The story thus moves from oppression to liberation to political struggle before finally arriving at freedom. "Exodus is a journey forward. It is a march towards a goal, a moral progress, a transformation."<sup>46</sup> Almost all of Exodus is preoccupied with the change from an oppressed to a free people.

This change unfolds in the long interval between Egypt and Canaan. While Moses plays a "critical role" in the story, we should not lose sight of the fact that "the people are central."<sup>47</sup> To do so is to miss the central message. After their liberation, the Israelites journey away from slavishness and servitude in Egypt toward the promise of freedom in Canaan, and along the way we witness them shedding the habits and values of old and acquiring new practices and standards, those befitting freedmen and women. "Egypt is not just left behind; it is rejected; it is judged; it is

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<sup>44</sup> There is a troubling trend in *Souls*, one that continually draws on anti-Semitic images: "The Jew is the heir of the slave-baron" (450), "shrewd and unscrupulous Jews" (479), "land-grabbing and money-getting" (454), "enterprising Jew" (480). David Nirenberg has argued that in the Western tradition, the distinction between a carnal, profane body and a higher soul in Christian thought has often identified Jews and the Old Testament with the former and has sustained anti-Judaism. David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

condemned. The crucial terms of the judgment are *oppression* and *corruption*,” argues Walzer.<sup>48</sup>

But the story is full of setbacks. Walzer says that the recurrence of oppression in Exodus is essential to the story’s political meaning. Oppression “is a result of backsliding along a temporal line. When the Israelites find themselves oppressed in their own land, it is because, as the prophet Jeremiah tells them, ‘their transgressions are many and their backslidings have increased’ (5:6).”<sup>49</sup> Oppression is therefore not conceived of as lying solely in the past, for it always stalks the present and threatens to corrupt the future. The “new ideas are shadowed by their old opposites: the sense of injustice by resignation, revulsion by longing.”<sup>50</sup> Each incident of backsliding toward Egypt moves the Israelites farther away from Canaan. This movement is intended to illustrate the difficulties in overcoming oppression. For this reason, Maimonides wrote: “For a sudden transition from one opposite to another is impossible.... It is not in the nature of man that, after having been brought up in slavish service, ... he should all of a sudden wash off from his hands the dirt [of slavery].”<sup>51</sup> Thus the Israelites must vigilantly guard against the “moral and psychological effects of oppression” that threaten their progress.<sup>52</sup> “No old regime is merely oppressive,” Walzer observes, “it is attractive, too, else the escape from it would be much easier than it is.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 33.

As a result, there were “murmurings” among the Israelites and increasingly so as they faced the “terrible austerity of the dessert.”<sup>54</sup> Walzer says that we can interpret the central tension in the dessert as a “conflict ... between the materialism of the people and the idealism of their leaders, or ... between the demands of the present moment and the promises of the future.”<sup>55</sup> The recurring metaphors of *meat* and *fleshpots* illustrate the movement from oppression to corruption.

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.... And the children of Israel said unto them, would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full.... (Exodus 16:2–3)

Walzer argues that the “‘fleshpots,’ in the plural, doesn’t refer to a lot of pots but to luxuries and sensual delight.”<sup>56</sup> The language of meat or fleshpots shows that “they admitted into their souls the degradation of slavery.”<sup>57</sup> *Meat* as a sign or symbol of corruption is replete in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments: “Who shall give us flesh to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt” (Numbers 11:18); “Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” (Hebrews 12:16); “Is not life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?” (Matthew 6:25); “The life is more than meat and the body more than raiment” (Luke 12:23).

While Du Bois’s critique of Washington mirrors that of Exodus, he often reached for the New Testament rather than the Old Testament. “Is not life more than

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 45.

meat, and the body more than raiment?”<sup>58</sup> This is the question that motivates much of Du Bois’s critique of Washington in *Souls*. Turning from Matthew (6:25) to Luke (12:23), Du Bois argued that the black peasantry “forgets that life is more than meat and the body more than raiment.”<sup>59</sup> He therefore concluded that there is a “pressing ... need of broad ideals and true culture, *the conservation of soul from sordid aims and petty passions!*”<sup>60</sup>

Du Bois structured his criticism of Washington within a narrative framework that depicted black Southerners as relapsing. Early in *Souls*, Du Bois drew on the images, symbols, and structure of Exodus, saying that the “freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land.”<sup>61</sup> “To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark,” Du Bois wrote, “Canaan was always dim and far away.”<sup>62</sup> The banks of Jordan were more and more out of reach because of their materialism and Washington’s leadership, so much so that they could hardly see their way. The “journey,” Du Bois said, had “changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-conscious, self-realization, self-respect.”<sup>63</sup> Liberation from slavery brought new aspirations, but the race went “wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation,” Du Bois warned.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 428.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 502–03.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 422; emphasis added.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

“Whisperings and portents came,” Du Bois said, and “the Nation echoed and enforced this self-criticism, saying: Be content to be servants, and nothing more.”<sup>65</sup> Du Bois argued that the neglect of the North and the violent racism of the South sapped black Southerners’ higher aspirations. This was even worse because the freedman “felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, tools, or savings, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors.”<sup>66</sup> Yielding to this temptation, though reasonable given the circumstances, nevertheless frustrated the struggle for freedom. The “bright ideals of the past,—physical freedom, political power, the training of brains and the training of hands,” Du Bois concluded, “have waxed and waned, until even the last grows dim and overcast.”<sup>67</sup> Washington’s leadership makes this all the more so. Therefore to politically redeem black Southerners, Washington’s leadership must be challenged. “The black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate,—a *forward movement* to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader.”<sup>68</sup>

In the first sentence of *Souls*, Du Bois underscored one of his main objectives. He said he intended to “show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century.”<sup>69</sup> And this “meaning” has interest for all of us as the “Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.”<sup>70</sup> He then said three themes structure his argument: “what Emancipation meant” to African Americans and “what

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 369.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 369.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 404; emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

was its aftermath”<sup>71</sup>; “the rise of personal leadership” and a candid criticism of “the leader who bears the chief burden of his race to-day”; and the “deeper detail” on the “struggles of the massed millions of the black peasantry.”<sup>72</sup> We can view these three themes as part of a single, interconnected argument: (1) the legacies of emancipation and the conditions at the dawning of the twentieth century made possible (2) the rise of Washington’s leadership, and (3) Washington’s current reign represents a troubling ethical tendency among “the massed millions of the black peasantry.”

“Easily the most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington. It began at a time when war memories and ideals were rapidly passing; a day of astonishing commercial development was dawning; a sense of doubt and hesitation overtook the freedmen’s sons,” wrote Du Bois.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, two conditions made possible the emergence of Washington as the leader of the race: the decline of the past but transcendent ideals that liberated the slaves *and* the rising materialism and commercialism of the day. In this “unusual age of economic development,” Du Bois said that “Washington’s programme naturally takes an economic cast.”<sup>74</sup> Washington had so “thoroughly” learned “the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 398.

material prosperity,” that he was but one with his age.<sup>75</sup> His philosophy thus holds out the “dream of material prosperity as the touchstone of all success.”<sup>76</sup>

Washington’s philosophy, upon this account, amounts to “a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life.”<sup>77</sup> His “singleness of vision and thorough oneness with his age” propelled his rise to the leadership of the race and bolstered his reign.<sup>78</sup> On the one hand, Washington’s influence is predicated on the fact that his politics affirms the present political culture. “For every social ill the panacea of Wealth has been urged,” Du Bois observed, “wealth to overthrow the remains of the slave feudalism ... wealth to employ the black serfs, and the prospect of wealth to keep them working; wealth as the end and aim of politics, as the legal tender for law and order.”<sup>79</sup> His “narrow” materialism clearly resonates with Afro-Southerners, who were less than four decades removed from slavery and living in poverty. “To-day he stands as the one recognized spokesman of his ten million fellows, and one of the most notable figures in the nation of seventy million.”<sup>80</sup> Du Bois added that “Washington’s cult has gained unquestioning followers, his work has wonderfully prospered, his friends are legion, and his enemies are confounded.”<sup>81</sup> This is all the more perplexing since “Washington’s programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 393–94.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

racess,” meaning that “Washington withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens.”<sup>82</sup> But his leadership becomes less bewildering when we recognize that Washington was no misfortune of history. He synthesized currents and patterns of thought—intuited and felt but rarely expressed—into a coherent social vision, one that could intimately speak to black Southerners’ most immediate concerns. His ideas were therefore “not wholly original,” true, but “Washington first indissolubly linked these things; he put enthusiasm, unlimited energy, and perfect faith into the programme,” Du Bois acknowledged, “and changed it from a by-path into a veritable Way of Life.”<sup>83</sup>

“When sticks and stones and beasts form the sole environment of a people,” Du Bois wrote, “their attitude is largely one of determined opposition to and conquest of natural forces.”<sup>84</sup> Du Bois’s central claim was that Washington represented an ethical tendency in the race that undermines the struggle for freedom and equality; explicitly, Washington is willing to sacrifice political and social rights for economic opportunities. Du Bois acknowledged that the majority of the race lived in the South, in that “part of the land where the blight of slavery fell hardest.”<sup>85</sup> Describing what he took to be the archetypal black “peasant,” Du Bois wrote that he is “slow, dull, and discouraged.”<sup>86</sup> This is because the “brains of the race have been knocked out by two hundred and fifty years of assiduous educations in submission, carelessness, and

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 396; emphasis added.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

stealing.”<sup>87</sup> And the “mass of those to whom slavery was a dim recollection of childhood found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little.... Such a paradox they could not understand, and therefore sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado.”<sup>88</sup> “Looking now at the country black population as a whole,” Du Bois added, “it is fair to characterize it as poor and ignorant,” but this only “but partially expresses the fact. They are ignorant of the world about them, of modern economic organization, of the function of government, of individual worth and possibilities,—of nearly all those things which slavery in self-defense had to keep them from learning.”<sup>89</sup> This is a striking claim. Du Bois insisted that Afro-Southerners were economically and politically “ignorant” of their world and, moreover, that they lacked “individual worth and possibilities.” Black Southerners thus lacked the intellectual capacity, socialization, political skills necessary for a meaningful response to white supremacy. And Washington’s leadership frustrates their ability to cultivate those things.

Once having established black Southerners’ destitution, Du Bois moved quickly to show how their efforts to remedy their deprivation yielded moral poverty. The “pressing forward of a social class,” he said, “means a bitter struggle, a hard and soul-sickening battle with the world such as few of the more favored classes know or appreciate.”<sup>90</sup> Du Bois goes on to argue that in pursuing economic advancement, especially from a place of deep deprivations, one is highly susceptible to sacrificing

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 478.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 474.

long-term goals to meet short-term needs. And as a result, political rights and civic equality can often fall victim to the desire to fulfill basic needs, particularly for a people who lack rights. He said that the failure to see this goes well beyond its victims. Most miss this point and thus fail to consider the moral cost of racism.

It is easy for us to lose ourselves in details in endeavoring to grasp and comprehend the real condition of human beings. We often forget that each unit in the mass is a throbbing human soul. Ignorant it may be, and poverty stricken, black and curious in limb and ways and thought; and yet it loves and hates, it toils and tires, it laughs and weeps, and looks in vague and awful longing at the grim horizon of life,—all this, even as you and I.<sup>91</sup>

The task of the keen observer is to not subsume African Americans' political ideals into their suffering. We should never lose sight of the deeper desires for rights and recognition that belongs to all of humanity. In other words, exploitation, oppression, and subordination make freedom and equality all the more imperative, regardless of who you are.

Du Bois, at times, suggested that Washington's politics is internally inconsistent, meaning, that in foregoing political rights for economic opportunities he failed to realize that equal opportunity fundamentally depends on individual rights and having those rights respected. "Is it possible, and probable, that nine million of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a service caste, and allowed only the most meager chance for developing their exceptional men?"<sup>92</sup> Though a compelling argument, it was Du Bois' less sustained critique and, I would argue, a secondary interest.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 399.

Du Bois was concerned with the moral cost of white supremacy. To bring his concern to light, he argued that what is needed is a politics that can counter Washington's—a politics that will not relinquish ethical ground.

Above our modern socialism, and out of the worship of the mass, must persist and evolve that higher individualism which the centres of culture protect; there must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammelled alike by old and new. Such souls aforesaid have inspired and guided worlds, and if we be not wholly bewitched by our Rhine-gold, they shall again.<sup>93</sup>

As this passage makes clear, the *soul* signifies higher individualism, culture, respect for self-sovereignty, rights, self-knowledge, self-awareness, social and political intelligence, and freedom. Moreover, Du Bois used a language of elevation and declination: the soul is “higher,” “loftier,” and ought to be “untrammelled.” He assigned to the category of the soul civic aspirations and basic political rights, but he did not impute any deep religious meaning and rarely spoke of spiritual redemption; his was a secular project of social salvation couched in sacred imagery and symbols.

As noted earlier, Du Bois argued that the economic legacies of slavery had led many Afro-Southerners to elevate material well-being above rights, but this proclivity had become an unquestioned practice by the time of Washington's leadership, and as Americans increasingly came to view earning as a substitute for politics or, more dangerously, to confuse economic advancement with political gains, it was now sanctioned by the entire country. “[H]ow much heavier the danger and need of the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 437.

freedmen's sons!"<sup>94</sup> As a result, African Americans, too, were willing to barter their birthright—the ideals of citizenship and social equality—for an opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty and destitution. “The tendency is here, born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings as among the material resources of a land to be trained with an eye single to future dividends.”<sup>95</sup> “Yet after all,” Du Bois asked, “when turning our eyes from the temporary and the contingent in the Negro problem to the broader question of the permanent uplifting and civilization of the black men in America, we have a right to inquire, as this enthusiasm for material advancement mounts to its height.... Is not life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?”<sup>96</sup>

Du Bois's use of the metaphor of *meat* to illustrate the desacralization of politics is made clear in *Darkwater*, which was published in 1920. Du Bois wrote that “the leading out of little souls into the green pastures and beside the still waters, not for pelf or peace, but for life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth; lest we forget, and the sons of the fathers, like Esau, for mere meat barter their birthright in a mighty nation.”<sup>97</sup> Du Bois condemned more broadly the commercialism of the Gilded Age. “There was one who came from the North,—brawny and riotous with energy, a man of concentrated power, who held all the thunderbolts of modern capital in his great fists and made flour and meat.”<sup>98</sup> And he added that the “greater

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 428.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, Dover Thrift Edition (New York: Dover Publication, 1999), 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 48.

gamblers used meat and iron and undid the foundations of the world. All the gods of chance flaunted their wild raiment here, above the brown flood of the Mississippi.”<sup>99</sup> There is little doubt that Du Bois thought Washington and black Southerners were setting the race back.

In chapter 5 of *Souls*, “Of the Wings of Atalanta,” Du Bois extended and enlarged the above line of criticism. Du Bois reinterpreted the myth of Atalanta to show how materialism devolves into a corrupt commercialism. Atlanta, the city, was where Washington struck his Faustian bargain. In September 1895, before an audience at the Atlanta Cotton Exposition, Washington gave the speech that brought him national fame. “‘In all things purely social we can be separate as the fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.’ This ‘Atlanta Compromise’ is by all odds the most notable thing in Mr. Washington’s career.”<sup>100</sup> Let us look further at how Du Bois used the *myth of Atalanta* to dramatize the consequences of Washington’s purported compromise.

*Atalanta* in Greek mythology is a swift-footed, independent woman of unrivaled strength and independence. The legend includes her father leaving her to die at birth, but she was suckled and raised by a bear. Atalanta then later established herself as a fierce warrior with few rivals. Her increasing fame led her father to “forgive” her for not being a son. He then said she could return home on the condition that she married a man. This was not to Atalanta’s liking and counter to her spirit. Knowing that no man could outrun her, she said she would marry any suitor who

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>100</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 393.

could beat her in a footrace; she would behead the losers. But one suitor, Hippomenes, would outwit her; with the help of Aphrodite, Hippomenes acquired three golden apples. In the race, he threw a golden apple off to the side every time Atalanta was close to overtaking him. Unable to resist these golden apples, Atalanta stooped to pick them up and so lost the race. Thus Du Bois asked, though the ideals of old are “sprung from our father’s blood, must that too degenerate into a dusty quest of gold,—into lawless lust with Hippomenes?”<sup>101</sup>

“If Atlanta be not named for Atalanta,” wrote Du Bois, she ought to have been.”<sup>102</sup> Atlanta is more than the city in which Washington traded away the rights of the race; it was, at this time, the commercial and cultural capital of the South. It held then, as it does now, a substantial black population, and to what degree there existed a considerable African American middle class, it would be found in Atlanta. Du Bois asked rhetorically: what would be the consequences if material pursuits continue to preoccupy black Southerners? Would they, like Atalanta, lose the race of life?

Here stands this black young Atalanta, girding herself for the race that must be run; and if her eyes be still toward the hills and sky as in the days of old, then we must look for noble running; but what if some ruthless or wily or even thoughtless Hippomenes lay golden apples before her? What if the Negro people be wooed from a strife of righteousness, from a love of knowing, to regard dollars as the be-all and end-all of life?<sup>103</sup>

If Du Bois had spent much of the earlier chapters in *Souls* attacking Afro-Southerners for failing to dream higher and strive harder, he did not spare the black bourgeoisie. He asked, “What if to the Mammonism of America be added the rising Mammonism

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 419.

of the re-born South, and the Mammonism of this South be reinforced by the budding Mammonism of its half-awakened black millions?”<sup>104</sup>

“It was no maiden’s idle whim that started this hard racing,” Du Bois insisted, but “a fearful wilderness lay about the feet of that city after the War,—feudalism, poverty, the rise of the Third Estate, serfdom, the re-birth of Law and Order, and above and between all, the Veil of Race.... How fleet must Atalanta be if she will not be tempted by gold to profane the Sanctuary!”<sup>105</sup> But principles would give way to the profane.

She forgot the old ideal ... and stooped to apples of gold,—to men busier and sharper, thriftier and more unscrupulous. Golden apples are beautiful ... and, too, the merchant who has dethroned the planter is no despicable *parvenu*. Work and wealth are the mighty levers to lift this old new land; thrift and toil and saving are the highways to new hopes and new possibilities; and yet the warning is needed lest the wily Hippomenes tempt Atalanta to thinking that golden apples are the goal of racing, and not mere incidents by the way.<sup>106</sup>

Despite the conditions that prevailed, the race had to be on guard against the temptations of the times. Du Bois thus emphasized the consequences of viewing economic pursuits as ends in themselves, or simply losing sight of the ultimate ends of striving. At the end of the day, Du Bois concluded, “the temptation of Hippomenes penetrated,” and “already in this smaller world” of black Southerners “the habit is forming of interpreting the world in dollars.”<sup>107</sup>

This pursuit had become so unquestioned, he noted, that those ends are all African Americans strive for. Meeting basic needs is transformed into a gospel of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 418.

wealth, and material desires are all that spur the race. The “fatal might of this idea is beginning to spread; it is replacing the finer type of Southerner with vulgar money-getters; it is burying the sweeter beauties of Southern life beneath pretense and ostentation.”

Atalanta is not the first or the last maiden whom greed of gold has led to defile the temple of Love; and not maids alone, but men in the race of life, sink from the high and generous ideals of youth to the gambler code of the Bourse; and in all our Nation’s strivings is not the Gospel of Work befouled by the Gospel of Pay? So common is this that one-half think it normal; so unquestioned, that we almost fear to question if the end of racing is not gold, if the aim of man is not rightly to be rich. And if this is the fault of America, how dire a change lies before a new land and a new city, lest Atlanta, stooping for mere gold, shall find that gold accursed!<sup>108</sup>

Of significance is the claim that “men in the race of life, *sink from the high and generous ideals*” and that they “almost fear to question if the end of racing is not gold, if the aim of man is not rightly to be rich.” Note that in “stooping for mere gold,” they “shall find that gold accursed!”

### **3. The Political Consequences of Washington’s Leadership**

Washington “believed that the Negro as an efficient worker could gain wealth and that eventually through his ownership of capital he would be able to achieve a recognized place in American culture and could then educate his children as he might wish and develop their possibilities.”<sup>109</sup> Du Bois acknowledged that Washington was possibly advancing a sequential strategy for challenging white supremacy, one in which African Americans would first achieve economic independence and would then use

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>109</sup> Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 236.

that economic independence as a base from which to launch a more feasible campaign for social and political integration. But is it “possible,” Du Bois asked, “and probable, that ... men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights?”<sup>110</sup> He insisted that this gradualist strategy would fail on its own terms. It is logically incoherent because it assumes that economic advancement could be achieved independent of liberal and democratic rights. He said Washington is “striving nobly to make Negro artisans business men and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for workingmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right suffrage.”<sup>111</sup> Upon Du Bois’s reading, then, it made little sense to suspend political struggle in the short term as rights and recognition are preconditions to rather than consequences of economic advancement.

Regardless of whether you view Washington as a political gradualist or as having authored a compromising and accommodationist politics, Du Bois said the results were the same. Washington’s leadership had devastating consequences for African Americans. His “tender of the palm-branch” was met with Jim Crow “disenfranchisement.”<sup>112</sup> In 1915, in an obituary for Washington in *The Crisis*, Du Bois acknowledged that Washington “was the greatest Negro leader since Frederick Douglass, and the most distinguished man, white or black, who came out of the South since the Civil War,” but he also said that “in stern justice, we must lay on the soul of this man a heavy responsibility for the consummation of Negro disenfranchisement,

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<sup>110</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 399.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

the decline of the Negro college and public school, and the firmer establishment of color and caste in this land.”<sup>113</sup>

One reading of Du Bois’s critique of Washington is that Washington outlined an argument for uplift as a sufficient strategy for social and political integration. Du Bois was most critical of this strategy’s failure to seriously challenge the ideological and symbolic foundations of Jim Crow. Du Bois’s early writings are replete with evidence that supports this interpretation.

The distinct impression left by Mr. Washington’s propaganda is, first, that the South is justified in its present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro’s degradation; secondly, that the prime cause of the Negro’s failure to rise more quickly is his wrong education in the past; and, thirdly, that his future rise depends primarily on his own efforts. Each of these propositions is a dangerous half-truth. The supplementary truths must never be lost sight of: first, slavery and race-prejudice are potent if not sufficient causes of the Negro’s position; second, industrial and common school training were necessarily slow in planting because they had to await the black teachers trained by higher institutions ... and, third, while it is a great truth to say that the Negro must strive and strive mightily to help himself, it is equally true that unless his strivings be not simply seconded, but rather aroused and encouraged, by the initiative of the richer and wiser environing group, he cannot hope for great success.<sup>114</sup>

According to Du Bois, Washington placed the entire onus of overcoming oppression and subordination directly on African Americans’ shoulders. If slavery and white supremacy are sufficient causes for the subordinated status of blacks in the postemancipation South, and encouragement from the larger environing group is a necessary condition for exit, then inclusive social structures that guarantee fair competition and equality of opportunity are preconditions and not consequences of

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<sup>113</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Late Booker T. Washington,” *The Crisis* 11 (December 1915): 82.

<sup>114</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 403.

self-help and uplift. Nothing I have argued previously undermines this conclusion, which Du Bois reached at the end of *Souls*.

Furthermore, Du Bois noted that Washington failed to acknowledge that his program for uplifting the race depended on civic and public structures that could assure fair conditions for development and merit, and, as such, his purported laissez-faire individualism was insufficient for remedying the disadvantages that track black life. Du Bois did not outright reject the ideals of self-development and self-reliance, but he did insist that such social uplift depended on a “talented tenth,” the exceptional men and women of the race. Moreover, any social and economic gains would depend on equality of opportunity, fairness, and rule of law, which can only be guaranteed through social structures in civil society, the market, and public institutions. These are preconditions for uplift as a sustained struggle to overcome the extant social structures of domination: slavery, white supremacy, exploitation, disenfranchisement, and segregation.

The idea is that Washington, as the “greatest” black leader, had a moral and political obligation to be unambiguous in his attack on Jim Crow. Du Bois said that Washington did not offer “candid and honest criticism” of the South.<sup>115</sup> Washington’s equivocation and silence, realist or not, shifted the burden of racial injustice onto African Americans themselves, “when in fact the burden belongs to the nation.”<sup>116</sup> More devastatingly, Du Bois accused Washington of having accepted “the alleged inferiority” and having withdrawn “many of the high demands of Negroes as men and

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 403–04.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

American citizens,” thus silencing their “tendency to self-assertion.”<sup>117</sup> In doing so, Washington allowed the South to feel “justified in its present attitude toward” African Americans while permitting all whites to “stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators.”<sup>118</sup>

But “self-respect is worth more than lands and houses,” and “a people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth civilizing.”<sup>119</sup> What made Washington’s politics pernicious, according to Du Bois, was its failure to seriously account for the visual register. Washington’s leadership, in Du Bois’s reading, was a failure to take seriously the optics of resistance. Washington ignored the visual register and failed to account for the sensorial and symbolic effects of his antipolitics, which undermined the struggle for freedom. In short, Washington’s uplift politics unwittingly affirmed the symbolic and ideological foundations of white supremacy.

Du Bois did not disagree with the principles of uplift but with what he interpreted as a dangerous tendency to view earning as a substitute for politics. To “teach the workers to work and the thinkers to think; make carpenters of carpenters, and philosophers of philosophers,” because “to make men, we must have ideals, broad, pure, and inspiring end of living,—not sordid money-getting, not apples of gold.”<sup>120</sup> For Du Bois, then, uplifting the race required, as a precondition, strong political opposition to Jim Crow, including persistent protest. In short, Du Bois argued

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 423.

that uplift as an internal politics is causally insufficient for addressing the need for fair and equal extant sociopolitical structures. He therefore insisted that political activism that directly targeted the structures of racial domination was primary for combating white supremacy.

But as I have argued previously, Du Bois had also stressed different concerns. Even if Washington's uplift politics succeeded, Du Bois would still think it too costly to African Americans. Du Bois said that we "shall hardly induce black men to believe that if their stomachs be full, it matters little about their brains. They already dimly perceive that the path of peace winding between honest toil and dignified manhood call for the guidance of skilled thinkers, the loving, reverent comradeship between the black lowly and the black men emancipated by training and culture."<sup>121</sup> "To-day the young Negro of the South who would succeed cannot be frank and outspoken, honest and self-assertive," Du Bois observed, "but rather he is daily tempted to be silent and wary, politic and sly; he must flatter and be pleasant.... Patience, humility, and adroitness must, in these growing black youth, replace impulse, manliness, and courage."<sup>122</sup> Du Bois further argued that the consequence of "interpreting the world in dollars" destroys the ideals of old, redefines virtues, and establishes a new criterion for black leadership. "In the Black World, the Preacher and Teacher," he said, "embodied once the ideals of this people,—the strife for another and a juster world."<sup>123</sup> But "to-day the danger is that these ideals ... will suddenly sink to a question of cash and a

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<sup>121</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 437.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 503–04.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

lust for gold.”<sup>124</sup> As a result, the “old leaders ... are being replaced by new; neither the black preacher nor the black teacher leads as he did two decades ago. Into their places are pushing farmers and gardeners, the well-paid porters and artisans, the businessmen,—all those with property and money.”<sup>125</sup>

The temptation to subordinate politics to economics could be avoided if socioeconomic uplift was led by the “exceptional” men and women of the race, those who can properly elevate their “duller brethren slowly and painfully.”<sup>126</sup> A “Talented Tenth” should, “through their knowledge of modern culture,” guide the black masses “into a higher civilization” and to the attainment of “self-realization and its highest cultural aspirations.”<sup>127</sup> Du Bois further argued:

If this is true, then here is the path out of the economic situation, and here is the imperative demand for trained Negro leaders of character and intelligence,—men of skill, men of light and leading, college bred men, black captains of industry, and missionaries of culture; men who thoroughly comprehend and know modern civilization, and can take hold of Negro communities and raise and train them by force of precept and example.<sup>128</sup>

Du Bois said that what the “black laborer needs is careful personal guidance, group leadership of men with hearts in their bosoms, to train them to foresight, carefulness, and honesty.”<sup>129</sup> Even if uplift is to get on its way, the agents thereof must be equipped with an attunement to higher ideals rather than the necessities of life because “a rising group of people are not lifted bodily from the ground like an inert solid mass,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>127</sup> Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 236.

<sup>128</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 481.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 478.

but rather stretch upward like a living plant with its roots still clinging in the mould.”<sup>130</sup>

#### **4. From Matthew to Marx**

Scholars have long observed a remarkable discontinuity in the body of Du Bois’s work. They have noted, in particular, his increasing turn away from liberal integration to a more socialist and nationalist political thought. Du Bois said he not only came to appreciate Marx late but that Marx had not been available to him; Marx was simply not a part of his education, and it is worth remembering that Du Bois was one of the most educated Americans at the turn of the century. “So far my formal education had touched politics and religion,” Du Bois recalled, “but on the whole we avoided economics. It was the moral aspect of slavery which we stressed, not the economic. I saw serfdom when I taught in a rural school, but in class I do not remember ever hearing Karl Marx mentioned nor socialism discussed.”<sup>131</sup> The absence of Marx in Du Bois’s earlier thought is revealing in that it may elucidate why in *Souls* Du Bois privileged for theoretical investigation the moral consequences of racial oppression.

There was, however, a clear transformation by the 1930s, as Du Bois’s writings began to directly reference Marx and veer toward Marxian concerns. But Du Bois never became a dyed-in-the-wool Marxist. In *Dusk of Dawn*, he explained his ambivalent relationship to Marxism.

I was not and am not a communist. I do not believe in the dogma of

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 485.

<sup>131</sup> Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 126.

inevitable revolution to right economic wrong.... On the other hand, I believe and still believe that Karl Marx was one of the greatest men of modern times and 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. And this conviction I had to express or spiritually die.<sup>132</sup>

Both *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940) reflect Du Bois's increasing interest in Marx, but Du Bois resisted a reductive class analysis of slavery or Jim Crow.<sup>133</sup> Du Bois famously argued in *Black Reconstruction* that it "must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage."<sup>134</sup>

In his later writings, especially *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois abandoned his earlier antimaterialism. Almost entirely absent is the likening of economic interests with corruption. In fact, not once did he use the terms "meat" or "golden apples" as metaphors in any of the books he published after 1920. When he did reach for a religious metaphor, it was that of "economic salvation."<sup>135</sup> The question of poverty, exploitation, and economic injustice began to prevail in his later work. "Above all the Negro is poor," wrote Du Bois, "poor by heritage from two hundred forty-four years of chattel slavery, by emancipation without land or capital and by seventy-five years of additional wage exploitation and crime peonage."<sup>136</sup> In his earlier work, Du Bois

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<sup>132</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 775.

<sup>133</sup> One of the best studies of Du Bois's later writings is Lawrie Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W. E. B. Du Bois* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For the context of Du Bois's later thought, see Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963*.

<sup>134</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Free Press, 1935), 700.

<sup>135</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 708.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 687.

often made such observations as gestures of goodwill in order not to dismiss the very real concerns and needs of the “black peasantry,” but now those needs and concerns ground his thought and politics. Not once in *Dusk of Dawn* did Du Bois use the term “peasant” or its connotations, whereas he had used it well over a dozen times in *Souls*. The “immediate problem” of the race, Du Bois argued, is “the question of securing existence, of labor and income, of food and home, of spiritual independence and democratic control of the industrial process.”<sup>137</sup> Of significance is the recognition that a political ideal like democracy can and should be identified and entwined with the working masses’ more everyday concerns. Du Bois no longer based his theoretical reflections in psychological, metaphysical, or spiritual categories and concepts; as a whole, they emerged up from his practical concerns.

Du Bois also began to rethink the nature of racism. He argued that racism was deeply embedded in the American psyche and rooted into citizens’ civic habits, norms, and values. On the face of it, this later view seems awfully close to his earlier assessment. It becomes clear, however, that he had not in fact thought of racism as an embedded social practice rooted in the deepest recesses of the unconscious. Du Bois said he had experienced a radical change in his thinking about racism because of the “Freudian era.”

I now began to realize that in the fight against race prejudice, we were not facing simply the rational, conscious determination of white folk to oppress us; we were facing age-long complexes sunk now largely to unconscious habit and irrational urges, which demanded on our part not only the patience to wait, but the power to entrench ourselves for a *long siege* against the strongholds of color caste.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 771; emphasis added.

He admitted that his early work was predicated on the belief that racism was a consequence of poor reasoning or ignorance, which means that it could be remedied by logical refutation or empirical evidence. “My basic theory had been that race prejudice was primarily a matter of ignorance on the part of the mass of men, giving the evil and anti-social a chance to work their way; that when the truth was properly presented, the monstrous wrong of race hate must melt and melt quickly before it.”<sup>139</sup> And in *The Autobiography*, Du Bois wrote: “The Negro problem was in my mind a matter of systematic investigation and intelligent understanding. The world was thinking wrong about race, because it did not know. The ultimate evil was stupidity. The cure was knowledge based on scientific investigation.”<sup>140</sup>

It may not seem an entirely important observation, specifically one that could have important theoretical and political implications. Du Bois’s reconceiving of racism as entrenched and unconscious, as a social practice rather than ignorance or faulty reasoning, necessarily undermines the political response he had advocated for in *Souls*. He said his previous work had been predicated on a “frontal attack” against Jim Crow and that this approach would no longer suffice.<sup>141</sup> His earlier conviction that “the monstrous wrong of race hate must melt and melt quickly before” the truths presented by a principled protest politics could no longer serve as the wellspring of an effective politics. In November 1910, in the inaugural article of *The Crisis*, Du Bois had written: “The object of this publication is to set forth those facts and arguments

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 760.

<sup>140</sup> Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 197.

<sup>141</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 776.

which show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested toward colored people.”<sup>142</sup> But in June 1934, in his article “Counsels of Despair,” Du Bois wrote: “Some people think that the fight against segregation consists merely of one damned protest after another. That the technique is to protest and wail and protest again, and to keep this up until the gates of public opinion and the walls of segregation fall down.”<sup>143</sup> Du Bois said that the “difficulty with this program is that it is physically and psychologically impossible.”<sup>144</sup>

This brings us to why Du Bois left the NACCP, the organization that was synonymous with his name. The NAACP’s mission is “organized opposition to the action and attitude of the dominant white group,” argued Du Bois, and that opposition “includes ceaseless agitation and insistent demand for equality: the equal right to work, civic and political equality, and social equality. It involves the use of force of every sort: moral suasion, propaganda and where possible even physical resistance.”<sup>145</sup> As we know, Du Bois was one of the founders of the NAACP. The institution and its strategy were pragmatic realizations of his vision, his solution to Jim Crow, and his normative ideals and political values. From 1909 until his departure, Du Bois’s thought was often inseparable from the institution and especially *The Crisis*.

But now the NAACP proved an internal barrier within the struggle for freedom. Du Bois wrote that there are “manifest difficulties” inherent to the NAACP’s strategy: “First of all it is not a program that envisages any direct action of Negroes

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<sup>142</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Crisis,” *The Crisis*, November 1910.

<sup>143</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Counsels of Despair: The Anti-Segregation Campaign—Protest—Methods of Attack,” *The Crisis*, June 1934.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 695.

themselves for the uplift of their socially depressed masses; in the very conception of the program, such work is to be attentive to by the nation and Negroes are to be subjects of uplift forces and agencies to the extent of their numbers and need.”<sup>146</sup> It is significant that Du Bois used the language of “uplift” to describe the NAACP’s mission. What is most important is that Du Bois further argued that, like Washington’s program at the turn of century, the weaknesses in the NAACP’s solution to Jim Crow had to be exposed and publically challenged.

By 1930 I had become convinced that the basic policies and ideals of the Association [NAACP] must be modified and changed; that in a world where economic dislocation had become so great as in ours, a mere appeal based on the old liberalism, a mere appeal to justice and further effort at legal decision, was missing the essential need; that essential need was to guard and better the chances of Negroes, educated and ignorant, to earn a living, safeguard their income, and raise the level of their employment.<sup>147</sup>

Du Bois said he could no longer serve with the NAACP because he no longer endorsed its strategy for fighting Jim Crow; precisely, he argued that the NAACP remained wedded to a liberal solution to the segregation, oppression, and exploitation of African Americans despite the intractable problems arising out of the economic upheavals of the 1930s, challenges that required a new political response.

Du Bois’s new appreciation for the centrality of economic exploitation, largely because of the depression, as well as his reconceiving of racial oppression, forced him to formulate a new response to Jim Crow, one attentive to economic injustice and racial caste, understood as a deep social practice, constitutive of white citizens’ civic character. Du Bois said combating both would require a “long siege.”

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 770.

I saw that the color bar could not be broken by a series of brilliant immediate assaults.... I saw defending this bar not simply ignorance and ill will; these to be sure; but also certain more powerful motives less open to reason or appeal. There were economic motives, urges to build wealth on the backs of black slaves and colored serfs; there followed those unconscious acts and irrational reactions, unpierced by reason, whose current form depended on the long history of relation and contact between thought and idea. In this case *not sudden assault but long siege* was indicated; careful planning and subtle campaign with the education of growing generations and propaganda.<sup>148</sup>

I believe that the metaphor of “long siege” is the most significant phrase for understanding the late politics of Du Bois, most clearly and concisely outlined in *Dusk of Dawn*. Du Bois basically called for a long, drawn-out, and strategic struggle against Jim Crow, what he liked to call “a campaign of waiting.”<sup>149</sup> He said struggle against racism called “for a long, patient, well-planned and persistent campaign.”<sup>150</sup>

There are virtually no biblical or classical metaphors in Du Bois’s later writings. It is as if his twenty-five years as the editor of *The Crisis* pulled his pen back to earth, to the concerns of his readers. Du Bois’s later writings are replete with a very different set of metaphors; images, symbols, and allegories of war proliferate in his descriptions of the struggle against racial oppression. Du Bois said African Americans must adopt an altogether different strategy to combat white supremacy. Du Bois then outlined what he thought was the most practicable response by drawing a radical distinction between two different military strategies. The old *frontal attack*, he contended, is that of the NAACP, with its emphasis on protest; what is now needed, Du Bois said, is a *flank attack*, a *long siege*, and Du Bois saw himself as its primary

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 557; emphasis added.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 696.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

strategist.

When an army moves to attack, there are two methods which it may pursue. The older method included brilliant forays with bugles and loud fanfare of trumpets, with waving swords, and shining uniforms.... It was thrilling, but messy, and on the whole rather ineffective.

The modern method of fighting is not nearly as spectacular. It is preceded by careful, very careful planning. Soldiers are clad in rather drab and dirty khaki. Officers are not riding out in front and using their swords; they sit in the rear and use their brain. The whole army digs in and stays hidden. The advance is a slow, calculated forward mass movement. Now going forward, now advancing in the center, now running around by the flank. Often retreating to positions that can be better defended.... This is not nearly as spectacular as the older method of fighting, but it is much more effective, and against the enemy of present days, it is the only effective way. It is common sense based on modern technique.

And this is the kind of method which we must use to solve the Negro problem and to win our fight against segregation.<sup>151</sup>

This passage repeatedly stresses that a successful political strategy for overthrowing white supremacy is one that does not overinvest in the optics of resistance—the “brilliant forays,” “loud fanfare of trumpets,” “waving swords, and shining uniforms.” These may well be “thrilling” and “spectacular,” but they are in vain. “There are times when a brilliant display of eloquence and picketing and other theatrical and spectacular things are not only excusable but actually gain ground, ... [but] it is a waste of time and effort to think that the spectacular demonstration is the real battle.”<sup>152</sup>

This new strategy would require African Americans to, at times, choose to withdraw and dig in, even if such actions visually affirmed the racial logic defending

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<sup>151</sup> Du Bois, “Counsels of Despair.”

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

segregation. They may “have to resort to a campaign of countermoves.”<sup>153</sup> “In addition to mental ability there is demanded an extraordinarily moral strength,” Du Bois acknowledged, “the strength to endure discrimination and not become discouraged; to face almost universal disparagement and keep one’s soul: to sacrifice for an ideal which the present generation will hardly fulfill.”<sup>154</sup> This would be a “long siege” on white supremacy. Integrationists “act as though there was but one solution of the race problem,” Du Bois wrote, which they see as “complete integration of the black race with the white race in America, with no distinction of color in political, civil or social life.”<sup>155</sup> While this is also Du Bois’s ultimate end, he added that it is clear “that not for a century and more probably not for ten centuries will any such consummation be reached.”<sup>156</sup> This line of thinking is indistinguishable from Washington’s politics.

So what form did Du Bois say this long siege would take? It was, in short, his argument for strategic “segregation,” his and not my word. Du Bois wrote that the “pressing problem is: What are we going to do about it [segregation]?”<sup>157</sup> Du Bois said that his strategy would raise “unpleasant facts.”<sup>158</sup> In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois said that the best available strategy is to formulate a plan for a subversive politics that uses segregation against itself.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 707.

<sup>155</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Segregation in the North—‘No Segregation’—Objects of Segregation—Boycott—Integration,” *The Crisis*, April 1934.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

There faces the American Negro therefore an intricate and subtle problem of combining into one object two difficult sets of facts: his present racial segregation which despite anything he can do will persist for many decades; and his attempt by carefully planned and intelligent action to fit himself into the new economic organization which the world faces.... With its eyes open to the necessity of agitation and to possible migration, this plan would start with the racial grouping that today is inevitable and proceed to use it as a method of progress along which we have worked and are now working. Instead of letting this segregation remain largely a matter of chance and unplanned development, and allowing its objects and results to rest in the hands of the white majority or in the accidents of the situation, *it would make the segregation a matter of careful thought and intelligent planning on the part of Negroes.*<sup>159</sup>

This is a remarkable passage, especially extraordinary when we consider it against the argument *Souls* outlined and its underlying moral vision. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois added that the

object of that plan [of self-segregation] would be two-fold: first to make it possible for the Negro group to await its ultimate emancipation with reasoned patience, with equitable temper and with every possible effort to raise the social status and increase the efficiency of the group. And secondly and just as important, the ultimate object of the plan is to obtain admission of the colored group to co-operation and incorporation into the white group on the best possible terms.<sup>160</sup>

In this protracted and complex campaign, he said that “there are certain things you must do for your own survival and self-preservation. You must work together and in unison; you must evolve and support your own social institutions; you must transform your attack from the foray of self-assertive individuals to the massed might in an organized body.”<sup>161</sup> This means “careful planning and subtle campaign with the

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<sup>159</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 700.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 776.

education of growing generations and propaganda.”<sup>162</sup> This “campaign of countermeasures” has but one goal and that is to “organize and collect resources” for the eventual integration of African Americans into the polity on the condition of full equality.<sup>163</sup> And “it is evident that economic planning to insure adequate income is the crying need of Negroes today.”<sup>164</sup> This is so because, given a protracted struggle, African Americans “must be financially able to afford to wait.”<sup>165</sup> Du Bois thus advanced his theory of economic cooperatives as essential to the struggle for emancipation.

And coming full circle to where Washington was, Du Bois concluded: “But now I proposed that in economic lines, just as in lines of literature and religion, segregation should be planned and organized carefully through thought. This plan did not establish a new segregation as the final solution of the race problem; exactly the contrary; but it did face the facts and faced them with thoughtfully mapped effort.”<sup>166</sup> Du Bois said his “plan” is “to use the segregation technique for industrial emancipation.”<sup>167</sup> He therefore prioritized economic cooperatives and economic empowerment, in general.

I had hoped for such insistence upon the compelling importance of the economic factor that this would lead to a project for a planned program for using the racial segregation, which was at present inevitable, in order that the laboring masses might be able to have built beneath them a strong foundation for self-support and social uplift; and while this

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 696.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 703.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 696.

<sup>166</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 777.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 705.

fundamental economic process was going on, we could, from a haven of economic security, continue even more effectively than ever to agitate for the utter erasure of the color line.<sup>168</sup>

“We had got to prepare ourselves for a reorganization of society especially and fundamentally in industry,” Du Bois added.<sup>169</sup> But the use of his power as a consumer should not only be for his “economic uplift but, in addition to that, for his economic education.”<sup>170</sup> Du Bois then extended his argument for economic empowerment. “Organizing then and conserving and using intelligently the power which twelve million people have through what they buy, it is possible for the American Negro to help in the rebuilding of the economic state.”<sup>171</sup> Du Bois insisted that his “plan of action would have for its ultimate object, full Negro rights and Negro equality in America.”<sup>172</sup> “It was clear to me,” he said, “that agitation against race prejudice and a planned economy for bettering the economic condition of the American Negro were not antagonistic ideals but part of one ideal; that it did not increase segregation; the segregation was there and would remain for many years.”<sup>173</sup>

Of course this strategy was all too familiar. And Du Bois’s contemporaries were quick to point out his convergence with Washington, as noted previously. Du Bois was therefore acutely aware of how his new program contradicted his earlier arguments in *Souls* and his harsh judgment of Washington. Du Bois now called for precisely what Washington had argued for decades prior, and Washington’s friends

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 774.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 706.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 707.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 700.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 777.

and enemies reminded him of it. Washington's uplift ideas, strategies, programs, and arguments, which Du Bois, in *Souls*, described as a policy of capitulation, adjustment, submission, accommodation, and compromise, now all seem to fall effortlessly under the banner of a "long siege." And in culling them together, Du Bois suggested that they constituted a politics radically different than that of Washington's. But he had to have known better.

### **5. Du Bois's Revisionist Reading of Washington**

Du Bois knew he could not fully escape the implications of his convergence with Washington's thought and politics. Unfortunately, subsequent generations of scholars have avoided this fact and thus often fail to see the complex role Washington plays across the vast body of Du Bois's work, especially Du Bois's rethinking of Washington. In a later version of his unpublished essay "The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington," Du Bois offered a more nuanced view of Washington's than he had advanced in *Souls*.<sup>174</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Washington remained a textual device, a canvas upon which Du Bois would subscribe political attitudes, values, and actions, even those profoundly different than the ones he had earlier assigned to Washington and black Southerners. The "chief significance" of Washington, Du Bois said, "lies in the fact that he cannot be considered simply as an individual" as "he is so inextricably woven into the national and even world

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<sup>174</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington" (unpublished during Du Bois's lifetime but recently published in *Du Bois Review* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 367–776.

movements of his day.”<sup>175</sup>

“Looking back over these twenty years of controversy, what can either side point to in justification of its contentions? First of all both sides must grant each other essential honesty of purpose,” and Du Bois added that the “Washington propaganda was not all compromise and cowardice, the opposition was not all envy and moonshine. On the other hand both sides could not be wholly right and supplementary in their efforts.”<sup>176</sup> Washington’s program “enabled Negroes to find steady employment, accumulate property rapidly, and be fairly well contented as a mass.”<sup>177</sup> Du Bois said that even Washington’s critics came to better appreciate his emphasis on the economic plight of the race:

Washington’s opponents also began to see light. They realized that his strong insistence upon work and saving was bearing fruit in the keeping up of the courage of the race, the rapid accumulation of Negro property and the turning of Colored men towards the trades and business. Of course, it would be too much to say that any final agreement was reached between the two parties.<sup>178</sup>

One remarkable change in Du Bois’s view is that Washington’s materialism kept up the courage of the race, whereas in *Souls* Du Bois had argued that Washington’s economic uplift amounted to a foregoing of civic and political ideals for jobs and wages.

In *Dusk of Dawn* Du Bois said his disagreement with Washington emerged, first, out of ideological differences but that those differences were easily reconcilable.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Du Bois said there were philosophical differences, but easy bridgeable ones.

There was first of all the ideological controversy. I believed in the higher education of a Talented Tenth who through their knowledge of modern culture could guide the American Negro into a higher civilization. I knew that without this the Negro would have to accept white leadership, and that such leadership could not always be trusted to guide this group into self-realization and to its highest cultural possibilities. Mr. Washington, on the other hand, believed that the Negro as an efficient worker could gain wealth and that eventually through his ownership of capital he would be able to achieve a recognized place in American culture and could then educate his children as he might wish and develop his possibilities. For this reason he proposed to put the emphasis at present upon the training in the skilled trades and encouragement in industry and common labor.... These two theories of Negro progress were not absolutely contradictory....<sup>179</sup>

Du Bois said the “controversy” with Washington “became more personal and bitter” than he “had ever dreamed.”<sup>180</sup> And “it was not a controversy” of his “seeking,” as he “had nothing but the greatest admiration for Mr. Washington and Tuskegee.”<sup>181</sup> “Contrary to most opinion,” Du Bois claimed, “the controversy as it developed was not entirely against Mr. Washington’s ideas, but became the insistence upon the right of other Negroes to have and express their ideas.”<sup>182</sup>

The real basis of the disagreement, Du Bois recalled, was Washington’s monopoly on power: “It was characteristic of the Washington statesmanship that whatever he or anybody believed or wanted must be subordinated to dominant public opinion and that opinion differed to and cajoled until it allowed a deviation toward

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<sup>179</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 604–05.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 604.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 608–09.

better ways.”<sup>183</sup> He added, “I was greatly disturbed at this time, not because I was in absolute opposition to the things Mr. Washington was advocating.”<sup>184</sup> “Tuskegee became the capital of the Negro nation,” which Du Bois resented.<sup>185</sup> Washington also allowed his institution and black collective self-organizing to be captured by white elites due to his reliance on patronage: the “Tuskegee Machine was not solely the idea and activity of black folk at Tuskegee. It was largely encouraged and given financial aid through certain white groups and individuals in the North. This Northern group had clear objectives.”<sup>186</sup>

What stands out in Du Bois’s later thought is that he did not argue, in any consistent and systematic way, that Washington’s uplift strategies, and especially his concern for economic independence, amounted to adjustment, submission, and compromise. A new line of criticism had opened up, one that depicted Washington as representing the antidemocratic temptations that uplift politics could fall prey to. Du Bois concluded that Washington’s “was an impossible assumption of power. No one voice ever did or ever can speak for ten million.”<sup>187</sup>

To fully see what Du Bois was doing in regard to his revisionist reading of Washington, we have to look at how he rewrote the genealogy of black political thought he outlined in *Souls*. Du Bois, as we know, previously argued that there are three enduring traditions of Afro-American thought: a separatist tradition, an

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 605.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 609.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 607–08.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

integrationist tradition, and an accommodationist tradition. He dismissed as insignificant and impractical the separatist tradition and said African Americans are faced with a choice between integrationist or accommodationist tradition. He later described black political thought thusly:

Historically ... Negroes have tended to choose between two lines of action: the *first* is exemplified in Walker's Appeal ... and coming down through the work of the Niagara Movement and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in our day. This program of organized opposition to the action and attitude of the dominant white group includes ceaseless agitation and insistent demand for equality: the equal right to work, civic and political equality, and social equality. It involves the use of force of every sort: moral suasion, propaganda and where possible even physical resistance.

There are, however, manifest difficulties about such a program. First of all it is not a program that envisages any direct action of Negroes themselves for the uplift of their socially depressed masses; in the very conception of the program, such work is to be attentive to by the nation and Negroes are to be subjects of uplift forces and agencies to the extent of their numbers and need.<sup>188</sup>

The integrationist or protest tradition is now defined as a form of radical paternalism: a political strategy that is based in white, liberal leadership, not to mention it is now conceived of as impractical and alienating.

The second tradition is that of the nationalist-separatist strain. Du Bois said that there is a "*second* group" that is "more extreme and decisive" and often takes the form of a "'back to Africa' movement."<sup>189</sup> He noted that these movements draw a broad constituency, not simply "demagogues, but to the prouder and more independent type of Negro," including those who are "tired of begging for justice and recognition from folk who seem to him to have no intention of being just and do not propose to

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 695; emphasis original.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

recognize Negroes as men.”<sup>190</sup> But what really stands out in Du Bois’s account of the separatist tradition is who now appears in it.

The extreme plans tended always to fade to more moderate counsel.... Groups of Negroes in their own clubs and organizations, in their own neighborhoods and schools, were formed, and were not so much the result of deliberate planning as the rationalization of the segregation into which they were forced by racial prejudice. These groups became physical and spiritual cities of refuge, where sometimes the participants were inspired to efforts of social uplift, learning and ambition; and sometimes reduced to sullen wordless resentment. It is toward this sort of group effort that the thoughts and plans of Booker T. Washington led. He did not advocate a deliberate and planned segregation, but advised submission to segregation in settlement and work.<sup>191</sup>

Washington now falls within the separatist lines, even if described as a more moderate nationalist. Also note Du Bois’s rather quick if not abrupt warning that Washington’s uplift was not a part of a “deliberate and planned segregation,” unlike Du Bois’s. Essentially, Du Bois said he advocated what Washington accidentally fell into.

There is “a *third* path of the advance which lately I have been formulating and advocating,” Du Bois said, but which “can easily be mistaken for a program of complete racial segregation and even nationalism among Negroes. First, ignoring other racial separation, I have stressed the economic discrimination as fundamental and advised concentration of planning here.... The cost of this program must fall first and primarily on us, ourselves.”<sup>192</sup> Both Washington and Du Bois agreed on the substantive aim of economic empowerment and the strategy of collective self-organizing, but Du Bois insisted that Washington counseled submission while he, Du Bois, always maintained a commitment to civil rights. But he did not acknowledge the

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 698; emphasis original.

possibility that Washington, too, may have thought a “long seize” rather than a frontal attack was the best response to white supremacy.

## **Conclusion**

In the final pages of his biography of Du Bois, David Levering Lewis recounts a story of Du Bois in 1963, at the Legon campus at the University of Ghana. Vice Chancellor Connor Cruise O’Brien often hosted “veranda gatherings,” where Du Bois was in regular attendance, even at the age of ninety-five.<sup>193</sup> O’Brien remembered that once he was criticizing his nemesis, Moise Tshombe, when a student said: “Tshombe was another Booker T. Washington.”<sup>194</sup> O’Brien said he never forgot Du Bois’s response, and he recaptured the moment vividly: “The old man stirred like a tortoise putting its head out if its shell.”<sup>195</sup> Du Bois stopped the student in his tracks. He said: “Don’t say that. I used to talk like that.”<sup>196</sup> Then Du Bois recalled a lesson his aunt taught him. He was at a dinner in Harlem and was ribbing on Washington when his aunt leaned over to him and said: “Don’t you forget that that man, unlike you, bears the mark of the lash on his back. He has come out of slavery.... You are fighting for the rights here in the North. It’s tough, but it’s nothing like as tough as what he had to face in his time and in his place.”<sup>197</sup> But this was not a mere spontaneous reaction by Du Bois.

In an interview with the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1963, Du Bois insisted that to

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<sup>193</sup> Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963*, 569.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

understand Washington one must begin with the fact that Washington had been a slave. Du Bois said,

I never thought Washington was a bad man.... He and I came from different backgrounds. I was born free. Washington was born slave. He felt the lash of an overseer across his back. I was born in Massachusetts, he on a slave plantation in the South. My great-grandfather fought with the Colonial Army in New England in the American Revolution [this earned the grandfather his freedom]. I had a happy childhood and acceptance in the community. Washington's childhood was hard. I had many more advantages: Fisk University, Harvard, graduate years in Europe. Washington had little formal schooling. I admired much about him.... The controversy developed more between our followers than between us.... In the early years I did not dissent entirely from Washington's program. I was sure that out of his own background he saw the Negro's problem from its lowest economic level. He never really repudiated the higher ends of justice which were then denied.<sup>198</sup>

Du Bois was telling a cautionary tale, that the context in which a form of politics is advanced matters. Du Bois added that “in the circumstances of the South, Washington could not have been effective any other way.”<sup>199</sup> In other words, Du Bois had the intellectual courage to rethink the political thought and practice of Washington. He did not confine himself to what he had written sixty years earlier in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). We, too, should begin where Du Bois left off: that is, we should have the courage to rethink Booker T. Washington and the uplift efforts of Afro-Southerners in the post-Reconstruction South. Of course we have to be willing to conceive of the disfranchised and disempowered as having political agency and voice.

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<sup>198</sup> The interview was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* 216, no. 5 (November 1965): 78–81.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Lion and the Lamb?

#### Booker T. Washington's Intellectual Debt to Frederick Douglass

My part has been to tell the story of the slave. The story of the master never wanted for narrators.

—Frederick Douglass<sup>1</sup>

The life of Frederick Douglass is the history of American slavery epitomized in a single human experience.

—Booker T. Washington<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Douglass emerged by the sheer logic of circumstance: He was “the noblest slave that ever God set free.” He was a living example of the evil of slavery, so unanswerable that he caught the imagination of the world. Then came a lull, a sort of troubled lifting of the darkened waters here and there, but so far as the White world was concerned, [there was] no real emergence of a definitely grasped individuality in the Colored race until Mr. Washington came.

—W. E. B. Du Bois<sup>3</sup>

### Introduction

When we consider Washington's intellectual life from the vantage point of his contemporaries, it becomes rather clear that he was judged against the legacy of

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass in Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 912.

<sup>2</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Frederick Douglass* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1904), 15.

<sup>3</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington,” Reel 82, frames 1376–1396, *Du Bois Papers*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Frederick Douglass and not W. E. B. Du Bois. It was Douglass, the former slave, abolitionist, and statesman, who was standard for black leadership. For instance, Kelly Miller, a Howard University sociologist and activist who had worked with both Washington and Du Bois, wrote in his 1908 *Race Adjustment*:

The radical and conservative tendencies of the Negro race cannot be better described than by comparing, or rather contrasting, the two superlative colored men in whom we find their highest embodiment—Frederick Douglass and Booker Washington.... The two men are in part products of their times, but are also natural antipodes. Douglass lived in the day of moral giants; Washington lives in the era of merchant princes.... 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... there is no less opposability in their character. Douglass was like a lion, bold and fearless; Washington is lamblike, meek and submissive. Douglass escaped from personal bondage, which his soul abhorred; but for Lincoln's proclamation, Washington would probably have arisen in esteem and favor in the eyes of his master as a good and faithful servant.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporaries of Washington and, later, Du Bois did not think of Washington's place in regard to an emerging conflict with Du Bois and northern intellectuals. Despite signs of Du Bois's eventual emergence as a black leader—*Souls of Black Folk* was published in 1903 and the Niagara Movement was founded in 1905—most could not have known that Du Bois would become one of the great minds of American and modern thought. It also mattered that Du Bois did not shape their writings the way he would those of future scholars. They thus judged Washington against what was then the highest standard for black political leadership and thought: Douglass. And thus

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly Miller, *Radicals and Conservatives and Other Essays on the Negro in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968). The book was first published in 1908 under the title *Race Adjustment*.

Washington, as Miller's observations show, was interpreted and assessed against Douglass.

Several scholars have noted Washington's debt to Douglass, and most Douglass scholars have viewed Douglass's postemancipation thought, especially his stress on self-reliance (which reaches an apex in his speech "Self-Made Men"), as anticipating much of Washington's uplift and self-help politics.<sup>5</sup> This observation often rests on the assumption that Washington's emphasis on the economic plight of emancipated blacks and his uplift politics resulted from a commitment to laissez-faire or natural rights liberalism. And there is little engagement with Washington's work to test this assumption. The conclusion often takes for granted Du Bois's early portrayal of Washington as a committed laissez-faire liberal and attaches that interpretation of Washington as continuing the tradition Douglass seemingly authorized with his later turn to economic self-reliance. This line of thought has sustained a genealogy of black libertarianism championed by such contemporary African American conservatives as Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and John McWhorter.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*; John Patrick Diggins, *On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln and the Foundations of American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Peter C. Myers, *Frederick Douglass: Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008); Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Bill E. Lawson, "Frederick Douglass and African American Social Progress: Does Race Matter at the Bottom of the Well," in *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bill E. Lawson and Frank M. Kirkland (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001); John McWhorter, *Winning the Race* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006). For a more nuanced reading of Washington's emphasis on markets, see Glenn C. Loury, *One By One from the Inside Out: Essays and Reviews on Race and Responsibility in America* (New York: Free Press, 1995). For a critique of black libertarianism, see Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, 226–70.

The intellectual historian Wilson Jeremiah Moses has pursued a close study of the intellectual relationship between Douglass and Washington. He argues that “Washington admired Douglass and saw himself as the legitimate heir to the mantle of the older race leader. His opinions were, in many cases, logical extensions of Douglass’s.”<sup>7</sup> Moses further contends that what united Douglass and Washington was the fact that “their economic philosophies were essentially laissez faire formulae for black advancement through individual commitment by individual blacks to the gospel of work and wealth.”<sup>8</sup> “The Negro in America was to advance himself by free competition on the open market.”<sup>9</sup> Both Douglass and Washington were committed to “rugged individualism” rather than “racial collectivism.”<sup>10</sup> Moses concluded that it was laissez-faire liberalism as the underlying philosophical commitment that shaped their very similar politics.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. also has described the literary relationship between Douglass and Washington, specifically Washington’s rhetorical use of Douglass to authorize his own leadership. For “Washington,” writes Gates, “Frederick Douglass was a John the Baptist who roamed the deserts of antebellum and Reconstruction America, clearing the way for that great deliverer, Booker T., sanctioning Washington’s social program and Washington himself as the true ideals for turn-of-

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<sup>7</sup> Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925*, 83–92. See also his *Creative Conflict in African American Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 141–84.

<sup>8</sup> Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925*, 96.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

the-century Afro-America.”<sup>11</sup> And as Robert Stepto has shown, Washington’s *Up from Slavery* reveals a deep debt to Douglass’s *Life and Times*. He writes that *Life and Times* was a “precursor text for *Up from Slavery*.”<sup>12</sup>

In his less trenchant and strategic moments, Du Bois, too, acknowledged Washington’s political preeminence and suggested that Washington was sincere in his insistence that he was continuing the work Douglass had begun. “After Frederick Douglass,” Du Bois wrote in his unpublished essay “The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington,” “Mr. Washington was the next great exemplification and revelation of problems of race and labor in America, so significant as to go to the very core of our democracy.”<sup>13</sup> Du Bois added,

Frederick Douglass emerged by the sheer logic of circumstance: He was “the noblest slave that ever God set free.” He was a living example of the evil of slavery, so unanswerable that he caught the imagination of the world. Then came a lull, a sort of troubled lifting of the darkened waters here and there, but so far as the White world was concerned, [there was] no real emergence of a definitely grasped individuality in the Colored race until Mr. Washington came.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 108.

<sup>12</sup> Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 46.

<sup>13</sup> Du Bois, “The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington.” The date of this article remains unclear. The *Du Bois Papers* at the Library of Congress has it cataloged as having been written in 1920. But in the *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* at the University of Massachusetts, there is a letter from Herbert Croly—the political philosopher and co-founder of *The New Republic*—to Du Bois dated January 20, 1916, in which Croly writes: “I am afraid that your article on ‘The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington’ is altogether too long for publication in *The New Republic*.” “New Republic. Letter from New Republic to W. E. B. Du Bois, January 20, 1916,” *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. The article was written very soon after Washington’s death (November 14, 1915) or, depending on how long it took Croly to write back, possibly before Washington’s death.

<sup>14</sup> Du Bois, “The Social Significance of Booker T. Washington.”

Du Bois then noted that Washington remained the undeniable leader of the race: “There was no question of Booker T. Washington’s undisputed leadership of the ten million Negroes in America.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, he added, “to discuss the Negro question in 1910 was to discuss Booker T. Washington.”<sup>16</sup> Du Bois, however, did not question the sincerity of Washington’s recurrent claim that he was continuing the work Douglass had begun, admittedly under far different circumstances. “I know Washington believed in what Frederick Douglass had crusaded for from emancipation until his death in 1895,” he told Ralph McGill in 1963.<sup>17</sup> “We talked about it,” Du Bois added for emphasis.<sup>18</sup>

To be clear, I am not arguing that Douglass and Washington had a significant public exchange. To my knowledge, they did not. They knew each other, and Douglass delivered his famous “Self-Made Men” speech at Tuskegee Institute. What I am contending is that Washington’s political vision and strategies were formed with reference to terms set by Douglass, whose spirit loomed large over black politics in the post-Reconstruction era.<sup>19</sup> Du Bois, in essence, understood all of this very well—hence the reason he illuminated and exaggerated how Washington had departed from Douglass in order to cloak himself in the legacy of Douglass. Washington also

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<sup>15</sup> Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 238.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph McGill, “Interview with W. E. B. Du Bois,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 216, no. 5 (November 1965): 78–81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963); Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 7th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); George M. Frederickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*.

wrapped himself in Douglass to authorize his own leadership and political thought. It was under Douglass's long shadow that Washington labored.

On September 18, 1895, Washington gave his famous speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. From that day until his death in 1915, Washington remained the undisputed leader of his race and one of its preeminent public intellectuals. But from the very beginning, Washington could not escape comparison to Douglass. This is true partly because Douglass had died a few months prior to Washington's speech and partly because Washington's tone and style were starkly different from Douglass's uncompromising political voice. For younger and more radical black leaders like William Monroe Trotter, Du Bois, and Ida B. Wells, Washington's leadership signaled a departure from the defiant and democratic visions Martin R. Delany and Douglass exemplified and the emergence of a new form of black politics. Du Bois and Wells later criticized Washington for his seemingly narrow emphasis on industrial education and farmers' alliances, as well as what they took to be a compromising, materialist politics.<sup>20</sup> In this chapter, then, I recover the forgotten intellectual relationship between Douglass and Washington. I first reconstruct the familiar reading of Douglass as having defined slavery as a condition of extreme personal domination. Douglass's emphasis on violence and his famous

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<sup>20</sup> For a radical discontinuity between Washington and Ida B. Wells, see Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Harper Collins Books, 2008), and for a stark contradiction between Du Bois and Washington, see, for example, Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 283–87; Roy L. Brooks, *Integration or Separatism: A Struggle for Racial Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 125–31; Jackson Lears, *The Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 131; Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 598–600; Adolph L. Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 53–70; Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, 68; West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, 39–40.

confrontation with his brutal overseer, Covey, have been the basis of a recent interpretation of Douglass as a theorist of republican freedom.<sup>21</sup> But the predominant interpretation of Douglass holds that Douglass was a liberal theorist whose commitment to freedom as self-ownership was clearly expressed in his literary depiction of slavery's denial of bodily integrity and its extortion of black labor.

Second, I argue that Washington's thought stood in a creative conflict with that of Douglass's. Washington sought to legitimize his leadership by projecting himself as continuing the work of Douglass while suggesting that Douglass was ill-equipped to confront white supremacy effectively. In short, he wanted to make clear that he was the legitimate heir of Douglass while also displacing Douglass. In so doing, Washington was also responding to Du Bois, who insisted that Douglass's protest politics were sufficient for combating Jim Crow. Instead, Washington argued that what remained relevant in the work of Douglass was not his defiant protest or his liberalism but rather his emphasis on structural inequalities and his portrayal of political judgment as an essential virtue of the politics of the dominated. These two themes in Douglass have been overlooked, partly because scholars have been beholden to Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). They have ignored or simply assumed that his third autobiography, *Life and Times* (1881), picked up his life's story where *My Bondage and My Freedom* left off.

Third, I argue that it is significant that Washington was most influenced by *Life and Times* because Douglass had not only expressed the challenges facing emancipated blacks but also revised his description of slavery to speak to the "Negro

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<sup>21</sup> Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 162–209.

Problem.” In short, it matters *which* autobiography of Douglass one draws on. Reading *Life and Times* as speaking to present problems, Douglass emphasized the structural and relational inequalities that marked slavery as an institution and the importance of cultivating political judgment for sustaining a subversive politics. Finally, in sections four and five I reconstruct the theme of structural domination in Douglass and then Washington, and in section six I outline Washington’s argument that Douglass had identified political judgment as the most important virtue for the enslaved.

### **1. The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass**

In 1885, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass wrote: The “slave must be brutalized to keep him a slave. The slaveholder feels this necessity. I admit this necessity.”<sup>22</sup> Douglass in part defined slavery as a condition of existence most marked by extreme acts of comprehensive and totalistic domination. “Absolute and arbitrary power can never be maintained by one man over the body and soul of another man, without brutal chastisement and enormous cruelty.”<sup>23</sup> From this “monstrous relation,” he wrote, sprang “an unceasing stream of most revolting cruelties.”<sup>24</sup> The “whip, the chain, the gag, the thumb-screw, the blood-hounds, the stocks, and all the other bloody paraphernalia of the slave system, are indispensably necessary to the relation of master to slave.”<sup>25</sup> “The first work of slavery,” Douglass said, was “to mar and deface those characteristics of its victims which distinguish *men* from *things*, and *persons* from

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* in *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 401–3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

*property.*”<sup>26</sup> It was therefore “necessary to resort to ... cruelties, in order to *make the slave a slave, and to keep him a slave.*”<sup>27</sup>

Douglass, then, identified the body of the slave as the site upon which the master inscribed and realized his power. He said that the slaveholder had “written his character on the living parchments of most of their backs.”<sup>28</sup> And he further argued that extreme bodily violence was instrumental to the security and smooth functioning of slavery, understood as an institution. Torture, then, was essential to the safekeeping and efficiency of slavery because it imposed on the enslaved a singular concern with survival, escaping not the institution but immediate bodily pain.<sup>29</sup> “[W]hen I was whipped within an inch of my life—*life* was all I cared for.... When I was looking for the blow about to be inflicted upon my head, I was not thinking of my liberty; it was my life.”<sup>30</sup> Torture, as Elaine Scarry has so compellingly argued, is a process of “unmaking.”<sup>31</sup> The “person in great pain experiences his own body as the agent of his agony. The ceaseless, self-announcing signal of the body in pain, at once so empty and undifferentiated and so full of blaring adversity, contains not only the feeling ‘my

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 421; emphasis original.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 402; emphasis original.

<sup>28</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 546.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Martha Nussbaum, who has shown how a starving person can sink below the threshold of the dignity proper to human life. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 402; emphasis original.

<sup>31</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

body hurts’ but the feeling ‘my body hurts me.’”<sup>32</sup> The radical discontinuity created between self and soma breaks down the former through the persistent cruelty and pain.

In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson insists that the “threat of naked force is the basis of the master-slave relationship.”<sup>33</sup> Slavery, no matter where and when it arose, always depended on extreme acts of personal power.<sup>34</sup> For Patterson, whose study is comparative and thus includes premodern and noncapitalist societies, honor rather than material profit is the shared basis of slavery, its ultimate end. He writes that the “master’s sense of honor is derived directly from the degradation of his slave, beginning in childhood and continuing through life in his despotic exercise of power.”<sup>35</sup> Thus slavery required “the direct and insidious violence, ... the endless personal violation, and the chronic inalienable dishonor” of the enslaved.<sup>36</sup> It is both honor and profit in the antebellum South, of course, since the recruitment of poor whites served as gendarmes. The literary scholar Saidiya Hartman agrees that slavery depended on “scenes of subjugation,” which served a disciplinary function essential to the instantiation of the master-slave relationship as one of power and powerlessness.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>33</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Drawing on Marx’s distinction between the “relations of personal dependence” that characterized feudal societies and the “fantastic form” of commodity fetishism, Patterson argues that the “idiom of power has two aspects,” the “personalistic and materialistic idioms. In the personalistic idiom, power is direct—or nearly so—and is frequently transparent,” whereas in the materialistic idiom, “relations of dependence are ‘disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labor.’” Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 18–19; Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 163–77, especially 169–70.

<sup>35</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>37</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjugation: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.

Slavery, she writes, “depended upon demonstrations of the slaveholder’s dominion and the captive’s abasement.”<sup>38</sup> The political scientist James Scott has extended this line of argument to capturing most forms of extreme domination—slavery, serfdom, Jim Crow, untouchability. He says that they are all “infused by an element of personal terror.”<sup>39</sup> The “visible, outward use of power is a symbolic gesture of domination that serves to manifest and reinforce a hierarchal order.”<sup>40</sup> And so says Foucault about medieval-early modern punishment: torture and spectacle and trial.<sup>41</sup>

For Douglass, however, violence served a more instrumental end. It blocked or frustrated purposive thought and action toward escaping slavery. Reflecting on his most violent tenure as a slave—his time with the brutal slave-breaker Covey—Douglass wrote that when he was “shrouded in darkness and physical wretchedness, temporal well-being was the grand desideratum.”<sup>42</sup> Thus the relationship between psyche, embodiment, and slavery is brought to light in the scene in which Douglass confronts Covey. For many readers, the scene is one that captures the transformative and redemptive power of violent resistance, rebellion. Douglass wrote that in fighting Covey he first achieved a profound *sense* of freedom.

Well, my dear reader, this battle with Mr. Covey ... was the turning point in my “*life as a slave*.” It rekindled in my breast the smoldering embers of liberty ... and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was *nothing* before; I *was a man* now. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect, and my self-confidence, and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 20–21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>41</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 3–72.

<sup>42</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 598.

inspired me with a renewed determination to be a *free man*. A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity. It was a *resurrection* from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery.... I had reached the point at which I *was not afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman in *fact*, though I still remained a slave in *form*.<sup>43</sup>

Douglass, as we see, distinguished a sense of freedom from real freedom. It does not, however, follow that his mortal combat with Covey, slavery's henchmen, was merely fleeting or insignificant. It did not free Douglass, but it was the catalyst for his escape and eventual emancipation.

Douglass said the fight “rekindled in [his] breast the smoldering embers of liberty” and “revived a sense of [his] own manhood” and “recalled to life [his] crushed self-respect, and [his] self-confidence, and inspired [him] with a renewed determination to be a *free man*.” The prefix is significant. “Re” says that the spirit, though battered and bruised, endured and lay waiting for its rebirth.<sup>44</sup> According to Henry Louis Gates, however, Douglass’s projected self always remained “transcendent.”<sup>45</sup> Douglass does not “allow us to witness his development as a person, precisely because he argues that he was always fully formed despite the horrors and brutalities of slavery. Paradoxically, Douglass argues that the self of the enslaved had suffered no essential damage ... and simultaneously that slavery did indeed work great damage upon all who dwelled within it.”<sup>46</sup>

Slavery as a system was an external world, an arena in which our hero, Douglass, had been tested, pushed, and maybe even brought to his knees a few times,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 591; emphasis original.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur Riss, *Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 164–85.

<sup>45</sup> Gates, *Figures in Black*, 112.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 111.

but who nevertheless remained unchanged. The unmaking, however stark, was incomplete. A few sentences after saying he was broken in body, soul, and spirit, that “the dark night of slavery closed in” upon him, Douglass insisted that at “times [he] would rise up and a flash of energetic freedom would dart through [his] soul, accompanied with a faint hope that flickered for a moment, and then vanished. [He] sank down again, mourning over [his] wretched condition.”<sup>47</sup> The self remained whole, even if battered, as the light flickered but did not go out. But I believe Gates overstates the case.

In Gates’s reading, the world of slavery is a static backdrop in which Douglass’s vigor and power were constrained. But he nonetheless remained existentially whole. Douglass, as a person, was not substantively different from chapter to chapter; there are no remarkable moments of transformation in his narratives. Upon Gates’s interpretation, we have a private and triumphant self set against a brutal world, which only reaffirms a hyper individualism. The language of entombment and resurrection also speaks to transcendence rather than struggle. But William L. Andrews interprets Douglass’s struggle with Covey as a “contribution to the literature of romantic individualism and anti-institutionalism.”<sup>48</sup> Andrews says that, in Douglass’s argument, “slavery was like a tomb, in which he languished in what Orlando Patterson would call ‘social death’ and from which he was resurrected only by rebellious effort.”<sup>49</sup> “The idea of heroic slaves like Douglass resurrecting

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<sup>47</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 572.

<sup>48</sup> William L. Andrews, “The Representation of Slavery and the Rise of Afro-American Literary Realism, 1865–1920,” in *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. William L. Andrews (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 77–78.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves from graves of the spirit by forceful resistance to authority undoubtedly appealed to an era fascinated by the romantic agon, the life-and-death contest of the spirit of revision against all that represses it,” insists Andrews.<sup>50</sup> Recently, Robert Gooding-Williams has used Douglass’s combat with Covey as the basis for interpreting Douglass as a theorist of republican freedom.<sup>51</sup> But we should not lose sight of the fact that the survivor of slavery is like the survivor of the Holocaust: their texts are necessarily incomplete, obfuscatory, distorted, and romanticized since it is almost impossible to put the trauma into words.<sup>52</sup>

Following “Philip Pettit’s recent reconstruction of the republican tradition of political thought,” argues Gooding-Williams, “we may say that one agent dominates another if, and only if, he possesses the power (the capacity) to interfere with that other on an arbitrary basis.”<sup>53</sup> He adds that “Douglass’s account of the nature of slavery ... conceptualizes the relationship of master to slave as, fundamentally, a form of domination.”<sup>54</sup> Gooding-Williams insists that since “the power of arbitrary interference is the substance of domination, curbing that power is tantamount to enforcing a limit on domination.”<sup>55</sup> He concludes that combat “is the means Douglass

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*.

<sup>52</sup> Dwight A. McBride, *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and Truth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 170–71.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 179.

deploys” to “curb Covey’s power arbitrarily to interfere in his life.”<sup>56</sup> The willingness to take radical action “brought Douglass (‘manly’) in-dependence, because it executed his determination no longer to depend for his well-being on Covey’s ‘merciful’ decision not to whip him.”<sup>57</sup> It is an interesting conclusion given that Pettit argued, “I suffer domination to the extent that I have a master; I enjoy non-interference to the extent that that master fails to interfere.”<sup>58</sup> But Pettit, who treats enslavement as mere metaphor or analytical illustration, uncritically moves from slavery to liberal-democratic subjecthood, failing to acknowledge that slavery is a special kind of domination and the violence therein is uniquely traumatizing.<sup>59</sup>

Gooding-Williams’s account fails for entirely other reasons. For instance, he draws an outcomes-based conclusion from a structure-based conception of domination. It is not clear that we can speak of “reduced” domination within Pettit’s conception.<sup>60</sup> As Frank Lovett argues, the slave would not be any less dominated since domination does not rest on the rate of arbitrary interference but *in* the social relation *as* a relation—“domination lies in the structure of the relationship, not in its results or

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.

<sup>59</sup> Frank Lovett, too, has the same blind spot in his *A General Theory of Domination and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> “Domination can occur without interference, because it requires only that someone have the capacity to interfere arbitrarily in your affairs; no one need actually interfere,” argues Pettit. If that is so, the rate of interference is politically and ethically insignificant. One is dominated or not dominated depending on how he stands socially, the relation in which he is a party to and not how that relation happens to unfold. Thus Pettit argues that “[n]on-domination in the sense that concerns us is the position that someone enjoys when they live in the presence of other people and when, *by virtue of social design*, none of those others dominates them.” Pettit, *Republicanism*, 23 and 67.

outcomes.”<sup>61</sup> Domination, then, is “understood to refer to the structure of a social relationship itself, and not the specific ways in which it happens to play out in some particular case.”<sup>62</sup> Douglass himself warned against reading too much into the political meaning of his fight with Covey. “I confess that the easy manner in which I got off was a surprise to me ... though the probability is that Covey was ashamed to have it known that he had been mastered by a boy of sixteen. He enjoyed the unbounded and very valuable reputation of being a first-rate overseer and negro-breaker.... His interest and his pride would mutually suggest the wisdom of passing the matter by in silence.”<sup>63</sup> An analytic of domination cannot provide a framework for a sympathetic reading of Douglass. The survivors of slavery, like Douglass, should be given tremendous leeway in terms of tropes used, iterations of story, changing views of what exactly happened, and what it means. That is in the very nature of surviving trauma.<sup>64</sup>

Most scholars, however, continue to read Douglass as an exemplary of the liberal tradition. Douglass’s depiction of corporeal suffering and the loss of bodily

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<sup>61</sup> Lovett, *A General Theory of Domination and Justice*, 47.

<sup>62</sup> As Frank Lovett argues, to the extent that strategies of resistance succeed, “the slave might seem not much worse off than some free persons. Indeed, the outcome-based view would seem to commit us to saying that, as a slave comes to understand his master’s psychological dispositions better and better, and thereby increasingly succeeds in avoiding overt abuse, he is less and less subject to domination.” Besides, a slave might become skilled at predicting his master; if he does, he would be “better able to cope with domination he is still subject to.” Lovett, *A General Theory of Domination and Justice*, 47 and 95.

<sup>63</sup> Covey could have acted differently and with impunity in all events. He chose arbitrarily—not out of an ethical concern for Douglass’s interest nor even having to fight him again—to protect his reputation. The relation of domination is also expressive: regardless of how a master treats a slave, say, hypothetically, he treats his slave as a free person in every regard and generally loves him, and the slave and master sincerely care for each other—as absurd as that may sound—the relationship of master to slave still expresses a harm; one is still socially recognized as master and the other as slave. Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 592.

<sup>64</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 912.

<sup>64</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

integrity did not merely appeal to readers' sympathy but instead brought their deeply held political and ethical commitments to liberalism into direct conflict with the institution of slavery. The horrific scenes he described illustrated slavery's denial of self-ownership and the right to reap the rewards of one's labor, facts no listener or reader of Douglass could have denied. But most antebellum Americans conceived of self-ownership in partly religious terms, as sacred self-sovereignty.<sup>65</sup> Thus the violence of slavery violated both liberal and Christian commitments to respecting the sovereignty of the individual, whether the self was understood as the individual's or God's property; political abolitionists drew from Douglass's vistas of violence an appeal to realize the liberal commitments outlined in the Constitution and moral abolitionists an illustration of how slavery violated Christian principles. Part of the genius of Douglass lay in the fact that he could script the horrors of slavery in such a way as to appeal simultaneously to Christian sensibilities and liberal values. Douglass and the radical abolitionists employed the notion of "sacred self-sovereignty" so as to affirm both the conviction that God resided within all people and the liberal ideal of individual autonomy.<sup>66</sup>

Douglass, however, is often read by contemporary critics in strictly secular terms as having affirmed a politics of self-proprietorship.<sup>67</sup> Scenes of torture made visible the institution's denial of property in self, which in turn defined emancipation

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<sup>65</sup> John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–20.

<sup>67</sup> Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–59.

as that of a “sovereign, self-owning individual.”<sup>68</sup> Antebellum blacks—both fugitive slaves and free—were deeply aware of white northerners’ professed political morality and thus deployed literary images and narrative structures that made visibly clear the ways in which slavery stood in stark contradiction to liberal values, as well as defined freedom in explicitly liberal terms. For example, Nancy Prince wrote that slaves were “determined to possess themselves, and to possess property.”<sup>69</sup> Douglass’s writings are replete with liberal assumptions, as is, for example, his liberal constitutionalism. The “Constitution of the United States not only contained no guarantees in favor of slavery, but, on the contrary, was in its letter and spirit an anti-slavery instrument, demanding the abolition of slavery as a condition of its own existence as the supreme law of the land.”<sup>70</sup> In a private letter to William Lloyd Garrison, Douglass wrote that freedom meant “appropriating [his] own body to [his] use.”<sup>71</sup> In his writings and speeches, Douglass depicted the concrete ways in which slavery denied political and personal autonomy, thus negatively defining freedom in classical liberal terms.

In other words, he affirmed a liberal conception of freedom as negative liberty through an aesthetic of tortured, bounded, and brutalized bodies.<sup>72</sup> From these depictions, slavery was seen as a system that denied the enslaved the right to self-ownership, that is, a right to bodily integrity and freedom from being compelled by

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 27–24.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Ronald G. Walters, “The Boundaries of Abolitionism,” in *Antislavery Reconsidered*, ed. Michael Fellman and Lewis Perry (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 9.

<sup>70</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 705.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth B. Clark, “‘The Sacred Rights of the Weak’: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America,” *Journal of American History* 82 (September 1995): 463–93.

<sup>72</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. Isaiah Berlin (London: Oxford University Press, 2002).

law and forced to provide labor and services to others.<sup>73</sup> For example, Douglass said that when his owner took his earnings from the work he did in the shipyard, the act was nothing short of theft. “He had the power to compel me to give him the fruits of my labor, and this *power* was his only right in the case,” Douglass said, but “I contracted for it, worked for it, collected it; it was paid to me, and it was *rightfully* my own.”<sup>74</sup> The emphasis he placed on contract and the right to one’s labor is unmistakable. The right of his owner to extort his labor was indefensible. “The right to take my earnings was the right of the robber,” wrote Douglass.<sup>75</sup>

Douglass’s postemancipation thought also affirmed a commitment to economic and political liberalism. In an 1881 article titled “The Color Line,” Douglass wrote that “all arbitrary barriers” should be removed “and a fair chance in the race of life be given” to the former slave.<sup>76</sup> Five years later, he wrote privately to W. H. Thomas: “Give the Negro fair play and an equal chance in the race of life, and I have no doubt of a happy future.”<sup>77</sup> Lincoln, too, often spoke of freedom as the race of life.

It is in order that each of you may have, through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Dred Scott v. Sandford: A Brief History with Documents* (The Bedford Series in History and Culture), ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Bedford-St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

<sup>74</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 634.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Frederick Douglass, “The Color Line,” in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and adapted by Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 651.

<sup>77</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Letter to W. H. Thomas, July 16, 1886,” in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and adapted by Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 705.

<sup>78</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Address to the 166th Ohio Regiment, August 22, 1864,” in *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1859–1865* (New York: Library of America, 1989), 624.

The metaphor of life as a race encapsulated a liberal ideology, the “creed is competitive individualism,” writes Isaac Kramnick.<sup>79</sup> When President Lyndon Johnson delivered his 1965 commencement speech at Howard University to announce his policy of affirmative action, Lincoln and Douglass may certainly have been on his mind: “You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say ‘you are free to compete with all others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.”<sup>80</sup>

The importance of competitive individualism and self-proprietorship is certainly present in Douglass’s work. When asked what he thought the government should do concerning emancipated slaves, Douglass answered: “Do nothing with them.”<sup>81</sup> “Your doing with them is their greatest misfortune,” he said.<sup>82</sup> In 1888 Douglass wrote:

The true object for which governments are ordained among men is to protect the weak against the encroachments of the strong, to hold its strong arm of justice over all the civil relations of its citizens and to see that all have an equal chance in the race of life. Now, in the case of the Negro citizen, our national government does precisely the reverse of all this.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>80</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “The Howard University Address,” in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*, ed. Lee Rainwater and W. L. Yancey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

<sup>81</sup> Frederick Douglass, “What Shall Be Done with the Slaves if Emancipated,” *Douglass Monthly* (Jan. 1862), in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and adapted by Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 470–73.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Frederick Douglass, “I Denounce the So-Called Emancipation as a Stupendous Fraud,” speech on the twenty-sixth anniversary of emancipation in the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C., April 16, 1888, in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and adapted by Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 720.

In “Self-Made Men,” Douglass insisted that equality of opportunity was all that the emancipated slaves asked of the federal government and their fellow citizens. “Give the Negro fair play and let him alone. If he lives, well. If he dies, equally well. If he cannot stand up, let him fall down.”<sup>84</sup> Douglass, then, seemed to have embodied what C. B. Macpherson called “possessive individualism,” which Macpherson defined as the view of the individual as “free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities.”<sup>85</sup> But Douglass’s conception of fair play was quite demanding.

Nevertheless, Douglass’s use of the Declaration of Independence in criticism of slavery, his liberal constitutionalism, and his postwar rhetoric of self-help and economic uplift have led many scholars to interpret him as laissez-faire. Historians, in particular, have interpreted Douglass as a laissez-faire liberal who embodied American individualism. Wilson Jeremiah Moses wrote that Douglass’s economic thought was “essentially laissez faire formulae for black advancement through individual commitment by individual blacks to the gospel of work and wealth.”<sup>86</sup> William S. McFeely, one of Douglass’s finest biographers, has argued, in *Frederick Douglass*, that Douglass’s postemancipation rhetoric of self-help affirmed the reasoning of white redeemers.<sup>87</sup> In his intellectual biography of Douglass, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, historian Waldo E. Martin Jr. insists that Douglass should be read as not

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<sup>84</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Self-Made Men,” in *Race and Liberty in America: The Essential Reader*, ed. Johnathan Bean (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 110.

<sup>85</sup> C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 3.

<sup>86</sup> Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925*, 96.

<sup>87</sup> William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 303.

just an abolitionist and black leader but a profound American intellectual, one whose thought reflected several strands of nineteenth-century thought.

But Douglass's debt to liberal individualism ran deepest and was thus most prevalent.<sup>88</sup> "Douglass's characterizations of self-made men accented his deep belief in laissez-faire liberalism: the pioneering and heady individualism so fundamental to American concepts of self-elevation and achievement."<sup>89</sup> David W. Blight writes, in his study *Frederick Douglass's Civil War*, that "American individualism had few better proponents than the postwar Douglass who celebrated 'self-made men.'"<sup>90</sup> And John Patrick Diggins argues that a strand of black political thought that "emphasizes a liberal individualism based on initiative in the private sphere, self-development, work and thrift, the rationality of economic life, personal responsibility, and the integration with the larger white society" runs "from Frederick Douglass to Booker T. Washington to our contemporary Shelby Steele and Thomas Sowell."<sup>91</sup> After seeing the federal government as doing nothing but acting to promote slavery before Lincoln, Douglass's lack of faith in the federal government is most understandable.

Douglass's postwar activism and writings, however, did call for federal programs to assist emancipated black Southerners. His apparent principled liberalism or libertarianism is historically contingent. If Douglass is read as a political philosopher committed to the analytical framework of classical liberalism, then he

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<sup>88</sup> Waldo E. Martin Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>90</sup> David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass's Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 195.

<sup>91</sup> Diggins, *On Hallowed Ground*, 275.

landed himself in a web of inconsistencies. Douglass, as Martin has shown, insisted that Reconstruction should embrace “full political, civil, and economic equality for the freedpeople.”<sup>92</sup> Douglass wrote in *Life and Times* that while “slavery was abolished, the wrongs of my people were not ended. Though they were not slaves, they were not yet quite free.”<sup>93</sup> “Our reconstruction efforts were radically defective. They left the former slave completely in the power of the old master,” argued Douglass.<sup>94</sup> And he did not end there.

In the hurry and confusion of the hour, and the eager desire to have the Union restored, there was more care for the sublime superstructure of the republic than for the solid foundation upon which it alone could be upheld. To the freedmen was given the machinery of liberty, but there was denied to them the steam to put it in motion.<sup>95</sup>

Wilson Moses notes that “Douglass’s moral reasoning, unassailable though it was, did not provide answers to the problems of what to do after the destruction of slavery.”<sup>96</sup>

This tension in Douglass’s thought leads to a second line of interpretative debate: the question as to whether Douglass was an inconsistent or simply egalitarian liberal. Martin notes that the “paradox of Douglass’s conception of Reconstruction, as well as that of his libertarian political colleagues, was his insistence on both a political economy of laissez-faire individualism and the federal government’s duty to assist the freedpeople in their transition to complete freedom.”<sup>97</sup> Douglass “typically advocated both self-reliant individualism and federal aid to the freedpeople as mutually

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<sup>92</sup> Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 67.

<sup>93</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 815.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 932.

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

<sup>96</sup> Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 67.

consistent in the context of the legacy of slavery.”<sup>98</sup> Blight argues that Douglass’s prewar political principles ran counter to his postwar commitments, resulting in “several unresolved contradictions” in his “postwar thought: a fierce belief in the sanctity of private property while demanding land for the powerless freedpeople; laissez-faire individualism and black self-reliance coupled with demands for federal aid to the freedpeople.”<sup>99</sup>

Political theorists have tried to reconcile Douglass’s prewar and postwar thought. Three of the most recent studies have sought to bridge what seem to be unbridgeable contradictions. The “unifying core in Douglass’s political thought,” argues Peter C. Myers in *Frederick Douglass: Race and Rebirth of American Liberalism*, consists of “his distinctive interpretation of the natural rights doctrine, applied particularly to race relations in the United States.”<sup>100</sup> Myers adds that Douglass’s postwar politics of self-reliance flowed from his commitment to self-ownership, which was fundamental to Douglass’s natural rights arguments against slavery, a set of arguments that echoed the thought of John Locke.<sup>101</sup> Myers insists that persons are “self-owners so far as they are self-makers,” and thus for “Douglass, the principle of self-making could not be reduced to an expression of American mythology or a middle-class, bourgeois prejudice.”<sup>102</sup> “In order to close the gap between the promises of liberalism and the realities of American life,” according to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 67, and 55–91.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>100</sup> Myers, *Frederick Douglass*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Nicholas Buccola in his study of Douglass's political thought, "Douglass infused his political philosophy with an egalitarian ethos of inclusion and a robust conception of mutual responsibility."<sup>103</sup> Buccola insists that Douglass "directs us to think about the ways in which the liberal goal of securing the conditions necessary for the exercise of personal freedom depends upon the prevalence of a robust sense of mutual responsibility."<sup>104</sup> Both Myers and Buccola seek to incorporate Douglass's postwar rhetoric of self-help within a set of consistently normative commitments.

Douglass's egalitarian liberalism arose from the simple fact that one can be "legally free, politically enfranchised, and economically helpless in America."<sup>105</sup> The political scientist Michael C. Dawson argues that Douglass was the founder of the radical egalitarian tradition in black political thought, a tradition that runs from Douglass to Wells to King.<sup>106</sup> Jack Turner's *Awakening to Race* offers the most consistent and compelling reading of Douglass's later thought as consistent with his earlier antislavery work.<sup>107</sup> Turner rightly shows that the criticism by Martin and Blight is overstated. He instead offers a reading of Douglass as an egalitarian liberal by reminding readers that in the American intellectual tradition, self-reliance has always presupposed social, economic, and political preconditions of self-support. Most significant for our purposes, he elucidates Douglass's understanding of fair play

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<sup>103</sup> Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass*, 12.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>106</sup> Dawson, *Black Visions*, 15–17.

<sup>107</sup> Jack Turner, *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

as requiring “more than noninterference.”<sup>108</sup> Fair play, argues Turner, “often requires positive material provisions.”<sup>109</sup> Thus Douglass was consistent in his “dual commitment to both self-help and social assistance.”<sup>110</sup> Turner insists, “Douglass supports government action to facilitate the self-help of citizens”<sup>111</sup>—hence “[his] support of a national education system, federal initiative facilitating black land ownership, and ... his belief in the right of citizens to the material rudiments of self-help when neither nature nor the free market provide them.”<sup>112</sup>

As I pointed out in the introduction, several scholars have noted continuity between Douglass and Washington. Since Washington is not their primary or secondary interest, his political thought is rarely engaged. It is therefore easy to take the predominant reading of Washington as a laissez-faire liberal who preached an ethics of self-help and economic uplift as intellectually indebted to what, as we have seen, some Douglass scholars have noted as Douglass’s postemancipation turn to a thin self-reliance and individualism. But as Turner has shown, Douglass’s later thought can hardly be conceived of as individualist in the libertarian sense of the term: Douglass, in fact, was closer to Emersonian self-reliance.<sup>113</sup>

Since most hold the assumption that Washington’s uplift politics rested on a laissez-faire conception of self-reliance, it is a short step to seeing him as following on the heels of Douglass. Moreover, historians and political theorists, in their desire to

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Turner, *Awakening to Race*.

reconcile the tensions in Douglass's thought, have failed to carefully attend to the practical context within which Douglass's thought evolved. To do so would move Douglass onto a more realist ground.<sup>114</sup> David Blight is the lone exception, and he confined his study to the Civil War.<sup>115</sup> Waldo Martin insists that Douglass's thought is best viewed over the course of his long life and against the shifting political and intellectual contexts within which he found himself, but Martin rarely situates Douglass within concrete political struggles nor does he carefully outline Douglass's explicit political aims in each era.<sup>116</sup>

While our task as political theorists is to emphasize the *political thought* of our subject, neglecting the concrete political struggles in which his or her political vision was formed has more than intellectual biographical consequences.<sup>117</sup> This is particularly true in American and black political thought.<sup>118</sup> To attend to action and

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<sup>114</sup> The seeming contradictions in Douglass's thought would seem less so if we read Douglass as a realist who is responding to a shifting political terrain, abandoning old positions for new and more feasible ones. Bonnie Honig and Marc Stears, "The New Realism: From Modus Vivendi to Justice," in *Political Philosophy versus History*, ed. Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 177–205.

<sup>115</sup> Blight, *Frederick Douglass's Civil War*. Blight was nevertheless deeply critical of Douglass's postemancipation thought, but the scope of his own study precluded him from giving Douglass's later thought a historical contextual treatment.

<sup>116</sup> Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, x.

<sup>117</sup> Historical conceptualism places primary emphasis on the historical conditions and the intellectual context of the political theorist of a given intellectual era. See, for example, Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, vol. 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Dunn, "The History of Political Theory," in *The History of Political Theory and Other Essays*, ed. John Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and James Tully, ed., *Meaning in Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>118</sup> Despite the emphasis on political claims and texts as speech acts, a form of political action, the historical conceptualism of Skinner and company approach tends to locate each text within a narrow discursive intellectual community. In this sense, context often simply means intellectual context, often consisting of a familiar set of authors and texts. For black political thought, especially under Jim Crow or slavery, institutional violence and systematic oppression have to be included as part of the larger social and political context within which each speech or text is performed or written. To this end, I agree with Strauss that persecution "gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a

concrete political struggle is not to minimize the role of the thinker as a theorist. Rather, it brings to light the relationship between context and text, thought and action, philosophy and politics, ideal aims and nonideal strategies. To ignore the fact that Douglass's thought was deeply influenced by the shifting terrain of antislavery politics and then what became known as the "Negro Question" obscures the substance of Douglass's thought itself. For Douglass, like Washington, political thought was more than a set of formal propositions that had to be logically reconciled on a purely ahistorical/abstract plane; political thought was fundamentally concerned with the vicissitudes of politics.<sup>119</sup>

Douglass's ultimate commitment was to achieving freedom and equality for blacks, and toward this end he employed, within limits, those ideas and means that were most serviceable to the task at hand.<sup>120</sup> He deployed liberal ideals to combat slavery because they would be and did prove to be effective for achieving emancipation. My central aim, however, is to recover Washington's understanding of Douglass, as conveyed by Washington himself. Thus Washington's interpretation of Douglass as a forerunner to his own political thought is more than plausible. To

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peculiar type of literature," but I do not endorse his conclusion that "the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only." Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 25.

<sup>119</sup> Douglass thought of politics in much the same way that Raymond Geuss does: "First, political philosophy must be realist. That means, roughly speaking, that it must start from and be concerned in the first instance not with how people ought ideally (or ought 'rationally') to act, what they ought to desire, or value, the kind of people they ought to be, etc., but, rather, with the way social, economic, political, etc., institutions actually operate in some society at some given time, and what really does move human beings to act in given circumstances." *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>120</sup> As Marc Stears argues, democratic realists often have to strategically employ nonideal means to realize ideal ends. *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1–20.

reiterate, Douglass and Washington did not converge around a shared commitment to liberalism, grossly doctrinaire antigovernment laissez-faire market liberalism, that is, a caricature of today's libertarianism that not even Robert Nozick himself would endorse.<sup>121</sup>

## **2. Inheriting and Disinheriting Douglass**

Washington's legitimacy rested, in part, on publically presenting his leadership as an extension of Douglass's work. And yet Washington's practical success required a departure from Douglass's normative commitments and style of politics. Because his leadership was located in the South, Washington had to be prudent, which meant he could not strike the defiant and uncompromising tone that Douglass had struck in his struggle against slavery. Douglass pitched his arguments to Northern white abolitionists and was himself located in the North.<sup>122</sup> Washington's challenge, then, was how to simultaneously define his leadership as continuous with the legacy of Douglass while also establishing a viable presence in the teeth of the Jim Crow conditions of the South. Washington's strategies were more feasible than Douglass's, given the nature of white supremacy and the constraints placed on Afro-southerners.

To do so, Washington transfigured Douglass by reinterpreting two themes in Douglass's third autobiography, *Life and Times*, as evidence that Douglass was his philosophical touchstone. Specifically, Washington emphasized and adopted Douglass's structural account of slavery and his emphasis on political judgment; these

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<sup>121</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

<sup>122</sup> Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*.

elements, Washington argued, were essential to the politics of the enslaved. But before we can take up these two themes, it is worth looking at Washington's ambivalent relationship to Douglass's thought. If Washington's political preeminence required depicting himself as continuing Douglass's legacy, his own sense of legacy and historical significance demanded that he also take Douglass's place.

In his third autobiography, *My Larger Education*, Washington said that hearing "so much about Douglass" made him desire to read his writing just so he could find out what Douglass had written and said. Washington wrote that Douglass's *Life and Times* "made a deep impression" on him and he "read it many times."<sup>123</sup> But for Washington, Douglass was no mere object of reverence. Douglass was a public symbol to be interpreted and treated as a source of inspiration, and a challenging landmark on the path to full emancipation. Douglass had come to stand as a symbol of the entire era. In his writings, Washington would tend to locate Douglass as a courageous leader of the previous struggle. Moreover, he sought to suggest to his readers and audiences that those who insisted that the old abolitionist politics of Douglass were all that were needed to effectively combat Jim Crow were politically naïve. He depicted himself as the only leader who understood the singularity of the problem of white supremacy—for Washington, Jim Crow was no mere continuation of slavery. Thus Douglass's protest politics and thin liberalism were infeasible political responses to the oppressive conditions tracking black life in the postemancipation South.

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<sup>123</sup> Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education: Chapters from My Experience* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 98.

Douglass, however, lived until 1895 and said a lot about the rise of white supremacy. He wrote that although “slavery was abolished, the wrongs of [his] people were not ended. Though they were not slaves, they were not yet quite free.”<sup>124</sup> Douglass argued that continued oppression and exploitation of Afro-southerners were consequences of the economic inequalities and vulnerabilities inherited from slavery, an idea that would prove influential on Washington’s own assessment of white supremacy. To understand the stark conditions of emancipated blacks, Douglass said we have to “only reflect for a moment upon the situation in which these people found themselves when liberated. Consider their ignorance, their poverty, their destitution, and their absolute dependence upon the very class by which they had been held in bondage for centuries, a class whose every sentiment was averse to their freedom.”<sup>125</sup>

“Until it shall be safe to leave the lamb in the hold of the lion, the laborer in the power of the capitalist, the poor in the hands of the rich,” Douglass said, “it will not be safe to leave a newly emancipated people completely in the power of their former masters.”<sup>126</sup> And this was exactly what was done after emancipation, argued Douglass.

History does not furnish an example of emancipation under conditions less friendly to the emancipated class than this American example. Liberty came to the freedmen of the United States not in mercy, but in wrath, not by moral choice, but by military necessity.... The very manner of their emancipation invited to the heads of the freedmen the bitterest hostility of race and class. They were hated because they had been slaves, hated because they were now free, and hated because of those who had freed them. Nothing was to have been expected other than what happened ... the old master class would naturally employ

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<sup>124</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 816.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 933.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 819.

every power and means in their reach to make the great measure of emancipation unsuccessful and utterly odious.<sup>127</sup>

“Now, since poverty has, and can have, no chance against wealth, the landless against the landowner, the ignorant against the intelligent,” he added, “the freedman was powerless.”<sup>128</sup> “Though no longer a slave,” the freedman, Douglass further argued, “is in a thralldom grievous and intolerable, compelled to work for whatever his employer is pleased to pay him, swindled out of his earnings by money orders redeemed in stores, compelled to pay four times more than fair price,... and to be kept upon the narrowest margin between life and starvation.”<sup>129</sup>

Douglass insisted that these conditions were exacerbated by the failures of Reconstruction. “Do you ask me how, after all that has been done, this state of things had been made possible? I will tell you. Our reconstruction efforts were radically defective. They left the former slave completely in the power of the old master, the loyal citizen in the hand of the disloyal rebel against the government.”<sup>130</sup> He said that the federal government “had felt that it had done enough” for the slave.

It had made him free, and henceforth must make his own way in the world. Yet he had none of the conditions for self-preservation or self-protection. He was free from the individual master, but the slave to society. He had neither money, property, nor friends. He was free from the old plantation, but he had nothing but the dust road under his feet. He was free from the old quarters that gave him shelter.... He was, in a word, literally turned loose, naked, hungry, and destitute to the open sky. The first feeling toward him by the old master classes was full of bitterness and wrath.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 933.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 816.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 933.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 932.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 815.

Douglass goes on to say:

In the hurry and confusion of the hour, and the eager desire to have the Union restored, there was more care for the sublime superstructure of the republic than for the solid foundation upon which it could alone be upheld. To the freedmen was given the machinery of liberty, but there was denied to them the steam to put it into motion. They were given the uniform of soldiers, but no arms; they were called citizens, but left subjects; they were called free, but left almost slaves. The old master class was not deprived of the power of life and death, which was the soul of the relation of master and slave. They could not, of course, sell their former slaves, but they retained the power to starve them to death, and wherever this power is held there is the power of slavery. He who can say to his fellow-man, 'You shall serve me or starve,' is a master and his subject is a slave.<sup>132</sup>

He thus asked, "How stands the case with the recently emancipated millions of colored people in our own country?"<sup>133</sup>

Douglass's answer, sobering as it was, had to have been shockingly depressing. He said, if "only from the national statute book we were left to learn the true condition of the colored race, the result would be altogether creditable to the American people."<sup>134</sup> "By law, by the constitution of the United States," he observed, "slavery has no existence in our country. The legal form has been abolished. By the law and the constitution, the negro is a man and a citizen, and has all the rights and liberties guaranteed."<sup>135</sup> But this "is our condition on paper and parchment."<sup>136</sup> Douglass's point was that de jure law should not be confused with the realities of the postemancipation South. He argued that in "most Southern States, the fourteenth and

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 932.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 931.

fifteenth amendments are virtually nullified.”<sup>137</sup> The rights guaranteed by emancipation are now “denied and held in contempt.”<sup>138</sup> As a result, the “old master class is to-day triumphant, and the newly enfranchised class in a condition but little above that in which they were found before rebellion.”<sup>139</sup>

Douglass was not at a loss when it came to assessing the conditions of emancipated blacks, even if he did not have a clear political response. What is striking is Washington’s intellectual debt to Douglass’s assessment of the rise of white supremacy, despite his tepid and rare acknowledgments to Douglass in this regard. Washington said that Douglass knew that he did not fully comprehend or appreciate the complexities of the conditions of the postemancipation South. “In his later years he [Douglass] came to understand that the problem, on the work of solving which he and others had entered with such high hopes in the Reconstruction period, was larger and more complicated than it at that time seemed.”<sup>140</sup> This was largely due to the fact that Douglass was of the past, argued Washington. Douglass had “lived in a great transitional period, and, in his struggle to gain his own freedom, he personified the historic events which took place during his time.”<sup>141</sup> “Frederick Douglass and Anti-slavery,” Washington added, “are almost interchangeable terms. In himself he

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 932.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 348.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 302.

[Douglass] was both the argument and demonstration of the things that gave interest and meaning to his life and times.”<sup>142</sup>

Washington therefore borrowed Douglass’s diagnosis of Jim Crow but displaced Douglass’s political leadership into the past as only speaking to the problem of slavery and the struggle for emancipation.<sup>143</sup> Washington’s criticism of Douglass is subtle. He enthusiastically linked Douglass to antislavery and the Civil War, but Washington also suggested that Douglass’s politics were antiquated and thus ineffective for the present.

Frederick Douglass’s life fell in the period of war, of controversy, and of fierce party strife. The task which was assigned to him was, on the whole, one of destruction and liberation, rather than one of construction and reconciliation. Circumstances and his own temperament made him the aggressive champion of his people, and of all others to whom custom or law denied the privileges which he had learned to regard as the inalienable possession of men.<sup>144</sup>

By identifying Douglass with party politics, Washington also suggested that Douglass had retained faith in the Republican Party as the engine for elevating the emancipated slaves, even after the collapse of Reconstruction. Scholars have noted that Douglass’s postwar thought gave emphasis to the self-help and uplift themes Washington later made famous, but they have often ignored Washington’s radical departure from Douglass, insofar as Washington did not consider the Republican Party a credible agent for pursuing black equality. Unlike Douglass, Washington was willing to play a complex game of telling white supporters one thing (quietism) while secretly carrying

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Gates, for example, notes that “Washington intends to subsume Douglass, as well as use him to sanctify the passing of the mantle of black leadership.” Gates, *Figures in Black*, 108.

<sup>144</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 349.

out radical advocacy, often on an anonymous basis, as I will show in the following chapters.

Second, Washington suggested that Douglass's liberalism, his emphasis on negative rights, had to be amended if it were to effectively address the positive economic and social resources required to enable African American self-reliance and uplift. In *My Larger Education*, Washington argued that "Mr. Douglass's great life-work had been in the political agitation that led to the destruction of slavery. He had been the great defender of the race, and in the struggle to win from Congress and from the country at large the recognition of the Negro's rights as a man and a citizen he had played an important part."<sup>145</sup> But it is the third line of attack that I think is most significant—the claim that Douglass's personality and political experience made him incapable of leading the race in their new struggle. Washington wrote that "the long and bitter political struggle in which he had engaged against slavery had not prepared Mr. Douglass to take up the equally difficult task of fitting the Negro for the opportunities and responsibilities of freedom."<sup>146</sup>

Douglass's appeal to rights and justice was effective in aiding the abolition of slavery but could not render the same results against Jim Crow. Washington concluded, "I felt that the millions of Negroes needed something more than to be reminded of their sufferings and of their political rights; that they needed to do something more than merely to defend themselves."<sup>147</sup> In other words, Washington's critique of Douglass was not that Douglass completely failed to anticipate or

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<sup>145</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 101.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

understand the oppressive and exploitative conditions in the postemancipation South; it was rather that Douglass's personality and philosophical and party commitments made him a great leader who "had played" an important role in the *past* but were ineffective for the political problems of the present. What Washington grasped was the importance of new emancipatory and autonomous black institutions: schools, colleges, economic cooperatives, newspapers, even entire black villages and towns. This line of argument was also an attack on figures such as Oswald Villard and Du Bois, who insisted that black political action ought to return to Douglass's protest politics. By locating and isolating Douglass in the past, Washington was in fact arguing that his radical critics, such as Trotter, Du Bois, Villard, and Wells, who are recovering Douglass's politics, fundamentally misunderstood the nature of Jim Crow.

Washington said, "Frederick Douglass died in February, 1895. In September of that same year I delivered an address in Atlanta at the Cotton States Exposition."<sup>148</sup> To project himself as the future of the race against the image of Douglass as the past, Washington linked his emergence as the leader of the race to the death of Douglass. He did so to identify himself as continuing the work that Douglass had begun and therefore as the rightful heir of Douglass. But Washington also constructed himself as a leader who was more equipped than Douglass in regard to combating Jim Crow white supremacy.

One of the most surprising results of my Atlanta speech was the number of letters, telegrams, and newspaper editorials that came pouring in upon me from all parts of the country, demanding that I take the place of 'leader of the Negro people,' left vacant by Frederick Douglass's death, or assuming that I had already taken this place.... I

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 101.

was at that time merely a Negro school teacher in a rather obscure industrial school.<sup>149</sup>

Washington argued that Douglass understood the struggle for freedom as requiring first the abolition of slavery and then the uplifting of the black masses. Washington wrote that in the postemancipation era, Douglass faced the terrible implications of his earlier argument that the task “was not merely to emancipate but to elevate the enslaved class.”<sup>150</sup> Because Douglass lacked the public temperament to be effective in executing this latter task or simply because he died, Washington was, in the end, called to carry out the uplifting of the race.

Washington, in sum, argued that Douglass realized that Jim Crow constituted a new front in the war for freedom, but his temperament and politics—the decline of his effectiveness more so than his actual death—created a historical vacuum in which a new leader could emerge, one who would continue the work Douglass had begun. Washington claimed that he himself was compelled by the people to take up and revise Douglass’s work. This was a post not to his liking, but he reluctantly accepted it.<sup>151</sup>

Did Washington slip the proverbial knife in Douglass’s back? In a strange way, Douglass made his back available. Douglass wrote that he had a public duty “to make slavery odious and thus hasten the day of emancipation.”<sup>152</sup> “I was called upon to expose my stripes,” he added, and “with many misgivings obeyed the summons and

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>150</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 245.

<sup>151</sup> This is an old idea. For example, Plato’s philosopher king is the new leader who is wise but humble and not ambitious, being concerned with a virtuous life first and foremost. Plato, *The Republic*. In Exodus, Moses, too, plays the role of the reluctant prophet.

<sup>152</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 939.

tried thus to do my whole duty in this my first public work and what I may say proved to be the best work of my life.”<sup>153</sup> But Douglass also wrote, “I find myself summoned again by the popular voice and by what is called the negro problem, to come a second time upon the witness stand and give evidence upon disputed points concerning myself and my emancipated brothers and sisters who, though free, are yet oppressed and are in as much need of an advocate as before they were set free.”<sup>154</sup> In 1881 Douglass wrote that he was not altogether prepared for the radical incompleteness of emancipation. Yet he was never one to shirk from duty. “Though this is not altogether as agreeable to me as was my first mission, it is one that comes with such commanding authority as to compel me to accept it as a present duty.”<sup>155</sup> And he stressed that the new is never easy. “A man in the situation in which I found myself has not only to divest himself to the old, which is never easily done, but to adjust himself to the new, which is still more difficult.”<sup>156</sup> These remarks suggest that Washington made use of Douglass’s ambivalences or, put more favorably, highlighted them. Washington, however, did not manufacture them. With the “negro problem,” Douglass said, “I am pelted with all sorts of knotty questions, some of which might be difficult, even for Humboldt.”<sup>157</sup>

### **3. Douglass’s Autobiographical Acts**

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 812.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 939.

While historians and political theorists have sought to situate Douglass within either the liberal or republican tradition in American thought, they have often ignored Douglass's stylistic choices. In particular, what should we conclude from the fact that Douglass decided to write three autobiographies? He was one of the most profound philosophical thinkers of the nineteenth century; the problem was not one of rhetorical deficits.<sup>158</sup> They have also ignored how Douglass's thought evolved from one autobiography to another. Waldo Martin is an exception, in that he insists that Douglass's thought has to be read against his long life.<sup>159</sup> Gooding-Williams, drawing on Martin, notes the singularity of the text he draws upon for his republican reading of Douglass. He says his reading of Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) is not an interpretation of Douglass's "'basic philosophy' as it evolves over the course of his long and complicated intellectual career."<sup>160</sup> He adds that

Douglass's second autobiography exhibits a communitarian sensibility largely missing from the *Narrative* [1845], while the third telling of his life's story [1881, revised in 1892]—particularly in parts not already appearing in *Bondage* [1855]—through its emphases on the self-made man and economic self-help, recoups the *Narrative*'s individualism and suggests a stronger kinship with Booker T. Washington than is evident in either *Bondage* or in Du Bois's representation of Douglass in *Souls*.<sup>161</sup>

Gooding-Williams seems to contend that the fundamental difference between *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times* (1881, revised in 1892) emerges in the added sections in the third autobiography, which includes discussions of the Civil

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<sup>158</sup> Douglass wrote three autobiographies: *Narrative* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, revised in 1892).

<sup>159</sup> Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, x.

<sup>160</sup> Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 166.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

War, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction era. While this is obviously true, it can lead to the assumption that *Life and Times* simply picks up where *Bondage* left off. Douglass wrote *Life and Times* in 1881, four years after the 1877 compromise that killed Reconstruction. Douglass added reflections that showed an astute sense of the times. But Douglass's loyalty and place in the Republican Party often mediated his criticisms, especially of Hayes, who appointed Douglass U.S. marshal of the District of Columbia.<sup>162</sup>

I think many Douglass scholars share a similar assumption, which leads to the conviction that the central tension in Douglass's work arises out of his reliance on the philosophical tools of classical liberalism to combat slavery and his later retreat from those liberal ideals when he addressed the economic and social inequalities tracking black life in the postemancipation South. But in doing so, they confound theme with chronology. For instance, they are inattentive to the ways in which Douglass used his third autobiography to reimagine slavery through the prism of the "Negro Problem." I would argue that this makes *Life and Times* a fundamentally different text than *My Bondage and My Freedom*, not *only* because of its reflections on postemancipation conditions but because those reflections and concerns shaped how Douglass rewrote his account of his enslavement. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to reconstruct the specific ways in which Douglass, in *Life and Times*, revised his earlier depictions of slavery so that they might speak more directly to present concerns. Instead, I want to

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<sup>162</sup> President Hayes told Douglass during a meeting in February 1877 that he would pursue conciliation with the South but that he would continue to protect the rights of African Americans. Hayes was inaugurated on March 5, and on March 17 he appointed Douglass U.S. marshal of the District of Columbia. When Hayes made the decision to withdraw federal troops supporting Reconstruction in South Carolina and Louisiana, Douglass did not protest. See "Chronology," *Autobiographies*, 1069–70.

stress the fact that Douglass was a self-conscious stylist who used each of his narratives toward very different personal and political ends.

By the 1890s, Douglass was already a public myth. He became an “American icon” not by accident but by conscious artistic and journalistic efforts.<sup>163</sup> The “public spirit was aided and advanced by the growing influence of the modern newspaper press,” insisted Washington in his biography of Douglass.<sup>164</sup> As a self-conscious stylist, Douglass understood the extraordinary power of word, sound, and image. “Poets, prophets, and reformers are all picture makers—and this ability is the secret to their power and of their achievements. They see what ought to be by the reflection of what is, and endeavor to remove the contradiction,” he wrote.<sup>165</sup> As this incredible passage makes clear, Douglass’s portrait of slavery was intended to provoke his readers and listeners to embrace social reform. “All that the American people needed, I thought, was light. Could they know slavery as I knew it, they would hasten to the work of its extinction,” Douglass wrote.<sup>166</sup> “In the early days of my freedom, I was called upon to expose the direful nature of the slave system, by telling my own experience while a slave, and to do what I could thereby to make slavery odious and thus hasten the day of emancipation.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> John Stauffer, “Frederick Douglass’s Self-fashioning and the Making of a Representative American Man,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 201.

<sup>164</sup> In chapter 7, I explicate the role of the black newspaper in emancipatory struggles, and I also illustrate how Douglass, as journalist and newsman, influenced Washington’s call for and work on behalf of an independent black public sphere. Combating Jim Crow white supremacy would require a new abolitionist public sphere. Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 91–92.

<sup>165</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Pictures,” quoted in Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 45.

<sup>166</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 671.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 939.

Douglass intended his *Life and Times* as a political and social history of the republic during its most significant and controversial era:

I have written out my experience here, not in order to exhibit any wounds and bruises and to awaken and attract sympathy to myself personally, but as a part of the history of a profoundly interesting period in American life and progress ... what moral, social, and political relations subsisted between the different varieties of the American people down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century and by what means they were modified and changed.... My part has been to tell the story of the slave. The story of the master never wanted for narrators.<sup>168</sup>

Douglass said he felt ethically and politically compelled to reveal the unvarnished truths and naked facts of slavery. Douglass felt exposing the scourges of slavery—like Olaudah Equiano, Nat Turner, William Wells Brown, Henry Bibb, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Ann Jacobs—would induce readers and listeners toward critical reflection, which would in turn swell the ranks of the abolitionist movement. Douglass, like many political theorists, understood his writings as political acts. His, however, was a literary activism that depended heavily on the power of the aesthetic. While there are certainly ethical and political critiques lodged in his narratives, it would be reductionist to view his narratives as mere “arguments,” a set of stylized logical claims that lead, unavoidably, to a coherent conclusion. The political efficacy of his narratives lay in their ability to enact “empathetic unsettlement,” a witnessing that could move readers toward empathy while preserving the singularity of his experience as a slave.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 43–85.

Judith Shklar wrote that the political importance of stories is that they provide us with “a more concrete way of thinking about politics, one closer to men and events.”<sup>170</sup> They have the potential to remove “the covers we may have put on the mind’s eye.”<sup>171</sup> But, of course, this could also fail.<sup>172</sup> Douglass’s autobiographical writings and antislavery essays were part of an effort to “convert readers to the abolitionist cause,” a “lifting of the veil,” as Shklar might have put it.<sup>173</sup> William Lloyd Garrison was certainly moved. He wrote that Douglass’s *Narrative* contained “many *affecting* incidents” and asked whether anyone could read it and “be insensible to its *pathos* and sublimity.”<sup>174</sup> Douglass gave social significance to the “incidents” of slavery by illustrating how a given horrific moment of torture by whip reflected the logic of the institution, the functional requirement of insidious violence. Thus Washington spoke for a generation when he said that the “life of Frederick Douglass is the history of American slavery epitomized in a single human experience.”<sup>175</sup> What he meant was that Douglass’s narratives of his life in slavery came to define the institution, its wrongs, the abolitionist struggle, and, most importantly, the role the slaves played in the destruction of slavery.

To have represented the institution with such precision and power, however, the slave-narrator, like Douglass, had to efface himself “behind the universally

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<sup>170</sup> Judith N. Shklar, *Ordinary Virtues* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 228.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 229–30.

<sup>172</sup> In *Impossible Witnesses*, Dwight A. McBride has persuasively argued that the “truth” of slavery often demanded “impossible witnesses.”

<sup>173</sup> Stauffer, “Frederick Douglass’s Self-fashioning and the Making of a Representative American Man,” 204.

<sup>174</sup> Quoted in Stepto, *From Behind the Veil*, 19; emphasis added.

<sup>175</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 15.

applicable facts of slavery.”<sup>176</sup> But facts do not speak for themselves, and survivors of trauma always do more than relate “facts”—appearances to the contrary. Each “telling” is either a healing or a rewounding or both.<sup>177</sup> Douglass thus deployed his autobiographies as depictions of the social ontology of slavery—that is, slavery as a condition of political existence. In other words, Douglass described episodes from his time as a slave within the arc of a moral life; each plot imputed the particular incidents that constituted the narrative with what Paul Ricoeur calls “meaningful totalities,” a process by which the author extracts a “configuration from a succession” of events that in turn also gives the particular event its broader ethical and political meaning.<sup>178</sup> But the slave-narrative is no mere narrative. Slaves are survivors of torture and trauma who have endured an almost unbearable assault on the self; the self and sense of meaning has to be reassembled.

Gates concludes that Douglass continually rewrote his life story toward revising his conception of self and slavery. “Douglass manipulated his own blank past as ‘a representation of the present,’ as a consistent extension backwards in time of the particular self he was forging.”<sup>179</sup> This is not an entirely persuasive reading of Douglass. First, it is too voluntarist and therefore could be said of any autobiography. But what is it to tell the story of one’s torture in a torture regime? And anyone “who writes more than one autobiography must be acutely aware of the ironies implicit in

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<sup>176</sup> William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>177</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, 1–110. See also LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, 1–42; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

<sup>178</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 279.

<sup>179</sup> Gates, *Figures in Black*, 120.

the re-creation of successive fictive selves, subject to manipulation and revision in written discourse.”<sup>180</sup> Gates adds that in doing so Douglass should have invited “critique because each of the selves he renders in each of his biographies is a distinctly different self with distinctly different origins, invented in 1845, reinvented in 1855 and in 1881 to make consistent the ‘Frederick Douglass’ he intended to reveal to his readers.”<sup>181</sup> Yet most scholars give Douglass a pass or simply assume that each narrative merely continues on where the previous one left off. But what Gates does not do is take seriously the question of torture and trauma, what each retelling demanded of Douglass as narrator.

Each narrative certainly tracks the entirety of Douglass’s life to the point of its authorship, and thus *Life and Times* (1881), which covers the lead-up to and the Civil War and Reconstruction and its collapse, is more than twice as long as *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). But Gates also argues that each of Douglass’s projected selves, at bottom, always remained “transcendent” to the institution of slavery.<sup>182</sup> Douglass does not “allow us to witness his development as a person, precisely because he argues that he was always fully formed despite the horrors and brutalities of slavery. Paradoxically, Douglass argues that the self of the enslaved had suffered no essential damage ... and simultaneously that slavery did indeed work great damage upon all who dwelled within it.”<sup>183</sup> Slavery as a system was an external world, an arena in which Douglass had been battered, but he nevertheless remained unchanged.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 111.

The unmaking, however stark, was incomplete. Upon Gates's reading, the world of slavery is a static backdrop in which Douglass's vigor and power were constrained but Douglass nonetheless remained existentially whole; Douglass, as a character, was not substantively different from chapter to chapter or text to text; there are no remarkable moments of transformation in the narratives. What we get is a private and triumphant self against a brutal world, which in the end only reaffirms a hyperindividualism.

But Douglass did in fact map differences in not only the selves but also the worlds he described. Admittedly, the distinctions are subtle and easy to miss. When we read *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) side-by-side with *Life and Times* (1881), we witness Douglass's development as a formal stylist and his subtle but significant changes to his life in slavery. Let us take two examples, which illustrate how Douglass revised his conception of slavery and the kind of politics and resources necessary for emancipation. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Douglass wrote:

The difference between the white slave, and the black slave, is this: the latter belongs to *one* slaveholder, and the former belongs to *all* the slaveholders, collectively. The white slave has taken from him, by indirection, what the black slave has taken from him, directly, and without ceremony. Both are plundered and by the same plunderers. The slave is robbed ... by his master ... and the white man is robbed by the slave system ... because he is flung into competition with a class of laborers who work without wages. *The competition, and its injurious consequences, will, one day, array the non-slaveholding white people of the slave states, against the slave system, and make them the most effective workers against the great evil.* At present, the slaveholders blind them to this competition, by keeping alive their prejudice against the slaves, *as men*—not against them *as slaves*. They appeal to their pride, often denouncing emancipation, as tending to place the white working man, on an equality with Negroes, and, by this means, they succeed in drawing off the minds of the poor whites from the real fact, that, by the rich slave-master, they are already regarded as but a single remove from equality with the slave.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 330; emphasis added.

Let us now look at the revised passage in *Life and Times* (1881):

The difference between the white slave, and the black slave, was this: the latter belonged to *one* slaveholder, and the former belonged to the slaveholders collectively. The white slave had taken from him by indirection what the black slave had taken from him directly and without ceremony. Both were plundered and by the same plunderers. The slave was robbed by his master of all his earnings, above what was required for his bare physical necessities, and the white man is robbed by the slave system of the just results of his labor because he is flung into competition with a class of laborers who worked without wages. The slaveholders blinded them to this competition by keeping alive their prejudice against the slaves as *men*—not against them as *slaves*. They appealed to their pride, often denouncing emancipation as tending to place the white working man on an equality with Negroes, and by this means they succeed in drawing off the minds of the poor whites from the real fact, that, by the rich slave-master, they were already regarded as but a single remove with the slave.<sup>185</sup>

Both passages are very similar, beyond Douglass's evolution as a stylist. Most obvious is his move away from a transcriptionist style—one that stresses the vocal, evidenced by his reliance on commas and carefully placed pauses—to a more formal literary style. But then there is this central and important omission:

The competition, and its injurious consequences, will, one day, array the non-slaveholding white people of the slave states, against the slave system, and make them the most effective workers against the great evil.

In 1855 Douglass had faith in the Free Soil ideology as a basis for interracial class alliance, and he thus insisted that poor white southerners, “the non-slaveholding white people of the slave states,” would play a pivotal role in the abolition of slavery, but by 1881, with blacks increasingly barred from labor unions and poor whites making up the ranks of white supremacist forces, Douglass erases his earlier faith in poor whites.

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<sup>185</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 628.

Douglass's conclusion is one of political pessimism, a rather bleak outlook in regard to the possibility of an interracial democracy in the post-Civil War South. Marxists are therefore wrong: the use of racial caste will forever preclude a white workers and slaves alliance and popular rebellion.

Let us now look at an addition instead of an omission. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Douglass wrote: "I was without home, without friends, without work, without money, and without any definite knowledge of which way to go, or where to look for supper or succor."<sup>186</sup> And in the same passage in *Life and Times* (1881), he wrote: "I was without home, without acquaintance, without money, *without credit*, without work, and without any definite knowledge as to what course to take or where to look for succor."<sup>187</sup> Douglass, who had served as the head of Freedmen's Bank, understood the political significance of access to credit markets as essential to surviving the agrarian economy of the postemancipation South. What stands out is that he inserted a concern for credit in his later description of his early days as a fugitive slave in the North. By doing so, he linked the disadvantages *he* incurred from slavery to the extreme poverty and landlessness that now define the economic conditions of Afro-southerners. Douglass, then, revised his view of slavery to speak to postemancipation conditions. He insisted that poor whites were not going to support blacks in their struggle for equality and banks and credit—which may seem mundane but will be significant for remedying economic dependency.

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<sup>186</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 351.

<sup>187</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 649; emphasis added.

I am not arguing that Douglass offered a radical revision of slavery in his *Life and Times* compared to his description of enslavement in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, but I do think that Douglass's use of autobiographical revision in his *Life and Times* influenced Washington's understanding of the institution of slavery and the kind of politics available to the dominated. Moreover, Douglass's use of his life story as a stylized polemic against slavery shaped Washington's later deployment of his own life story as a political critique of white supremacy. But more substantively, Washington drew on two central themes in Douglass. First, Douglass's more structural account of slavery stands out in his third autobiography, in part because it so clearly foreshadowed Washington's descriptions of postemancipation conditions as resulting from the material inequalities and vulnerabilities inherited from slavery. Second, Douglass's emphasis on prudence or political judgment as an important political virtue in the struggle for survival and emancipation was influential for Washington; Washington would also underline the centrality of political judgment in his later work.

#### **4. Douglass's Structural Account of Slavery**

Washington insisted that there was a broader political message embedded in Douglass's recounting of the horrors of slavery. He said, for example, that the "spectacle" of seeing a female slave tortured "had made a lasting and painful impression upon" Douglass. Surely, for a male slave, this was the worst cruelty; again, torturous, thereby triggering careful, even deferential, responses by us, his readers. "Vaguely he began to recognize the outlines of the institution which at once permitted and, to a certain degree, made necessary these cruelties. It was at this time that he

began to speculate on the origin and nature of slavery.”<sup>188</sup> Washington carefully situated the double torture—that of this particular female slave and Douglass’s coerced witnessing—within the broader institution of slavery.

Washington found in Douglass’s writings four themes that proved essential for his reconstruction of slavery as a social relation of domination rooted in the basic structure of society, a relation of domination that could not be summed up in terms of a few vicious acts perpetrated by a handful of extraordinarily sadistic individual whites. Douglass and Washington were compassionate toward the physically assaulted slaves and yet, at the same time, attentive to slavery’s more general dehumanization and its enduring consequences for the freedmen and women. The four themes were: (1) slavery was a *social relation* of domination; (2) it was sanctioned by society at large; (3) its consequences were social, material, collective, and enduring; and (4) slavery was brutal and traumatic, heartbreaking. But slavery did not necessarily kill the mind, spirit, and compassion of its survivors, as evidenced by the freedmen’s solidarity. These themes are more prevalent in Douglass’s 1881 autobiography, *Life and Times*, which was important work for Washington’s formulation of slavery as causally significant for the emergence of Jim Crow. Though partly predicated on the material and social consequences of slavery, Jim Crow, upon Washington’s definition, was nevertheless a new historical conjuncture—a distinct form of domination.

Douglass’s writings are replete with evidence for a structural account of slavery. It can even be argued that Douglass identified injustice as arising from the

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<sup>188</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 21.

structure of the relation of master to slave independent of the outcomes and effects of any given instance of the social relation.

My feelings were not the result of any marked cruelty in the treatment I received; they sprung from the consideration of my being a slave at all. It was *slavery*—not its mere *incidents*—that I hated.<sup>189</sup>

Douglass added that

apologists for slavery often speak of the abuses of slavery; and they tell us that they are so much opposed to those abuses as we are; and that they would go as far as to correct those abuses and to ameliorate the condition of the slave as anybody. The answer to that view is, that slavery is *itself* an abuse.<sup>190</sup>

Orlando Patterson insists that the “master-slave relationship cannot be divorced from the distribution of power throughout the wider society in which both master and slave find themselves.”<sup>191</sup> Slavery was in itself unjust, regardless of the outcomes or results, for all the paternalist “kindness” that a master might choose to demonstrate. Douglass said that “feeding and clothing me well could not atone for taking my liberty from me.”<sup>192</sup>

Reading Douglass’s description of slavery against Iris Marion Young’s understanding of structural oppression, we might say slavery as an institution and set of structures precedes the individual masters and slaves “both temporally and ontologically. A person encounters an already structured configuration of power, resource allocation, status norms, and culturally differentiated practices. Particular

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<sup>189</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 535; emphasis original.

<sup>190</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 426.

<sup>191</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 35.

<sup>192</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 535.

individuals occupy particular positions in these fields.”<sup>193</sup> To go further, the identities of master and slave are constituted and conditioned by the social relationship itself; masters and slaves are often born into and grow up within a slave society, through which they spend their entire lives. Enslavement is, of course, passed down on a matrilineal basis. My use of the term *social relationship* follows Weber: “The term ‘social relationship’ ... denotes the behavior of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the actions of each takes into account that of the others and is oriented in these terms.”<sup>194</sup> Simply put, it is a relationship that is strategic and socially recognized. Slaves must anticipate their masters as peasants must anticipate their landlords. The set of structures—formal and informal—enables a social relation in which the slaveholder has the power to dominate his slave: the former is the agent of domination and the latter is the subject of that domination.<sup>195</sup>

Douglass argued that the “plantation was a little nation by itself, having its own language [and] its own rules, regulations, and customs.”<sup>196</sup> Of course in this passage Douglass does not mean “nation” as in Michael Walzer’s use of nation to mean “a people” or its similar use by black leaders like Delany, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, and Alexander Crummell.<sup>197</sup> Clearly, there were two sets of peoples and two sets of customs on the plantation. It is interesting that he chose a form of governance, an institutional framework, as a metaphor for plantation life. That is, he situated

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<sup>193</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99–100.

<sup>194</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 26.

<sup>195</sup> Lovett, *A General Theory of Domination and Justice*.

<sup>196</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 486.

<sup>197</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*. See also Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

slavery within an enlarging set of sociopolitical structures—a “little nation”—that were deeply oppressive rather than representative of a sense of peoplehood. Moreover, Douglass suggested a strategic context: It had “its own language” and “its own rules” which, one might add, were imposed by an enlarging set of “regulations and customs.” Yet this peculiar world required national sanction and enforcement. “In a high moral sense, as well as in a national sense, the whole American people are responsible for slavery, and must share, in its guilt and shame, with the most obdurate men-stealers of the south,” argued Douglass.<sup>198</sup>

In “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” Douglass said that the “rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me.”<sup>199</sup> Slavery, he insisted, “is the great sin and shame of America!”<sup>200</sup> In the nineteenth century, the annual Fourth of July oration commemorated and reaffirmed the spirit of the American Revolution and, in particular, the ideals of freedom and liberty. Great statesmen, like Douglass or Phillips, would deliver the oration to local communities. On July 5, 1852, Douglass delivered the oration at Rochester’s Corinthian Hall, where he said:

This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today?

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<sup>198</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 427.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

He added that the federal government was more than complacent, that it actively enforced slavery. “Your broad republican domain is a hunting-ground for *men*.... Your president, your secretary of state, your lords, nobles, and ecclesiastics enforce, as duty you owe your free and glorious country, and to your god, that you do this accursed thing.”<sup>201</sup>

Orlando Patterson suggests that the master-slave relationship “became transformed from a personal into an institutional dialectic,” what he called an “enduring social process.”<sup>202</sup> In other words, slaveholders who monopolized the southern economy and controlled slave and white wage labor buttressed their rule by capturing and controlling the state. The state, in turn, legally guaranteed them almost complete power over their slaves and provided the legal and police apparatus to secure their property. This social process required both institutions and ideology, the latter of which, according to Douglass, was supplied by religion. He argued that “the government ... north and south,” as well as the political parties and the dominant religious organizations, have “served to deaden the moral sense of the northern people,

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<sup>201</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 438. Jason Frank, drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, offers an insightful interpretation of the speech. Focusing on Douglass’s democratic claims, he emphasizes the formal conditions of a given speech situation. Frank argues that such “constituent moments enact felicitous claims to speak in the people’s name, even though those claims explicitly break from the authorized procedures and norms for representing popular voice.” He also notes that such dilemmas tend to appear in constitutional settings, but in spite of “having no authorization to speak for the people, Douglass—an escaped slave, one *sans part*—nonetheless claimed to speak on their behalf. Douglass made this claim from an indeterminate or paradoxical position, insofar as he spoke at once as a slave—representing, in his words, ‘a people long dumb, not allowed to speak for themselves’—and as part of a political collectivity as yet without social determination. This rhetorical positioning extracted Douglass from the dominant categories of identity and classifications (escaped African slave, racially determined or historically monumental invocations of the American people), while simultaneously setting the stage for a new political subject’s emergence.” Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 209–36.

<sup>202</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 101.

and to impregnate them with sentiments and ideas forever in conflict with what as a nation we call *genius of American institutions*.”<sup>203</sup> Patterson rightly warns: “Instead of individual slaveholders and slaves constituting the units in the relationship, the institution of slavery is conceived of as a single process that operates on the total social system.”<sup>204</sup>

Douglass, at times, however, seemed to suggest that it was the structures themselves that were the source of domination. In *Life and Time*, Douglass recounted his visit to St. Michaels, where he had a brief reunion and reconciliation with his former master, Thomas Auld, in the ominous year of 1877. St. Michaels, Douglass recalled, was “the scene of some of the saddest experiences of slave life.”<sup>205</sup> He knew that his return “was strange enough in itself,” but to meet with Auld for a “friendly talk over ... past relations was in fact still more strange.”<sup>206</sup> Douglass began by reminding his readers of the base evils of his former master.<sup>207</sup> But Douglass’s recollection then took an interesting turn. “He was to me no longer a slaveholder either in fact or in spirit, and I regarded him as I did myself, a victim of the circumstances of birth, education, law, and custom.”<sup>208</sup> Douglass went even further, stripping Auld of any agency and moral responsibility. “Our courses had been determined for us, not by

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<sup>203</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 427; emphasis original.

<sup>204</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 337.

<sup>205</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 874.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> “Captain Auld had sustained the relation of master—a relation which I had held in extreme abhorrence, and which for forty years I had denounced in all bitterness of spirit and fierceness of speech. He had struck down my personality; had subjected me to his will; made property of my body and soul, reduced me to chattel ... taken my hard earnings.” Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 874.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 875.

us. We had both been flung upon a mighty current of life, which we could neither resist nor control. By this current he was master, and I a slave.”<sup>209</sup> And he ended on the peculiar utterance, “I did not run away from *you*, but from *slavery*.”<sup>210</sup> Slavery understood from this angle seems to deny that there were agents and subjects of domination, that a set of structural conditions *enabled* Auld to dominate Douglass. Recalling his “mistress,” Douglass had argued: “We were both victims to the same overshadowing evil, *she* as mistress, I as slave. I will not censure her too harshly.”<sup>211</sup>

Conversely, Douglass’s early emphasis on the inner life of the slave, and the transcendent self that emerged, could be read as assuming a voluntarist, antistructural position. The only structural constraints were external and upon Douglass’s actions and not upon his thoughts and desires. But we know that direct coercion and fortuitous witnessing did affect his thoughts—it made him, upon his own account, no longer dream of freedom. His late turn suggested a structuralist-determinist position in which the system of slavery determined every action and explained every aspect of plantation life. But as Steven Lukes notes, “Social life can only properly be understood as a dialectic of power and structure, a web of possibilities for agents, whose nature is both active and structured, to make choices and pursue strategies within given limits.”<sup>212</sup> It makes little sense to speak of structures without agents and agents without structures. Besides, Auld would not allow himself the loss of mastery. He said to Douglass, “I never liked slavery ... and I meant to emancipate all of my slaves when they reached

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 876.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.; emphasis original.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 535; emphasis original.

<sup>212</sup> Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 29.

the age of twenty-five years.”<sup>213</sup> There is clearly a rhetorical battle between Douglass and Auld to gain the moral high ground, and Auld remains consistent in his narcissism and total lack of humanity. Understood through Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, it is the slave who prevails in the end because he is the one who labors and thus has the reason necessary; we may therefore interpret Douglass as taking back his humanity by forgiving his former master. Or a rather typical Christian reading would suggest that only Douglass, not Auld, has the power to forgive. But if we take the question of torture and trauma seriously, as I have been suggesting we do, then is this not an impressive and yet logical way for Douglass to find closure, as it were?

The social, political, and economic opportunities available to black southerners in the antebellum South constituted the structures of their condition or environment. Structural constraints limited the slave’s freedom or power to act otherwise by excluding a range of possibilities. These constraints took the form either of an external limit, like laws and punishment, or barring opportunities, like, say, education. An external constraint, then, will create an internal limitation—an illiterate slave is less likely to be able to escape. The structure may be positive or negative, but what matters is whether it precludes the slave’s pursuit of his or her interests, including the simple but indispensable recognition of his or her humanity. Situating the enslaved subject within the web of constraining structures, some of which can also be manipulated into enabling structures, allows the reader to apprehend the complex world enslaved blacks moved within and how they negotiated and manipulated those structures, cultivating a

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<sup>213</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 877.

set of political skills that would prove important for coping with and challenging Jim Crow.

It is important to remember that the “plantation was a battlefield where slaves fought masters for physical and psychological survival. Although unlettered, unarmed, and outnumbered, slaves fought in various ways,” as John Blassingame’s monumental study has shown.<sup>214</sup> From kitchen gardens, tool-breaking, secret code-talk, songs, storytelling, pilfering, and poisoning to maintaining families against unthinkable brutalities and separations, sustaining spiritual communities, and caring for one another, slaves made and remade their worlds. They were hardly prepolitical or nonpolitical.<sup>215</sup> Eugene Genovese advances a Marxist—more Gramscian—interpretation of the “world” slaves made, especially the ways in which the slaves employed a simultaneous accommodation and resistance to the “paternalism” ideology perpetuated by slaveholders, the way they manipulated the professed claims by slaveholders toward negotiating better conditions. He adds that,

strictly speaking, only insurrection represented political action, which some chose to define as the only genuine resistance since it alone directly challenged the power of the regime. From that point of view, those activities which others call “day-to-day resistance to slavery”—stealing, lying, dissembling, shirking, murder, infanticide, suicide, arson—qualify at best as prepolitical and at worst as apolitical. These distinctions have only a limited usefulness and quickly lose their force. Such apparently innocuous and apolitical measures as a preacher’s sermon on love and dignity or the mutual support offered by husbands and wives played—under the specific condition of slave life—an indispensable part in providing the groundwork for the most obviously

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<sup>214</sup> John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 284.

<sup>215</sup> Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*.

political action, for they contributed to the cohesion and strength of a social class threatened by disintegration and demoralization.<sup>216</sup>

Also essential to the political lives of the slaves was the “invisible institution”—the informal religious gatherings on the plantation—which fostered social bonds that would prove important to psychological survival and political hope. “The story of Israel’s Exodus from Egypt helped make it possible for slaves to project a future radically different from their present,” writes Albert J. Raboteau.<sup>217</sup> In chapter 5, I show how the transformation of black rural schools and colleges into subversive spaces was predicated on recovering the politics and skills cultivated during slavery. I argue that from within the encampment of the Jim Crow South, rural black schools and colleges constituted a counterpublic that served as the base for a subversive black politics.

Douglass further described the disadvantages the slaves were made to endure as a set of relational inequalities inhering in the socioeconomic relations that marked slavery. Gates notes that Douglass provided “an ordering of the world based on a profoundly relational type of thinking, in which a strict barrier of difference or opposition ... [was] made to signify the presence and absence of some quality.”<sup>218</sup>

Douglass said that the slave

toils that another may reap the fruit; he is industrious that another may live in idleness; he eats unbolted meal that another may eat the bread of fine flour; he labors in chains at home, under a burning sun and biting lash, that another may ride in ease and splendor abroad; he lives in

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<sup>216</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 598.

<sup>217</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 312, 211–88.

<sup>218</sup> Gates, *Figures in Black*, 89.

ignorance that another may be educated; he is abused that another may be exalted ... he is clad in coarse and tattered raiment that another may be arrayed in purple and fine linen; he is sheltered only by the wretched hovel that a master may dwell in a magnificent mansion; and to this condition he is bound down as by an arm of iron.<sup>219</sup>

Unchecked exploitation of slaves resulted in tremendous gains for slaveholders at the material, social, physiological, and psychic expense of the slave. Such exploitation was permitted and promoted by the basic structure of Southern society. “Alas this immense wealth, this gilded splendor, this profusion of luxury, this exemption from toil, this life of ease, this sea of plenty,” Douglass said, was a relational effect of the oppression and exploitation of the “poor slave on his hard pine plank, scantily covered with his thin blanket.”<sup>220</sup>

Douglass’s descriptions reflected a deep concern for structural inequalities, broadly conceived to include detention, forced illiteracy, brutal punishment, severe stigma, and prohibition of kinship recognition, and their enduring harm. Iris Marion Young, who pays capacious attention to the whole range of disempowerment, insists that a structural “*inequality* consists in the relative constraints some people encounter in their freedom and material well-being as the cumulative effect of the possibilities of their social positions, as compared with others who in their social positions have more options or easier access to benefits.”<sup>221</sup> “Appeal to structure,” argues Young, “invokes the institutionalized background which conditions much individual action and expression, but over which individuals by themselves have little control.”<sup>222</sup> Douglass

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<sup>219</sup> Frederick Douglass, “The Nature of Slavery,” appendix to *My Bondage*, 419–20.

<sup>220</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 508.

<sup>221</sup> Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 98.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

insisted that slavery was a persistent condition of “hunger, whipping, and nakedness”<sup>223</sup>—one in which he “was deprived of the necessities of life.”<sup>224</sup>

We can see this influence on Washington. In his 1907 biography of Douglass, Washington gave greater emphasis to the structural and thus more corporeal, obvious, and brutal material deprivations of slavery. Washington quoted Douglass as saying: “So wretchedly starved were we that we were compelled to live at the expense of our neighbors.”<sup>225</sup> In fact, Douglass mentioned hunger or extreme starvation over thirty times in his *Life and Times*, which was almost twice as often as he mentioned torture, beatings, or whippings. He said, “Food was my chief trouble” and “I was too hungry to sleep.”<sup>226</sup> “Starvation made me glad to leave Thomas Auld’s, and the cruel lash made me dread to go to Covey’s.”<sup>227</sup> Slaveholders employed mundane and not merely spectacular instruments of domination, such as overwork and starvation.

We worked all weathers. It was never too hot, or too cold; it could never rain, blow, snow, or hail too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night.... I was somewhat unmanageable at first, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in *breaking* me—in body, soul, spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed; my intellect languished; the disposition to read departed; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me, and behold a man transformed to a brute!<sup>228</sup>

Central to this torturous existence was the sense that one occupied a space of the dominated with a closed totality, headed by the master, with absolutely unscalable

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<sup>223</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 34.

<sup>224</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 553.

<sup>225</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 34.

<sup>226</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 483–84.

<sup>227</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 563.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

prison walls. Douglass directly linked overwork, extreme toil, and physical exploitation to the process of unmaking, an emphasis on the material idiom that was later taken up by Washington. In other words, Douglass had devoted tremendous textual space to describing the generalized and physiological abuses endured during slavery. He said that the “hard and continued labor” pushed him to the point of his “powers of endurance.”<sup>229</sup> “Aching bones and a sore back were my constant companions,” he added.<sup>230</sup> It was “[w]ork, work, work” that “succeeded in *breaking*” Douglass, upon his own account.<sup>231</sup>

## 5. Washington’s Structural Account of Slavery

The influence of Douglass’s emphasis on slavery as an absolutely closed space of total domination can be seen in Washington’s descriptions of the institution. “My life had its beginning in the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings. This was so, however, not because my owners were especially cruel, for they were not, as compared with many others.”<sup>232</sup> So wrote Washington in the early lines of *Up from Slavery*. He began with social surroundings and almost without taking a breath reminded his readers that extreme cruelty—he said they were not “especially cruel,” not that they were not cruel—was not necessary to submit the enslaved to a condition of wretchedness. The point is worth restating. His “life had its *beginning* in the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging *surroundings*.” Washington described slavery as

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 569.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 572.

<sup>232</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 215.

a form of life, a condition of existence unfolding within a given set of circumstances—concrete, material, and thus tangible—that preceded him. This is a claustrophobic and totalistic phenomenology of the human life enclosed within the concentration camp. The master of the “superior race” rules absolutely and with state sanction and impunity over the slave and his/her progeny for the duration of a cross-generational sentence that stretches forward into infinity.

Washington depicts the dialectic of self and slavery through a transformation of labor extraction, physical detention, and commodification of the “inferior race” into a social ontology that profoundly shaped his life. The plantation, under Washington’s pen, became its own social world with its own curious logic. “Every plantation was, to a certain extent, a little kingdom by itself ... a little state.”<sup>233</sup> Abstract ideals and macro social, political, and economic institutions and processes that sanctioned and enforced slavery were manifest at the level of the plantation in the social relation of master and slave and all the consequences the latter was made to bear. Those enslaved did not need a disquisition on rights to apprehend their condition; the extreme psychological and physiological deprivations, exploitation, rape, stigma, terror, child removal, and ubiquitous suffering made it clear.

Under this institution, one’s phenomenological sense of oneself as nothing but a slave virtually displaced one’s sense of oneself as a human being with kith and kin. Residence in the slave quarters shaped the slave’s identification first and foremost. “I am not quite sure of the exact place or exact date of my birth, but at any rate I suspect

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<sup>233</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 2009), 85.

I must have been born somewhere and at some time. The earliest impressions I can now recall are of the plantation and the slave quarters—the latter being the part of the plantation where the slaves had their cabins.”<sup>234</sup> The master’s assignment of a slave to a particular slave cabin and pallet to sleep on trumped one’s identity as a son to a mother and father, a brother to siblings, a nephew to aunts and uncles, and so on. Washington gave priority to the everyday, commonplace, and even dull aspects of life in bondage to outline a figurative world of slavery, one captured best by its concrete, material, and corporeal dimensions.

This world constituted a social space into which he, Washington, was born, spent his early years, and was formed and transformed. To effectively constrain the enslaved, slaveholders required forms of social control, several of which did not require acts of *personal* domination. The exploitation of slaves and the accompanying necessities of oppression and domination depended on a much wider diffusion of power than master staring down slave. The slaveholder’s totalistic power had to be felt in every aspect of the slave’s captive existence. Extreme cruelty and torture, corporal punishment, and vicious chastisement, though probably common, were not necessary expressions of the slaveholder’s domination over the slave.

Washington drew a distinction between “the plantation and the slave quarters” and said, “The latter being the *part* of the plantation where the slaves had their cabins.”<sup>235</sup> The plantation had four social spaces: the house in which the master lived; the field or farm in which the slaves labored; spontaneous spaces that arose with social

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<sup>234</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 215.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

gatherings, such as secret schools or religious meetings; and the quarters, where significant meetings, like religious services, were only held with the master's permission. The cabin, as Washington noted, was part of the economic functioning of the plantation. On the second page of *Up from Slavery*, Washington introduced the slave cabin in which he was raised.

The cabin was not only our living-place, but was also used as the kitchen for the plantation. My mother was the plantation cook. The cabin was without glass windows; it had only openings in the side which let in the light, and also the cold, chilly winter.... There was no wooden floor in the cabin, the naked earth being used as a floor.... There was no cooking-stove on our plantation, and all the cooking for the whites and slaves my mother had to do over an open fireplace.... While the poorly built cabin caused us to suffer with cold in winter, the heat from the open fireplace in summer was equally trying.<sup>236</sup>

“The early years of my life, which were spent in the little cabin, were not very different from those of thousands of other slaves,” Washington reminded his readers.<sup>237</sup> He added, “I cannot remember having slept in a bed until after our family was declared free by the Emancipation Proclamation.”<sup>238</sup>

What do these seemingly innocuous descriptions of the slave quarters reveal about Washington and Douglass's influence upon him? Without a doubt, power inscribed itself on the body of the slave, but it often did so within several loci. Primarily targeted were immediate necessities—shelter, food, clothing, work, sleep, belonging, and, of course, bodily integrity, the slave woman's reproductive integrity, and life itself. Since the totalistic and comprehensive distribution of the master's power throughout the entire plantation—supported by his unlimited right to

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 217.

surveillance—targeted life itself, the plantation perpetrated extreme physiological and psychological suffering. The slave quarters became an important site and tool of social control and its felt consequences, Washington argued.

In her troubling and profound reading of torture and unmaking, Elaine Scarry notes that torture as a process will “convert ... every conceivable aspect of ... the environment into an agent of pain.”<sup>239</sup> She observes that shelter expresses the “most benign potential of human life. It is, on the one hand, an enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same way the body encloses and protects the individual within.”<sup>240</sup> She adds that “while the room is a magnification of the body, it is simultaneously a miniaturization of the world, of civilization.”<sup>241</sup> Pain can cause the “world to disintegrate,” but the “room, both in its structure and content,” can be “converted into a weapon” by expressing and amplifying the conditions of exploitation and subordination.<sup>242</sup> These mundane aspects of slavery reveal its far more sinister side: even one’s heat and home are monstrously transformed by the master, such that for the slave there is little psychic distance between the sleeping pallet and the whipping post.

In a particularly striking passage in *Up from Slavery*, Washington reversed the language of “breaking in.” Moving closer to the body, Washington wrote that clothing offered little cover from the ubiquitous pain of enslavement. He said he was forced to wear articles of clothing that were virtual instruments of torture.

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<sup>239</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 27–28.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

*I was forced to endure as a slave boy ... the wearing of a flax shirt.... I can scarcely remember any torture, except, perhaps, the pulling of a tooth, that is equal to that caused by putting on a flax shirt for the first time. It is almost equal to the feeling that one would experience if he had ... a hundred small pin-points, in contact with his flesh.... The fact that my flesh was soft and tender added to the pain. But I had no choice.*<sup>243</sup>

Note the language of coercion. Even in seemingly commonplace passages, Washington emphasized the fact that the most ordinary features of daily life were saturated with the master's power.

Washington also described the disadvantages endured during slavery as relational inequalities. This emphasis is most clearly seen in his discussion of food and hunger. "On the plantation in Virginia," he said, "meals were gotten by the children very much as dumb animals get theirs. It was a piece of bread here and a scrap of meat there."<sup>244</sup> "At times, when I had failed to get any other breakfast, I used to go to the places where the cows and pigs were fed and make my breakfast off this boiled corn," Washington casually noted.<sup>245</sup> Washington's mother cooks for the big house, and he is left to scour the farmyard like a starving rat. Douglass had described a similar scene: "Our food was coarse corn meal boiled.... It was put into a large wooden tray or trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush.... He that ate the fastest got the most ... few left the trough satisfied."<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 220; emphasis added.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>245</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 7.

<sup>246</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, 33.

Washington contrasted his access to food with his evening duties: “When I had grown to sufficient size, I was required to go to the ‘big house’ at meal-times to fan the flies from the table.”<sup>247</sup> Description of these dinners afforded a witnessing of the vast material inequalities that separated the slaves from their owners—not only in what his masters consumed but also in the ritual of domination incorporated into the very act. The master and his family had at close hand and on a daily basis contact not only with the better fed and clothed “house” slaves—maids, butlers, and so on—but also rough, starving youths from the farmyard. Their indifference to Washington’s desperate condition amidst their plenty only underlined his subhuman status. Washington could never console himself that his immiseration was simply due to negligence and inadequate observation, that the master would right the wrong as soon as he was fully appraised.

Washington then brought together the structural relations of inequality in a seemingly innocent recollection of a Sunday “treat.”

I rarely take part in one of these long dinners that I do not wish that I would put myself back in *the little cabin where I was a slave boy*, and again go through the experience there—one that I shall never forget—of getting molasses to eat once a week from *the ‘big house.’* Our usual diet on the plantation was corn bread and pork, but on Sunday morning *my mother was permitted to bring down* a little molasses from *the ‘big house’* for her three children, and when it was received how I did wish that everyday was Sunday! I would get my tin plate and hold it up for the sweet morsel, but I would always shut my eyes while the molasses was being poured out into the plate, with the hope that when I opened them I would be surprised to see how much I had got. When I opened my eyes I would tip the plate in one direction and another, so as to make the molasses spread all over it, in the full belief that there would be more of it and that it would last longer if spread out in this way. So strong are my childish impressions of those Sunday morning feasts that

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<sup>247</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 219.

it would be pretty hard for any one to convince me that there is not more molasses on a plate when it is spread all over the plate than when it occupies a corner—if there is a corner on a plate. At any rate, I have never believed in “cornering” syrup.<sup>248</sup>

Most interesting in this passage is its seeming innocent “recollection.” What it is, in fact, is an uninterrupted line that historically resituates the present in the past. Washington *recalled* this passage after a “long dinner” hosted for him after a lecture. The temporal movement (his memory) linked the inequalities of slavery with the present inequalities of the Gilded Age. Second, the “small cabin where I was a slave” and “the ‘big house’” sets up a spatial distance that also marks a relation of power: “my mother was permitted to bring *down* ... from the ‘*big house*.’” Of course, his recollection includes the vertical language of domination, the seat of power, the language of permissibility. The “morsels” he had gotten in presence of the abundance of his master’s family led Washington to conclude, “I have never believed in ‘cornering’ syrup.” The nuanced criticism located spatially the inequalities in the most basic of resources—energy: molasses, concentrated sugar extract and sugar: the source of slavery itself. But he illustrated his tenuous and broken relation with his mother. And, importantly, Washington endorsed redistributing wealth: There is “more to be had” when the Robber Barons and monopolies—considering his company at these dinners—are made to pay their fair taxes and public funds are used to build schools.

Washington also described the loss of childhood in the denial of play and education. “I was asked not long ago to tell something about the sports and pastimes that I engaged in during my youth. Until that question was asked it had never occurred

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 345; emphasis added.

to me that there was no period in my life that was devoted to play.”<sup>249</sup> There is then an interesting double-move in which he grounds his alienation from his own childhood in the labor requirements of the plantation. “From the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labour.... During the period that I spent in slavery I was not large enough to be of much service, still I was occupied most of the time.”<sup>250</sup> Education was also a central deprivation. As this is the main subject of the next chapter, I will only note its import here in brief terms. “I had no schooling whatever while I was a slave, though I remember on several occasions I went as far as the schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses to carry her books,” Washington said.<sup>251</sup>

Washington gave primary place to these deprivations in order to highlight the concrete and enduring effects of slavery—effects that outlasted the event of slavery. Simply put, homeless, hungry, illiterate, and on the edge of life, many emancipated blacks found themselves, hat in hand and eyes downcast, returning to the old plantation to seek work. It is normatively irrelevant whether a former slave went back to *his* or *her* old master or whether the plantocracy was one and the same with the old slaveocracy or whether it was constituted by the “carpetbaggers” and the bourgeois elements of the New South. The result was the same. Afro-southerners’ hopes for social and economic independence suffered a quick death. In *Up from Slavery*, the historical development of domination remains implicit. Washington assumed his readers would take note of the fact that the same set of deprivations described in

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

slavery—extreme poverty (living on the edge of survival), torture, degradation, social disempowerment through enforced ignorance, and loss of affiliation or belonging—were the conditions he stressed in his depictions of black life in the postemancipation South: exposure to arbitrary assault and murder, rape, extreme poverty, social subordination, and the need for autonomous institutions.

My contention that Douglass often identified the material and nonagential violence of slavery is by no means a stretch. Some of the most moving and significant passages in Douglass's third autobiography, *Life and Times*, are his description of the everyday suffering, whereas the whip was omnipresent in his 1845 *Narrative*. Douglass said, "I received no severe treatment from the hands of my master, but the insufficiency of both food and clothing was a serious trial for me, especially the lack of clothing. In the hottest summer and coldest winter I was kept almost in a state of nudity."<sup>252</sup> And then this remarkable sentence: "My feet have been so cracked with the frost that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes."<sup>253</sup> On his feet, what he stands and walks on, what carries him through the world, he can fit a foreign object, an instrument of writing, into where flesh once was. It is more than a scar. In addition, the missing flesh in his foot is a missing part of his being. Imprinted on his body is a visible subtraction—there was something there and now there is not, and what remains is an eternal present-tense of what was taken from him—an indentation, a loss ever-present in its absence. The pen cannot fill the indentation in his life; the acts of writing and witnessing are insufficient. Before Richard Wright, before Toni

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<sup>252</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 519–20.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

Morrison, it was Douglass who spoke of racist violence and the formation of the black subject in struggle.<sup>254</sup>

## 6. Douglass and Political Judgment

Washington interpreted Douglass's depiction of his escape from slavery as a lesson in political judgment. He argued that Douglass's fight with Covey was but one event within a longer struggle to escape slavery. "For fifteen years he had been patiently planning to get his feet upon free soil and breathe the air of a free state," Washington wrote of Douglass.<sup>255</sup> But "Douglass found it much easier to learn the obstacles than the aids to successful escape. The former were many and obvious; the latter were few and difficult to discover."<sup>256</sup> "Every slave preparing to escape his fetters must act without guide or precedent," Washington said, "and form his own plan of deliverance."<sup>257</sup> This was so because there "were no well-marked routes from slavery to freedom, no highways, byways, or 'underground railways,' known to him at the time," Washington said.<sup>258</sup> Douglass "knew something of theology, but nothing of geography.... He had received vague hints that the dominion of slavery was without boundary."<sup>259</sup> In other words, Douglass faced practical barriers to achieving real freedom. While most readers of Douglass have homed in on his dramatic

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<sup>254</sup> Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008); Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

<sup>255</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 61.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

confrontation with Covey, they have often ignored Douglass's argument that what, in the end, enabled his escape from slavery was a practical skill, literacy, and the cultivation of cunning and deception.

For Gooding-Williams, the significance of literacy is that it afforded Douglass access to the language of rights. "As Douglass describes plantation politics, it is a revolutionary politics fueled by rights-conscious thinking that is aversive to the condition of slavery."<sup>260</sup> Gooding-Williams invests much attention in Douglass's description of the first book he read while a slave, the *Columbian Orator*, a collection of speeches by famous orators. Gooding-Williams insists that Douglass's rights-based thinking originated in his reading of this work, placing tremendous emphasis on the political content of a particular text rather than on the political efficacy of literacy in itself as a subversive skill. He is, however, sensitive to Douglass's emphasis on prudence, though he sees it as mere "secrecy." He argues that "plantation politics requires more than aversive thinking. As we shall see, it additionally requires aversive speaking and acting."<sup>261</sup> Gooding-Williams situates what he calls Douglass's aversive thinking and action within a neo-republican analytic.

On Douglass's account, slaves deploy secrecy to constrain their masters' capacities to interfere arbitrarily with their collective actions. Because masters cannot intervene in activities about which they remain ignorant, secrecy carves space for liberty—that is, for nondominated action. Whereas the fight with Covey enforced a limit on domination, the secreting of the Sabbath school's subversive activities effectively extends the limit. When, then, he portrays insurgent plantation politics as a practice of collective, nondominated action, he conceptualizes that politics as a practice of freedom.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 183.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

“In Douglass’s narrative,” concludes Gooding-Williams, “slaves’ collective political action is nondominated just to the extent that it is kept secret.”<sup>263</sup> Of course Gooding-Williams is right that secrecy protected subversive spaces from discovery and that it also enabled practices of freedom within the larger conditions of domination. But he also never considers that secrecy might be an *instance* of something more politically significant.

Conversely, Washington interpreted Douglass as a theorist of political judgment. Douglass’s emphasis on deception, Washington argued, was illustrative of Douglass’s insistence that prudence is an important political virtue. Take the question of literacy. Washington wrote, “Before he formulated any plans for freedom for himself, he learned the important trick of writing ‘free passes’ for runaway slaves.”<sup>264</sup> The subversive power of literacy did not lay in the fact that it afforded Douglass access to a philosophical defense of the “rights of man” but that it provided him a practical key for unlocking one of the shackles of slavery. Washington then locates Douglass’s use of his literacy as expressing profound political judgment. He began by saying that Douglass’s successful escape of slavery “required a mind of more than ordinary *shrewdness* to discriminate between the practical and impractical.”<sup>265</sup> “If Douglass had been a man of less *tact* and intelligence,” he would not have succeeded.<sup>266</sup> Douglass, in *Life and Times*, said: “It was necessary, therefore, for me to

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>264</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 27.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 273; emphasis added.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 288; emphasis added.

keep a watch over my deportment, lest the enemy should get the better of me.”<sup>267</sup> The language of “deportment” cannot be reduced to mere secrecy—it is concerned with the somatic and affective registers of politics—one has to be disciplined into never letting the mask slip. It was not a cognitive or rational proposition—I must keep this plan a secret—but a set of deep practices.

Washington said that Douglass had “made a solemn vow to himself that the year should not close without witnessing some earnest effort on his part to escape.”<sup>268</sup> But this goal required more than courage. It required skill in assessing slaveholders and fellow slaves alike, the capacity to cultivate a consistent mask of compliance and infinite common sense as to the practical barriers.

His first task was to study the character, the temperament, and the various personal qualifications of the men whom he proposed to make his partners in this dangerous undertaking. He must learn whether they were proof against the sin of betrayal under all possible circumstances. Each man must cultivate an unhesitating faith in the others. Each must have unlimited courage, both physical and moral. *All must learn the tricks of self-concealment, and of assumed indifference and deception.* They must understand the various kinds of perils they were likely to encounter. The kidnapper, the slave-catcher, the black and white detectives, and the whole range of restraints that, like a continuous wall, hemmed in a slave, must be considered and understood.<sup>269</sup>

Washington was adamant that Douglass’s main lesson was that the mask of the happy or contented or at least thoughtless slave must be perfected so that rebellious intents and plans were not detected. It was, however, not a secret to keep but a form of life to be perfected.

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<sup>267</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 607.

<sup>268</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 43; emphasis added.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–44.

Thus Washington insisted it was from Douglass that he learned his politics of subversive subservience, strategic silence, and two-faced sedition: plotting revolution while wearing the look of the contented. This was a deadly game of theater.

Washington wrote that

if he [Douglass] had hoped in his heart, he must not betray it by so much as a look, in manner or in speech. Overseers were all eyes and ears and quick to suspect something was wrong if a slave seemed unusually thoughtful, sullen, or happy. They were by no means easily deceived as to the real intention of a slave planning to run away. To become an object of suspicion was merely to insure that the suspected slave would be the more closely guarded.<sup>270</sup>

Describing Douglass's botched attempt at escape, Washington said political judgment was equally important in selecting political allies. "For the second time in his life, Frederick Douglass now began earnestly to study the possible means of permanently breaking his fetters," but his "intense longing to be free must have betrayed itself in his *countenance*, for very soon he noticed that he was being closely watched."<sup>271</sup> "Having satisfied himself that his companions were proof against treachery and were of the right sort of mettle, he began to study the practical means of escape."<sup>272</sup> Trust is not discovered; it is cultivated in mutual dialogue and tests.

Douglass wrote "free passes" for himself and his fellow slaves, but they were intercepted on the road on suspicion of escape, tied up, and taken back to the Auld plantation. Washington said that when they stopped, in this moment, Douglass "adroitly threw his pass, the only incriminating evidence against them, in the fire, and by some secret sign advised the others to eat theirs with their bread on the journey,

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 54; emphasis added.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 44.

which they did.”<sup>273</sup> Douglass suspected that one of the slaves had betrayed them. “Having thus shrewdly helped his master to recover his good temper and natural kindness,” wrote Washington, “Douglass took special pains to keep him pleased and unsuspecting.”<sup>274</sup> The lesson was clear: “These were anxious days and many small details had to be mastered. He must carefully avoid anything in manner or word which could excite the slightest suspicion.”<sup>275</sup> Douglass was ultimately successful when he later boarded a train, pretending to be a freeman. Impersonating a freeperson was a skill Douglass had learned in Baltimore, where he worked among freemen. Again, it was a skill that took many years.

Washington said Douglass “had learned to act the part of a freeman so well that no one suspected him of being a slave. He had early acquired the habit of studying human nature.... No one knew better than he the kind of human nature that he had to deal with in this perilous undertaking. He knew the speech, manner, and behavior that would excite suspicion.”<sup>276</sup> It was his “cool temerity” that enabled his close escape from slavery “on so narrow a margin of safety.”<sup>277</sup> But Douglass said, “As I look back, I am more inclined to think that he suspected us, because, prudent as we were, I can see that we did many silly things well calculated to awaken suspicion.”<sup>278</sup>

And he further argued that Douglass’s early education in prudence proved him well as an abolitionist. He insisted that what separated Douglass from William Lloyd

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>278</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 607.

Garrison was Douglass's recognition of slavery as a political rather than a moral problem. As such, slavery required a political solution, one that could only be achieved by a leader with exemplary statesmanship. Washington wrote that the abolition movement carried out by Garrison "was non-political."<sup>279</sup> He said that "it sought to effect a revolution, but by moral regeneration of the people. Slavery, as Garrison conceived it, was a national sin which could be reached only by appeal to national conscience; but the effect of the anti-slavery agitation had not been confined to those who accepted his revolutionary doctrines."<sup>280</sup> "Garrison and his followers, supported by the infallible logic of their leader, still clung to the disunion policy, which was primarily a discharge of conscience from all complicity with slavery and only secondarily a means to the abolition of slavery."<sup>281</sup> But many people, argued Washington, could not follow "the relentless logic of Mr. Garrison to its revolutionary conclusions."<sup>282</sup> "This wider anti-slavery movement was fast drifting from a mere unorganized sentiment, without force sufficient to compel resistance, into a political party with a definite platform. Those who could not follow the 'disunion' and 'non-resistance' principles of Garrison, but began to fear the aggression of the slave-power, joined the 'Free Soil' and 'Liberty' parties."<sup>283</sup> "The issues raised by the Abolitionists were daily becoming less a question of the right or wrong of slavery and more a

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<sup>279</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 122.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–23.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

question of how,” Washington said, “under the actual circumstances in which the institution existed, it might best be gotten rid of.”<sup>284</sup>

Washington further claimed that Douglass spoke to those who increasingly came to see slavery as a political problem, a question of national policy rather than logical or moral reconciliation, transcendence, and redemption on a higher spiritual plane. “Frederick Douglass, with less consistency, perhaps, and a keener sense for the practical exigencies of the situation, was undoubtedly influenced by desire to get in close touch with this larger audience.”<sup>285</sup> Washington insisted that Douglass’s power and place in history lay in the fact that he was a pragmatic and prudent leader who sought feasible solutions to the problem at hand. Unlike Garrison, Douglass never conflated the moral wrongs of slavery with the political task at hand—abolishing the institution.

This is a subtle and brilliant tactical move by Washington. He was effectively identifying Douglass’s two different postures. The defiant and uncompromising Douglass championed by those like Du Bois was ineffective for combating white supremacy. But Washington was also suggesting that the view of Douglass as uncompromising is overstated. By comparing Garrison and Douglass, Washington was essentially arguing that Douglass had a second posture, that of a practical politician, a prudent leader living in history and taking its full measure. To underline Garrison’s eschatology and to contrast its apocalyptic dimensions with Douglass’s second posture, that of practical politician, made it possible for Washington to say he was

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 123.

carrying on the *true* legacy of Douglass. Du Bois and Washington's other critics resembled Garrison and his failures.

The fundamental difference between Garrison and Douglass was that Garrison cared more for moral consistency than the abolition of slavery. The survival of Garrison's pure conscience was more important to him than the survival of his country, according to Washington.

The power which Garrison exercised over his contemporaries was due, to a considerable degree, to the clearness and vigor of his intellect and the unflinching fidelity with which he followed its decrees. The first thing that he demanded of himself and of others was that they should think and feel rightly in regard to this question of slavery. The revolution he sought to effect was a purely spiritual one: he aimed to change men's minds and hearts. The power he desired to overthrow was a state of mind—a state of mind which permitted slavery to exist.<sup>286</sup>

“It is a good thing for a man to have an idea,” Washington said, “but it is a better thing for him to have sufficient force of character to put his idea into effect. A man stands or falls by what he is able to do rather than by what he is able to say.”<sup>287</sup> Douglass exemplified such a leader.

Douglass on the contrary, was destined, by natural disposition, for a different field of action. He was by temperament a politician, and, like all politicians, more or less an opportunist. *He was less interested in the theory upon which slavery should be abolished than he was in the means by which freedom could be achieved.* No doubt he was influenced to a considerable degree, in the formulation of his views in regard to the Constitution, *by his practical sense of what the situation demanded*, and, even if these views have not been upheld by subsequent interpretation of that document, they still appeal strongly to common sense.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 131.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 123; emphasis added.

It was not the uncompromising moral conviction of Garrison that brought an end to slavery but Douglass's practical political judgment.

Douglass's statesmanship was most evident in his ability to grasp the fact that the "whole question appeared to be: shall slavery have the power of expansion?"<sup>289</sup> As such, the relevant concern for most Northern whites was not the moral standing of the institution or the well-being of enslaved blacks. Rather, the institution posed a threat to the economic livelihood of the North. Washington said that Douglass "understood the trend of events and he was not swept away by merely transitory incidents.... During the Illinois debates, Frederick Douglass did all he could to enforce the arguments and extend the steadily growing influence of Mr. Lincoln."<sup>290</sup> Douglass may have thought Lincoln too flexible on slavery, and he therefore had to keep the political pressure on Lincoln.

Douglass aligned himself with Lincoln because Lincoln, too, was an exemplary statesman who knew that the abolition of slavery would depend on his ability to make slavery part of a larger threat to free labor.

In the North, the Negro was a problem; in the South, he was property. It was always easier to deal with property than to deal with a problem. For example: In the Kansas and Nebraska controversy, the South wanted territory for slave property and the North wanted it as an outlet for New England emigrants. If the only question involved had been to save the black man from further enslavement, the South would very possibly have won. In other words, interest in the Negro as a human being, deserving a chance to live and grow, was not the only and perhaps not the immediate motive behind the men who fought for free-soil.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 201.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

Washington thus concluded that

the situation was complicated as well as perilous. Heretofore, when the only question between the North and South was slavery or the right to hold slaves, the people of the North were governed as much by their racial prejudices as the Southern people. Now, however, when other questions, incidental to slavery, as, for instance, the future political supremacy, were involved with the main issue, many men and women, who had heretofore been indifferent or silent, became actively concerned, and felt impelled to take a definite stand.... It was at this time clear from the whole history of the controversy that if the Negro were ever to be free, his freedom must come as a consequence and not as the cause of conflict.<sup>292</sup>

Douglass's statesmanship, which was a product of the political judgment he cultivated as a slave, enabled him to recognize the complexities and compromises necessary for effectively abolishing slavery.

Douglass's discussion of statesmanship was most clearly stated in his 1876 Oration of Abraham Lincoln: "Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined."<sup>293</sup> "The honest and comprehensive statesman," argued Douglass, "clearly discerning the needs of the country, and earnestly endeavoring to do his whole duty, though covered and blistered with reproaches, may safely leave his course to the silent judgment of time."<sup>294</sup> Statesmanship was a quality lacking in Garrison and absent in those who continued to place blind faith in the power of moral righteousness—Washington's critics. They held to the idea that white

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 203; emphasis added.

<sup>293</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 920.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 922.

supremacy would crumble if its moral inconsistencies were pointed out. What the new struggle needed was the practical judgment of Douglass and not a moral righteousness.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I recovered the forgotten intellectual relationship between Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. I began by retracing the familiar reading of Douglass as having defined slavery as a condition of extreme personal domination. I then argued that Washington's thought stood in a creative conflict with that of Douglass's. Washington sought to legitimize his leadership by projecting himself as continuing the work of Douglass while suggesting that Douglass was ill-equipped to confront white supremacy effectively. Washington argued that what remained relevant in the work of Douglass was not his defiant protest or his liberalism but rather his emphasis on structural inequalities and his portrayal of political judgment as an essential virtue of the politics of the dominated. I then showed that it is significant that Washington was most influenced by Douglass's third autobiography, *Life and Times* (1881), where Douglass had not only expressed the challenges facing emancipated blacks but also revised his description of slavery to speak to the "Negro Problem." In section four, I reconstructed how the theme of structural domination predominated in Douglass's writings, and in section five I showed how it influenced Washington's emphasis on the economic foundations of white supremacy. In the previous and final section, I outlined Washington's further argument that Douglass had identified political judgment as the most important virtue for the enslaved. In doing so, I

illustrated Douglass's influence of Washington's political thought, further showing that we should read and think Washington with and against Douglass more so than with and against Du Bois.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### From the Lash to the Lien: Booker T. Washington on the Foundations of White Supremacy

Is not the dollar as potent as the lash? The belly as tender as the back?

—Former slave owner from South Carolina<sup>1</sup>

Until it shall be safe to leave the lamb in the hold of the lion, the laborer in the power of the capitalist, the poor in the hands of the rich, it will not be safe to leave a newly emancipated people completely in the power of their former masters...

—Frederick Douglass<sup>2</sup>

#### **Introduction**

On April 4, 1913, Oswald Garrison Villard wrote to Washington, “I think your timidity is running away with you.... you are too fearful.”<sup>3</sup> Villard was a well-known journalist, philanthropist, and civil rights activist and the grandson of the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. He had worked closely with Washington in the 1890s and early 1900s, but he now aligned himself with more “radical” civil rights leaders, like Du Bois. He even served as a founding member and the disbursing treasurer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Villard, who was most notable for his uncompromising integrationism,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 120.

<sup>2</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 819.

<sup>3</sup> “Letter from Oswald Garrison Villard to BTW, April 4, 1913,” *Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 12:159–60.

insisted that Washington should be more bold and courageous in his public criticisms of Jim Crow. Washington's current tone seemed to affirm the forces of white supremacy more than question them and therefore undermined his leadership of the race. "You must, of course, be your own judge of conditions in the South," Villard wrote, "but I cannot help saying to you how strongly I feel that in giving way to prejudice as much as you do ... [you will surely] increase prejudice and weaken yourself."<sup>4</sup> Villard was adamant that an uncompromising public protest against the South was the only morally permissible and politically effective means for combating racial injustice.

Four days later, Washington replied to Villard's letter, saying that he could live with the stain of cowardice if his prudence, in the end, increased opportunities for blacks in the South and made their lives a little more bearable. "If it will do the cause any good I am willing to plead guilty to the charge of cowardice and timidity."<sup>5</sup> Washington did not remind Villard that even if he failed to strike the rhetoric of a Garrison or a Douglass, he was nevertheless uncompromising in his public criticisms of disenfranchisement, segregation, and lynching. He also did not appeal to the limitations under which he labored, especially those imposed on black leaders in the heart of the South. Washington could have argued that as the founder and president of Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama, he had little choice but to be restrained and judicious in his public criticisms of local and state politics and Southern whites, in general. As one of only a few major African American universities located in the heart of the rural

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "Letter from BTW to Oswald Garrison Villard, April 8, 1913," *BTWP*, 12:164–66.

South, Tuskegee Institute and its faculty and students were highly vulnerable to the forces of white terrorism. Washington's carefulness, expressed in his well-timed criticisms, was neither reticence nor passiveness. It was a survival skill.

For over a decade, Washington had been explaining himself to Villard and other Northern critics. More than two years earlier, Villard wrote to Washington: "Your philosophy is wrong."<sup>6</sup> If "my grandfather," Garrison, had struck your tone, "he never would have accomplished what he did, and he would have hurt, not helped, the cause of freedom."<sup>7</sup> According to this view, it was the abolitionists' defiant protest and their unfiltered criticism that emancipated the slaves. But Washington's reformist tone and his measured public statements on the South were increasingly alienating Northern blacks and liberal whites. Both of these camps were nurtured on the antislavery tradition and saw in it a model for challenging and overthrowing Jim Crow. "It certainly cannot be unknown to you that a greater and greater percentage of the colored people are turning from you and becoming your opponents," Villard warned, "and with them a number of white people as well."<sup>8</sup>

This latest letter was left unanswered for nearly a month. In January 1911, Washington finally responded. "You, of course, labor under the disadvantage of not knowing as much about the life of the Negro race as if you were a member of that race yourself."<sup>9</sup> Washington was not one to resort to *ad hominem* arguments, so Villard

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<sup>6</sup> "Letter from Oswald Garrison Villard to BTW, December 13, 1910," *BTWP*, 10:506.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> "Letter from BTW to Oswald Garrison Villard, January 10, 1911," *BTWP*, 10:541.

must have struck a nerve. Washington reminded him that he, Washington, had always been explicit in his denunciations of white supremacy.

You say that I ought to speak out more strongly on public questions. I suppose that means such questions as relate to our receiving justice in the matter of public schools, lynchings, etc. In that regard, I quote you some sentences which I used only a few days ago in talking to the Southern white people here in Alabama concerning their duty toward the Negro.<sup>10</sup>

Washington attached a list of passages from articles he had published in newspapers and magazines and from interviews he had given. These passages were intended to demonstrate his unambiguous position on Jim Crow as well as his explicit condemnations of segregation, disenfranchisement, lynching, defunding of education, and the laws and policies intended to maintain white supremacy.

But Washington knew the disagreement cut much deeper. It was not just a quarrel over the optics of resistance. “No matter what I would do or refrain from doing, the same group would oppose me,” he said to Villard, and he noted, “I think you know this.”<sup>11</sup> Washington believed that the legacy of William Lloyd Garrison had little to teach African Americans about the nature of white supremacy and even less to impart to them regarding how they should conduct themselves politically. Furthermore, Garrison had his own radical antislavery white critics, from Abraham Lincoln to John Brown. Washington insisted that the abolitionist politics of old could not serve as a model for black Southerners in their struggle against white supremacy. African Americans in the South faced a new challenge, one that required a different response than that to slavery. He had said this much to Villard: “It seems to me that

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 542–43.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 542.

there is little parallel between conditions that your grandfather had to confront and those facing us now. Your grandfather faced a great evil, which was to be destroyed. Ours is a work of construction rather than a work of destruction.”<sup>12</sup>

A politics of “destruction” is often chaotic and violent, like the Civil War or decolonization in the twentieth century. You need freedom fighters and soldiers willing to maim and kill if they have to. But liberators may not always possess the virtues and skills necessary to lay the foundation for a democratic future. Douglass’s reflections on emancipation affirmed this view.

My great and exceeding joy over ... the abolition of slavery (which had been the deepest desire and the greatest labor of my life) was slightly tinged with a feeling of sadness.

I felt I had reached the end of the noblest and best part of my life.... Outside the question of slavery my thoughts had not been much directed, and I could hardly hope to make myself useful in any other cause than to which I had given the best twenty-five years of my life. A man in the situation in which I found myself has not only to divest himself of the old, which is never easily done, but to adjust himself to the new, which is still more difficult.<sup>13</sup>

Douglass’s was a plea for willful transformation. Protest and even violence were necessary to abolish slavery. But to construct, sustain, and lead a new political community in its aftermath required foresight, pragmatism, and a willingness to acknowledge and work within the limits of possibility in the present status quo.

For Washington, the distinction between “destruction” and “construction” was an important one. It illustrated the essential difference between the kind of political action and strategies necessary for tearing down an oppressive system like slavery and the form of politics that can incrementally construct institutions, practices, and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 541.

<sup>13</sup> Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 812.

resources capable, simultaneously, of eroding white supremacy and constructing the material and social preconditions for freedom: a black politics that can do all of that in a world not yet of their own making. “Building something new early in the 19th century depended first on breaking down something old: the prerequisite of construction was destruction,” wrote Robert H. Wiebe.<sup>14</sup> The senior Henry James argued that democracy was the “dissolution and disorganization of old forms. It is simply a resolution of government into the hands of the people, a taking down ... and a recommitment.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, true emancipation required more than the abolition of slavery; it also required the material, social, and civic foundations for black citizenship, including access to land and jobs, education and civic institutions, and the guarantee and protection of rights and freedom.

Washington began by asking: “What is the actual condition of the 6,500,000 Negroes who inhabit the Southern States, and who for 250 years through no fault of their own and by the expressed or implied consent of all people, were deprived of the fruits of their labor and kept in abject ignorance, is a question that should often touch the heart of every American citizen?”<sup>16</sup> In his answer to this question, he outlined a view of white supremacy as what today we would call an extreme form of relational inequality or group domination.<sup>17</sup> The idea is that white Southerners as a group are

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<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women’s New England Club, January 27, 1889,” *BTWP*, 3:25.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Anderson offers the most concise definition of relational inequality or relational injustice. A “relational theory of inequality locates the causes of economic, political, and symbolic inequalities in the relations (process of interaction) between the groups, rather than in the internal characteristics of their members or cultural differences that exist independently of group interaction.” A “*relation*” is a

structurally positioned so they are able to effectively oppress, dominate, and exploit Afro-Southerners as a group. This is so regardless of the individual fates of any one white or black Southerner. Washington's view is a familiar one. Most students of the post-Reconstruction South would agree with Washington's conclusion that Jim Crow was a new racial formation, even if some of its structural foundations were rooted in the history of slavery.<sup>18</sup> So, too, would Washington's firmest critics.<sup>19</sup>

I therefore argue that what is of most importance in Washington's descriptions of white supremacy is not solely their content. Rather, what is significant is how the different features of white supremacy that Washington describes hang together so as to constitute a coherent and ideological system where the economic, political, and social institutions and practices of white supremacy reinforce and strengthen one another, resulting in a system that would prove resilient to a frontal attack. In this light, then, I

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"mode of conduct—a practice or habit in accordance with a principle, a rule, process, or norm—by which one part interacts with (or avoids) the other party, or acts in ways that affect the other party's interests or autonomy. The relation may be face-to-face or mediated by institutions such as the state. It is a *group* relation if the process governs relations between groups." *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 16–17. See also Iris Marion Young, who argues that "identity is constituted relationally, through involvement with—and incorporation of—significant others and integration in communities." Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 45. "Relational autonomy consists partly, then," argues Young, "in the structuring of relationships so that they support the maximal pursuit of agent ends." Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 258.

<sup>18</sup> For the best overview of the postemancipation South, see, for example, C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); C. Vann Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955); John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Harper Brothers); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). For the urban context, see Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Washington's two most important and enduring critics were W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1986); Ida B. Wells, *On Lynchings*, introduction by Patricia Hills Collins (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002).

interpret Washington's descriptive accounts of white supremacy as a system of oppression anchored in what today we might call the "basic structure" of society, meaning the South's predominant economic arrangements, major political and social institutions and practices, and civic habits and norms, which *taken together* constitute the background condition against which black Southerners had to carry out their lives.<sup>20</sup> I further argue that Washington's observations of the political and socioeconomic conditions of the postemancipation South rest on a conception of racial oppression that bears great resemblance to Iris Marion Young's understanding of oppression as "systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions."<sup>21</sup>

The chapter therefore addresses Washington's writings on white supremacy in that order—economic, political, and social—before turning to their implications. First, I recover Washington's argument that the failure to provide the freedmen and women land and access to the material conditions necessary for their protection from the worst forms of economic exploitation resulted in the overwhelming majority of black Southerners becoming ensnared in economic arrangements best described as conditional bondage. Second, I turn to his discussion of the political oppression of the freedmen and women, specifically how the use of extra-legal violence,

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<sup>20</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 7–11, 54–58.

<sup>21</sup> Washington's conception of Jim Crow mirrors Iris Marion Young's definition of oppression. She argues that "oppression refers to systematic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intensions of a tyrant. Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are enmeshed in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules," and therefore "oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions." Oppression "names in fact a family of concepts and conditions," which we can "divide into five categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence." Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 40–41, see chapter 2 ("Five Faces of Oppression").

disenfranchisement, and the defunding of education reinforced and strengthened already exploitative and oppressive conditions. But poor whites had to sanction and enforce these transformations; they had to embrace a system that also exploited them. This brings us to Washington's third theme. He often stressed the enduring role of racial caste in America as providing white supremacy with its ideological foundation. In section four, I draw out Washington's main conclusion: if one truly understood the nature of white supremacy, then it would become clear that those advocating a frontal assault on Jim Crow by black Southerners were likely engaging in hollow moralizing or simply asking them to risk their lives for a political program that was certain to fail. He came to this conclusion after describing how deeply embedded white supremacy is in the South's economy, politics, and social order. In a word, I explicate why Washington thought white supremacy invulnerable to an abolitionist politics primarily based in protest, why Jim Crow's entrenchment in the economic, political, and sociocultural structures of the New South made it resilient against reason and criticism.

### **1. From Slavery to Serfdom: The Material Foundations of White Supremacy**

The historian George M. Frederickson writes that "white supremacy refers to the attitudes, ideologies, and policies associated with the rise of blatant forms of white or European dominance over 'nonwhite' populations," that is, the "making invidious distinctions of a socially crucial kind that are based primarily, if not exclusively, on physical characteristics and ancestry," but, he adds, in "its fully developed form, white supremacy means 'color bars,' 'racial segregation,' and the restriction of meaningful

citizenship rights to a privileged group characterized by its light pigmentation.... It suggests systematic and self-conscious efforts to make race or color a qualification for membership in the civil community.”<sup>22</sup> White supremacy was rooted in both the public and private sphere, secured and strengthened through laws and public policies like those of disenfranchisement, segregation, and the defunding of education for blacks. And white terrorism was ever-present—the intimidation, murder, and lynching of black people. But Frederickson’s definition underestimates the material basis of white supremacy.<sup>23</sup>

Washington did not. He emphasized the economic motivations and consequences of Jim Crow, and he did so because black Southerners often experienced its most devastating consequences in their working lives, their daily struggle for survival. As will become clearer, Washington’s analysis anticipated C. Vann Woodward’s study of white supremacy.

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<sup>22</sup> George M. Frederickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi–iii.

<sup>23</sup> Frederickson is the most sophisticated of those historians who take their theoretical bearing from Max Weber. They seek to afford race an autonomous role in history, in part as a reaction to Marxist historians who subordinate race to class. Frederickson acknowledges this fact: “My approach draws much of its inspiration from the interpretative sociology of Max Weber. It acknowledges that the growth of capitalism is a central force shaping the modern world; but it does not assume that we can fully explain patterns of inequality in modernizing, industrializing societies in terms of the economic or even political imperatives of the capitalist system. According to Weber, ‘status’ orders, based on a consciousness of differences in honor and prestige among social groups, are analytically distinguishable from class hierarchies determined by relationships to the market and current modes of production; and the two may arise from independent causes.” George M. Frederickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 216–17. Barbara J. Fields criticizes Frederickson for not balancing his Weber with Marx, and this failure, she says, ends up naturalizing race: “Having arisen historically, race then ceases to be a historical phenomenon and becomes instead an external motor of history.” Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso Books, 2012), 120. Barbara Fields argues, to the contrary, that race “is not an idea but an ideology. It came into existence at a discernable historical moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reasons.” Barbara J. Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States,” *New Left Review* I, no. 181 (May-June 1990), 101.

Much discussion about the Negro's civil rights, his political significance, his social states, and his aspirations can be shortened and simplified by a clear understanding of the economic status *assigned* him in the New Order.... The lives of the overwhelming majority of Negroes were still circumscribed by the farm and plantation. The same was true of the white people, but the Negroes, with few exceptions, were farmers without land.<sup>24</sup>

In arguing that blacks were *assigned* their place in the New South, Woodward's reading focuses attention on the gamut of power, especially economic exploitation, in determining blacks' place in the new social order.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Washington argued that the nature and contours of white supremacy come most clearly into focus when we survey the working lives of African Americans in the postemancipation South. "To a very large extent," Washington told his audience in Texas in 1911, "the problem of the Negro in the Southern States is a labor problem."<sup>26</sup>

Almost all Afro-Southerners at the time of Washington's leadership were either born in slavery, like Washington, or were only one generation removed from bondage. And the majority of blacks remained in the South, working as agricultural laborers and other positions at the bottom of the economic ladder, if paid a wage. Gerald David Jaynes, in his study of the black working class in the postemancipation South, found that "86 percent of all black workers earned their living as agricultural laborers or domestic and personal servants. Of those remaining, approximately seven

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<sup>24</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 205; emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Origins of the New South and the Negro Question," *Journal of Southern History* 57 (November 2011): 811-26.

<sup>26</sup> "An Account of Washington's Tour of Texas," *Tuskegee Student*, 23 (October 7, 1911), *BTWP*, 11:327.

percent were skilled artisans or engaged in manufacturing industries.”<sup>27</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch argue that black Southerners occupying professional status in 1890 were less than 3 percent of the whole.<sup>28</sup> A professional class that could serve as Du Bois’s “talented tenth” was yet to be achieved.

Washington was remarkably close in his own assessments of the economic life of the race. “I think I am safe in saying that 85 per cent of our people in the Southern States are to be found outside of the larger cities and towns.”<sup>29</sup> And of “the ten million black people in the United States,” he said, “nine million at least belong to the ordinary, hardworking classes.”<sup>30</sup> An African American worker in, say, Alabama in 1890 had to probably eke out a living as a sharecropper, which meant he was at the mercy of his white landlord, local shopkeeper, and the sheriff. The surrounding white yeomanry would have offered little protection, and the swelling class of landless whites would have most likely viewed him as a threat, if not the cause of their own diminishing prospects. While the conditions were terrible for black men, they were even worse for black women, who labored under the further danger of sexual exploitation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862–1882* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 267.

<sup>28</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 227.

<sup>29</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Address before the White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, January 15, 1909,” *BTWP*, 10:18.

<sup>30</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Address before the National Business League, August 20, 1913,” *BTWP*, 12:264.

<sup>31</sup> The best general study of black women and labor in the postemancipation South is Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), especially 79–151 and the appendices, 337–49; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Labor and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

These are the facts, Washington often insisted. One has to begin with the realities on the ground. Therefore the “wise and honest thing to do is to make a study of the actual condition and environment of the Negro.”<sup>32</sup> For Washington, there was little worth in discussing a political or social problem in the abstract and even less worth in formulating infeasible responses and solutions. Du Bois was in agreement on the importance of empirical research for a practicable black politics, though they deeply disagreed on what constituted a viable political response, what counted as a political opportunity. “The Negro problem was in my mind a matter of systematic investigation and intelligent understanding. The world was thinking wrong about race,” Du Bois recalled, “because it did not know. The ultimate evil was stupidity. The cure for it was knowledge based on scientific investigation.”<sup>33</sup> Washington often cited Du Bois’s empirical studies of racial inequality, but he did not share Du Bois’s optimism or his view that “stupidity” was at the heart of racial injustice.<sup>34</sup> Washington’s empiricism was born of a desire to know what was possible, given the constraints on the ground.

Writing in his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, Washington said that when he arrived in Tuskegee, Alabama, one of the first things he did was set out to learn about

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<sup>32</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 31–32.

<sup>33</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (Printed in Canada: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1968), 197.

<sup>34</sup> Washington cited several of Du Bois’s studies in his “The Negro in Business,” *Gunston’s Magazine*, March 1901, *BTWP*, 6:76–84. Washington often referenced Du Bois’s *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 [1899]). From 1897 to 1910, Du Bois organized and carried out annual sociological conferences and studies at Atlanta University, which produced eighteen monographs, ranging from “morality among Negroes in cities” to “the Negro artisan” to the “Negro church.” For a summary of these studies, see Ernest Kaiser’s introduction to W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Atlanta University Publications* (New York: Arno Press, 1968). For a representative sampling of Du Bois’s sociological writings, see *W. E. B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community*, ed. Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

the lives of his future students. But to get “a true idea of the real condition of the South, one should leave the town and go far into the country on the cotton plantations,” he asserted, “miles from any railroad where the majority of the colored people live.”<sup>35</sup> He wanted to know, intimately, what life was like for a black person in Alabama. He hoped it would help him anticipate his future students’ concerns and aspirations as well as practical challenges. Washington said he therefore went in search of “the actual life of the people.”<sup>36</sup> Since these visits were unannounced, Washington said he gained an unfiltered look into their lives. He reminded his readers that “there had been no notice given that a stranger was expected,” so he “had the advantage of seeing the real, everyday life of the people.”<sup>37</sup> He recalled that he “ate and slept with the people, in their little cabins,” observing their working and social lives, seeing “their farms, their schools, their churches.”<sup>38</sup> Spending significant time “with the people, in their little cabins,” allowed him to observe closely their struggles as they unfolded on their farms and in their schools and churches.<sup>39</sup> If the farm loomed large over their private affairs, their social life unfolded in the school and church. And if sectarian differences sent them off into different congregations on Sunday morning, the school unified them the rest of the week. This afforded a local teacher, like Washington, tremendous influence: an authority rivaling that of the local preacher.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Speech before the Boston Unitarian Club, Boston 1888,” *BTWP*, 2:503.

<sup>36</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 274.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1–306; Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), 263–83; James D. Anderson, *The*

But in the peculiar world of white supremacy, even evidence of its horrors could be brought to testify for and not against it. Washington warned that black leaders who underlined the inequities tracking the lives of African Americans would find themselves in a difficult position. Their evidence of racial injustice would be drafted into the service of Jim Crow, co-opted by the forces of white supremacy to confirm their beliefs about natural inequality, whether those attitudes relied on the old paternalism of the slaveholder class or the new, emerging ideas about biological inferiority and the decline of the race or the reactionary and violent “Negro-phobia” taking hold of the South.<sup>41</sup> Washington said this very real possibility led activists to evade the actualities on the ground. There “are those among the white race and those among the black race who assert, with a good deal of earnestness, that there is no difference between the white man and the black man in this country.”<sup>42</sup> “This sounds pleasant and tickles the fancy; but, when the test of hard, cold, logic is applied to it,” Washington wrote, “it must be acknowledged that there is a difference—not an inherent one, not a racial one, *but a difference growing out of unequal opportunities in the past.*”<sup>43</sup>

It was important to show how the disadvantages tracking black life were in fact consequences of racial injustice. Washington said that such inequalities are easily

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*Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 110–47.

<sup>41</sup> George M. Frederickson, *The Image in the Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 31–32.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

traced back to the structural vulnerabilities inherited from slavery.<sup>44</sup> He argued, for instance, that slavery shaped the nation's economic, political, and social order, and particularly so in the South. With a monopoly on labor and land, slaveholders suppressed competitors and solidified their economic dominance; they then leveraged their economic power toward gaining control of county and state governments. Once they had captured the political process, they enacted comprehensive slave codes that would reinforce and increase their power over their slaves, as well as buttress and grow their monopoly on wealth and land.<sup>45</sup> Washington maintained that the freedmen and women were emancipated with nothing but their bodies and left at the mercy of their former owners.<sup>46</sup> The former slaveholders, now making up the planter class in the postliberation South, readily exploited the background inequalities inherited from slavery. Given the bargaining position of emancipated blacks, they were swiftly trapped in conditions of servitude.<sup>47</sup>

Recalling his own experience in slavery, Washington said the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, which had effectively unfettered him, proved an ominous

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<sup>44</sup> For a similar reading of emancipation and Reconstruction, see, for example, Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*; Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*; Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 11–110; and, of course, the classic history of race in America remains, Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, see esp. 293–338.

<sup>45</sup> Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 9–12; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> On this point, see Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

<sup>47</sup> For a compelling general introduction to this phenomenon, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 114–78. For a study of this formation in a single community, see Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860–80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

start to freedom. The “rejoicing on the part of the emancipated coloured people lasted but for a brief period,” he said.<sup>48</sup> But by the time his fellow slaves “returned to their cabins there was a change in their feelings.”<sup>49</sup> The “great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children, seemed to take possession of them.”<sup>50</sup> The questions were many, from providing for your family, to finding a community in which you could be a member with standing.

In a few hours the great questions with which the Anglo-Saxon race had been grappling for centuries had been thrown upon these people to be solved. These were the questions of a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches. Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters?<sup>51</sup>

This disheartening birth of freedom was all the more dispiriting for elder slaves. “Some of the slaves were seventy or eighty years old; their best days were gone. They had no strength with which to earn a living in a strange place and among a strange people, even if they had been sure where to find a new place of abode.”<sup>52</sup> Gradually, “one by one, stealthily at first, the older slaves began to wander from the slave quarters back to the ‘big house’ to have a whispered conversation with their former owners as to the future.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 225.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

The foregoing reflections do not suggest that emancipation was not a revolutionary or profound experience for Washington and emancipated slaves in general. Rather, they speak to the most primordial and intuitive needs of any person, free or enslaved: the unavoidable need to acquire basic necessities—food, clothes, shelter, and security. What does emancipation mean when you are thrown off the plantation without a loaf of bread, a shirt on your back, a foot of land, and no where to go? Emancipation was glorious, yes, but it also brought with it burdens, new and difficult challenges. It was, by no means, what we would call freedom.

In *The Story of the American Negro*, Washington elaborated on the inherence of slavery and how that heritage deferred the promise of freedom. He began with the disadvantages incurred from bondage—such as illiteracy, landlessness, and the dim prospects to change either—and how these circumstances landed many emancipated slaves back into servitude.

When he [the Black farmer] was “turned loose” ... at the end of the Civil War, ... he began life, as a great majority of my race began at that time, with nothing. He did not own a house; he had but little clothing, and no food.... After freedom came he left the plantation on which he had been a slave and went to work on an adjoining place as a “renter.” He told me that when he was first free he felt that he had to move about a little to find out what freedom was like. But he soon found that in most respects there was very little difference between his condition in freedom and his condition in slavery. The man of [*sic*] whom he rented furnished him rations, directed his planting, and kept after him to see that he made his crop. At the end of the year the charges of rent and interests had eaten up all that he had earned.... One of the chief privileges of freedom he found to be the opportunity for getting into debt, but after he had succeeded in getting into debt he learned that he had lost even the privilege which had remained to him of moving from one plantation to another.... This condition ... between the white land-owners and the Negro tenants, represents a kind of serfdom.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Washington, *Story of the Negro*, 222–23.

This passage confirms what historians have shown, that is, how the occupational structure of the postemancipation South, shot through with racism, conspired to deny opportunities to blacks other than those that confined them to “voluntary” servitude.<sup>55</sup> To put it somewhat forcefully, black Southerners went from slavery to serfdom.<sup>56</sup> If not serfdom, then they were, on the whole, confined to the lowest rungs of the economic ladder, positions from which they were not expected to ascend.<sup>57</sup>

Turning to the exploitative economic arrangements in the present, post-Reconstruction South, Washington said that they emerged in the private sphere in a liberal, if not altogether free, market. And these arrangements were entered into and enforced by liberal instruments such as contracts.<sup>58</sup> Their consequences yielded the opposite of freedom. “The colored people on these plantations are held in a kind of slavery that is in one sense as bad as the slavery of the antebellum days.”<sup>59</sup> Washington said that it “is the mortgage system which binds him, robs him of independence, allures him and winds him deeper in its meshes each year till he is lost

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<sup>55</sup> See Peter Rachleff, *Black Labor in Richmond, 1865–1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Labor in South Carolina, 1860–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Susan Eva O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> For an empirical study of this claim, see Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom*.

<sup>57</sup> For an economic history of the African American working class in the postemancipation South, see Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots*, especially 253–316, where he describes the economic origins of the color line and in particular the role of “Negro Agrarianism,” 280–300.

<sup>58</sup> For how liberal and capitalist ideals served oppressive ends in regard to emancipated African Americans, see Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–97; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjugation*, 125–63. For both Stanley and Hartman, liberal ideals were emancipatory in that they were effective tools in the abolitionist toolkit, but they were also used for exploitative ends during the postemancipation era.

<sup>59</sup> Washington, “A Speech before the Boston Unitarian Club, Boston 1888,” 2:503–4.

and bewildered.”<sup>60</sup> Washington described the ensuing cycle of debt and dependency thusly:

The first year our people got their freedom they had nothing on which to live while they were raising the first crop. The former masters said: If you will give a mortgage on the crop which you expect to produce this year, I will advance you the money or food on which to live while the crop is being grown. In this way the mortgage system started, and it has grown and overlapped from year to year and fastened itself into the moral and industrial life and not only the colored people but of the white people as well to an extent that it is hard for you to realize. Poor men whether black or white who are *compelled* to seek assistance through these mortgages are charged an interest that ranges from 25% to 40%, and if you bear in mind that this money is not used in most cases but for 4 or 6 months the interest mounts up beyond 100 per cent.<sup>61</sup>

Note that even if a benevolent landowner was forced by his own bank to press his sharecroppers for maximum returns, despite him possibly having benign views of African Americans as a race, he was nevertheless constrained by the lack of credit and cash available in the postemancipation South.<sup>62</sup>

By the turn of century, white landowners had captured the black labor force. To make the point, Washington most often turned to sharecropping and tenancy. They

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Speech before the New York Congregational Club, January 16, 1893,” *BTWP*, 3:282.

<sup>62</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch have situated the emergence of sharecropping in the revolutionary transition from slave to free labor, a struggle between the freedmen, planters, and poor whites, and, significantly, the loss of capital in slaves because of emancipation—they argue that slaves accounted for nearly 60 percent of all agricultural wealth in the cotton states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. *One Kind of Freedom*, 52–53. But Gavin Wright has argued that they missed the central point when they noted that the “average slave owner held nearly two-thirds of his wealth in the form of slaves; slaveholders “were not landlords but ‘laborlords.’” Because the “investments in slaves was independent of local development ... planters had little to gain from improvement.” As a result, southern economic development lagged far behind the North. This is important because it explains the lack of economic opportunities available to blacks and thus the increased cost of exit. *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), 17–19.

were, in fact, the main occupations for blacks in the South.<sup>63</sup> After observing the farms and old plantations throughout the black-belt region, Washington concluded that not just a few but the overwhelming majority of the race remained in conditional bondage.<sup>64</sup> “On many of these plantations the people are but little in advance of where slavery left them.”<sup>65</sup> He warned that sharecropping and the lien were the twin evils of Southern life. Either could trap the worker in a cycle of debt and servitude, leaving them with little prospects of escaping its chains.

Of course when the war ended the colored people had nothing on which to live while the first crop was being made. Thus, in addition to renting the land on which to make the first crop they had to get the local merchant or some one else to supply the food for the family to eat while the first crop was being made.... In order to be sure that he secured his principal and interest a mortgage or lien was taken on the crop, in most cases not then planted. Of course the farmers could pay no such interest and the end of the first year found them in debt.<sup>66</sup>

“Naturally at the end of the year he finds hanging over him a debt which he cannot pay. The second year he tries again to free himself, but in addition to the burden of the

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<sup>63</sup> Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots*.

<sup>64</sup> Washington wrote, “I have often been asked to define the term ‘Black Belt.’ So far as I can learn, the term was first use to designate a part of the country which was distinguished by the colour of the soil.... Later, and especially since the war, the term seems to be used in a wholly political sense—that is, to designate the counties where the black people out-number the white.” Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 272. The label “black belt” has been used to describe a geographical region running from east-central Mississippi to the Virginia Tidewater. But it is primarily used to describe the region’s social and economic features. And the geographical boundaries of the region do not form to its social and economic features. It is also referred to as the “cotton belt.” For a discussion of the relationship between cotton production, the role of black sharecroppers and tenants, and racial alignment in the “black belt,” see Richard Franklin Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 232–34.

<sup>65</sup> Washington, “A Speech before the Boston Unitarian Club, Boston 1888,” 2:503. On the evolution of the plantation structure, see, for example, Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>66</sup> “Letter from BTW to George Washington Cable, October, 8, 1889,” *BTWP*, 3:8.

second year, he finds the first year's debt saddled on to him and thus from year to year many of them struggle," Washington argued.<sup>67</sup>

"Legal slavery is dead but there is an industrial, moral, and mental slavery that is very far from being dead," Washington decided from his observations throughout the South, "and it will be years before that kind of slavery is blotted out."<sup>68</sup> His remarks on sharecropping, renting, and lien are not off the mark. As Eric Foner has argued, the "eventual solution to the labor problem in the post-Civil War cotton South was the system of sharecropping, which evolved out of an economic struggle in which planters were able to prevent most blacks from gaining access to land."<sup>69</sup> Washington wrote that

eighty-five per cent of my people in the Gulf States are on the plantations in the country districts, where a large majority are still in ignorance, without habit of thrift and economy; are in debt, mortgaging their crops to secure food; paying, or attempting to pay, a rate of interest that ranges between twenty and forty per cent; living in one-room cabins on rented land, where schools are in session in these country districts from three to four months in the year, taught in places, as a rule, that have little semblance to school houses.<sup>70</sup>

"Taking Alabama as an example," he added, "in the country districts you will find at least 3/4 or 4/5 of the people [black Southerners] are in debt by reason of the mortgage or crop lien system."<sup>71</sup> "Industrially considered," Washington observed, "most of our people are dependent upon agriculture. The majority of them live on rented lands,

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<sup>67</sup> Washington, "A Speech before the Boston Unitarian Club, Boston 1888," 2:504.

<sup>68</sup> Washington, "A Speech before the New York Congregational Club, January 16, 1893," 3:282.

<sup>69</sup> Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 45. See also Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 97–128.

<sup>70</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, in *BTWP*, 1:15.

<sup>71</sup> Washington, "A Speech before the New York Congregational Club, January 16, 1893," 3:282.

mortgage their crops for the food on which to live from year to year, and usually at the beginning of each year are more or less in debt for the supplies of the previous years.”<sup>72</sup> He stressed that five-sixths of black agricultural workers have to “mortgage their crops and stock for the food on which to live from day to day.”<sup>73</sup>

In the New South, economic exploitation was an intergenerational cycle, a self-reproducing system. Landlords, for example, would use sharecropping and tenancy contracts to bar access to education, guaranteeing them child laborers as well as future generations of dependable, and thus exploitable, labor. In his private correspondence with George Washington Cable, a radical white Southerner whose novels and writings on the New South forced him to live in exile, Washington wrote:

If a farmer have 6 in a family say wife and 4 children, the merchant has it in his power to feed only those who work and some times he says to the farmer if he sends his children to school no rations can be drawn for them while they are attending school.... The practices that I have referred to are in most cases sanctioned by the laws of the legislature or are not prohibited by law.<sup>74</sup>

The result was the loss of sovereignty over oneself and one’s children. Basic necessities like food were calculated per worker in a family. Children who went to school were not considered workers or laborers according to the terms of the contract. The landowner could therefore deprive a family food rations for those children. What becomes evident is that providing schools was insufficient so long as black families had to decide between feeding and educating their children. If blacks would get around Southern legislatures and municipalities defunding public education through

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<sup>72</sup> Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 137.

<sup>73</sup> Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women’s New England Club, January 27, 1889,” 3:25.

<sup>74</sup> “Letter from BTW to George Washington Cable, October, 8, 1889,” 3:8–9.

self-taxation and other self-help and uplift strategies, then white landowners simply wrote into the terms of the labor contracts that sending one's children to school constituted a breach of the contract and therefore afforded the landlord the right to deny that tenant his or her daily provisions, which made exiting these economic relationships the highest priority.

In describing these conditions, Washington reminded his readers that his intention was to also bring to light their ethical and political consequences for African American farmers and workers.

All this pertains to the material side, and not to the ethical, higher growth of the Negro, you say. I do not overlook or undervalue that side of our development. But show me a race that is living from day to day on the outer edges of the industrial world; show me a race living on the skimmed milk of other people, and I will show you a race that is the football for political parties. The black man, like the white man, must have this industrial, commercial foundation upon which to rest his higher life.... It is hard to make a Christian out of a hungry man, whether black or white.<sup>75</sup>

In late nineteenth century America, Christianity was understood as a religion with civilization or, as Washington put it, a "higher life." He therefore insisted that African Americans achieve a secure material base from which they will be better positioned to contend for the higher aims in life, as well as to be able to effectively challenge white supremacy. This material base can also provide necessary protection against some forms of racist repercussions they were certain to suffer as a result of economic mobility and for threatening the status quo.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Booker T. Washington, "An Address before the National Educational Association, July 11, 1900," *BTWP*, 5:580.

<sup>76</sup> There is an interesting tension in Washington's claim. He does not, for instance, address the fact that black economic advancement will, in turn, intensify racial violence. For an empirical study of how

But given the average black sharecropper's level of dependency on his white landlord, you can guess with fair certainty that he will not cross the one person who controls the most basic resources he and his family require for survival. Even without disenfranchising blacks, Washington suggested, the black vote could be nullified or controlled by white landowners.

We must admit the stern fact that at present the Negro, through no choice of his own, is living among another race which is far ahead of him in education, property, experience, and favorable condition; further, that the Negro's present condition makes him dependent upon white people for most of the things necessary to sustain life, as well as for his common school education. In all history, those who have possessed the property and intelligence have exercised the greatest control in government, regardless of colour, race, or geographical location. This being the case, how can the black man in the South improve his present condition? And does the Southern white man want him to improve it?<sup>77</sup>

In an agrarian economy like that of the South, land was the most important resource, of which former slaveholders or the planter class often held a monopoly. To hoard the opportunities afforded by landownership, white planters leveraged their economic power to capture municipal and state governments, and they then used the power of taxation and expenditures to deny blacks education, which could increase opportunities and abilities and thus threaten their power.<sup>78</sup> Enforcing ignorance was therefore necessary for maintaining a dependent and powerless population, whose labor they could easily extort.

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economic threat served as one of the causes of lynching, see Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 55–165.

<sup>77</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 61.

<sup>78</sup> On the relationship between enduring inequalities and opportunity hoarding, see Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 117–69.

“Until there is industrial independence,” Washington concluded, “it is hardly possible to have a good living and a pure ballot in the country districts.”<sup>79</sup> “Where so large a proportion of a people are dependent, live in other people’s houses, eat other people’s food, and wear clothes they have not paid for,” he concluded, “it is pretty hard to expect them to live fairly and vote honestly.”<sup>80</sup> As Thomas Jefferson and the Jacksonians knew so well, if you are economically dependent on another you are at their mercy and can hardly be expected to make autonomous political decisions. This truism sheds its abstraction when we put it in the mouth of a black sharecropper or a former slave, like Washington: “If you live in somebody else’s house, wear somebody else’s clothes, and eat somebody else’s food, you can hardly expect to cast your own vote.... *You are an industrial slave, even if you are a political freedman.*”<sup>81</sup>

Read this way, economic dependency is a constitutive feature of domination and unfreedom.<sup>82</sup> The background conditions of poverty, landlessness, illiteracy, racial terror, and the lack of reasonable alternatives, conspired to tether Afro-Southerners to exploitative and oppressive economic relationships. As James C. Scott has shown:

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<sup>79</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 38.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Account of a Speech in Washington, D. C., April 7, 1894,” *BTWP*, 3:399; emphasis added.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Lovett argues that domination “should be understood as a condition suffered by persons or groups whenever they are dependent on a social relationship in which some other person or group wields arbitrary powers over them.” This relationship is made possible by asymmetrical power where one agent’s powerlessness makes her vulnerable to the other agent’s arbitrary power. Domination therefore “requires at a minimum some degree of dependency on the part of the subject person or group” and it is “plausible to think that the greater the dependency of subject persons or groups, the more severe their domination will be, other things being equal.” “As her dependency increases, so too does the leeway of the agents of her domination—they can treat her with greater severity.” Lovett, following Philip Pettit, is clear that “domination lies in the structure of the relationship, not in its results or outcomes.” Lovett, *A General Theory of Domination and Justice*, 20, 50, see esp. 20–126. Or as Philip Pettit famously argued, “I suffer domination to the extent that I have a master; I enjoy non-interference to the extent that that master fails to interfere.” Pettit, *Republicanism*, 23.

The study of the basis of peasant politics begins with Tawney's metaphor describing "the position of the rural population" as "that of a man standing permanently up to his neck in water, so that even a ripple might drown him." It places the critical problem of the peasant family—a secure subsistence—at the center of the study of peasant politics, which I believe it belongs.<sup>83</sup>

It should also be at the center of the study of black politics in the postemancipation South. Implicit in Washington's descriptions of the evils of the sharecropping system is the view that freedom requires a minimum threshold of independence, which means not being so destitute that you enter arrangements that leave you completely dependent on another for your economic subsistence. While such a condition makes you subject to their will, it does not follow, however, that there was no resistance to such conditions.<sup>84</sup>

Washington clearly identified dependency as producing powerlessness, which in turn yields conditions of domination.<sup>85</sup> When you work someone else's land and live in someone else's cabin, you will not look them in the eye, much less challenge them. Land or alternative economic opportunities are the only means by which black

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<sup>83</sup> James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), viii.

<sup>84</sup> James Scott recovers the infrapolitics of peasants in Southeast Asia, and in doing so he shows the political opportunities available to dominated and subordinated populations and, in turn, the form their politics will take. But entirely missing in Scott's account is the role of institutions and organized forms of resistance. I suspect that Scott wants a theory of resistance that is consistent with his own anarchist commitments. Or, most likely, his case studies do not provide evidence for something approaching the "uplift" or institutionalism of black Southerners during Jim Crow. Washington's uplift politics is therefore distinct from Scott's infrapolitics in that it is predicated on organized activities housed in autonomous black institutions—schools, farmers alliances, newspapers, and so forth. See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) and his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. For an application of this approach to black politics, see Robin D. G. Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994). Note for Kelly, the Malcolm X that matters most is Malcolm X's life prior to his joining the Nation of Islam, his everyday resistance as a small-time criminal (161–82).

<sup>85</sup> Washington's views are consistent with normative insights of the republican tradition, as synthesized by Pettit, *Republicanism*.

sharecroppers and tenants can exit such relationships. Washington therefore argued that the “slavery of the mortgage system is like a cancer eating up the body and soul, leaving the Negro in debt, landless, homeless, and too often with empty stomachs and clotheless body.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, meeting *basic* needs is not an option for most, if any, of us.<sup>87</sup> It is reasonable for people in abject poverty to voluntarily enter servitude in order to avert destitution and starvation. Such extreme conditions point to the relationship between freedom and access to opportunities and the resources necessary to cultivate essential capabilities.<sup>88</sup> It is more than rational for a black farmer to subject himself and his family to slavelike conditions in exchange for meeting basic needs, such as food and health, clothing and shelter, and basic security.<sup>89</sup> But in doing so, he loses his freedom and sovereignty.

We can conclude that sharecropping was a system driven by a search for immediate profits and a long-term strategy of white landowners as a group against

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<sup>86</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Speech at the Memorial Service for Samuel Chapman Armstrong, May 25, 1893,” *BTWP*, 3:319.

<sup>87</sup> For this reason, John Rawls granted that basic rights and liberties may not, in all cases, trump other concerns. “The first principle covering equal basic rights and liberties may easily be preceded by a lexically prior principle regarding that citizens’ basic needs be met, at least insofar as their being met is necessary for citizens to understand and to be able to fruitfully exercise those rights and liberties.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> The basic structure of a just society is one in which its social institutions provide conditions for *actual opportunities*. Amartya Sen argues that freedom requires the elimination of certain forms of dependence because “being free to do something independently of others (so that it does not matter what they want) gives one’s substantive freedom a robustness that is absent when the freedom to do that is conditional either on the help—or on the tolerance—of others.” *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 225–320. This is a general feature of the capabilities approach. As Martha C. Nussbaum argues, the “capabilities approach” begins with questions as to “what people are able to do and be.” *Women and Human Development*, 5; also see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). For a use of the capabilities approach that focuses specifically on the nature and endurance of disadvantage, see Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit, *Disadvantage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and in particular their discussion of *corrosive disadvantage*, 133–54.

<sup>89</sup> Lovett, *A General Theory of Domination and Justice*, 194–96.

poor blacks as a group.<sup>90</sup> And while poor whites did not always fare much better than black tenants, they were not always subject to lynch mobs.<sup>91</sup> As Washington made clear, the state and quasi-state action—such as vagrancy laws authorizing local sheriffs to arrest and imprison blacks who left the land they were contracted to work on, as well as those “in idleness,” and then assigning them to work in chain gangs—was used to enforce geographic immobility and therefore safeguard exploitative and oppressive economic arrangements. For this reason, Washington dedicated much of his secret legal campaigns against what was called the “neo-slavery” of the era.<sup>92</sup>

## **2. The Political Formation of White Supremacy**

The legacies of slavery combined with the socioeconomic barriers of the postliberation South forced blacks into relations of conditional bondage. Abject poverty and landlessness, further entrenched by the lack of income opportunities, no available credit, and no feasible alternatives led many Afro-Southerners to trade away their newly gained freedom in exchange for survival.<sup>93</sup> But even if Washington

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<sup>90</sup> For the relationship between sharecropping, tenancy, and racial oppression in the postemancipation South, see Daniel Novak, *The Wheel of Servitude: Black Forced Labor after Slavery* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1978); Pete Daniel, “The Metamorphosis of Slavery, 1865–1900,” *Journal of American History* 66 (1979): 88–99; William Cohen, *At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Edward Royce, *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

<sup>91</sup> For the complex relationship between black and white sharecroppers, see Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913*, 205–34; Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 187–213; Jacqueline Jones, *Dispossessed: America’s Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 1–126.

<sup>92</sup> One among several examples is Washington’s financing of the Alonzo Bailey case. See Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901–1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 65–81.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Higgs has written one of the classic studies, rightly emphasizing the lack of credit in the southern economy but he overstates the “competitive” market of the New South, ignoring the planters’

convinces us that emancipated blacks entered oppressive relationships because of the background inequalities inherited from slavery, his argument does not entirely explain why Afro-Southerners remained tethered to those arrangements. Washington's descriptive analyses of the material foundations of white supremacy are more convincing when they are considered as part of a single—though significant—feature of a larger system of racial oppression. I want to now turn to the second feature of that system, the political formation of white supremacy. Washington argued that the North's abandonment of Reconstruction, its deserting of Afro-Southerners, paved the way for the political development of white supremacy, which he said were carried out through white terrorism and the state.

Washington recalled that he had spent a significant amount of time reflecting on “that mysterious, indefinable and misleading term ‘The Negro Problem,’”<sup>94</sup> after which he decided that the “Negro Problem” was in fact a “vexed Southern problem,” meaning that even if its effects and consequences extended to the country at large, one has to begin with the South, the fact that the fate of African Americans were left to its fractious politics after the war.<sup>95</sup> Quincy Ewing, a liberal white Southerner and friend of Washington, offered a concise translation of the true meaning of the “Negro Problem” when he wrote in his 1909 article for *The Atlantic Monthly* that the “problem, [h]ow to maintain the institution of chattel slavery, ceased to be at

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use of the state to prevent exit. *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865–1914* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). See also Thavolia Glymph and John Kushma, eds., *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985). For a discussion of how the struggle over cotton production in the South shaped American political development, more broadly, and the nation's political economy, see Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900*.

<sup>94</sup> Washington, “A Speech before the Boston Unitarian Club, Boston 1888,” 2:502.

<sup>95</sup> Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women's New England Club, January 27, 1889,” 3:31.

Appomattox; the problem, [h]ow to maintain the social, industrial, and civic inferiority of the descendants of chattel slaves, succeeded it, and is the race problem of the South at the present time.”<sup>96</sup>

Essential to Washington’s broader argument is the further claim that the politics of the post-Reconstruction South reinforced the social and civic subordination of African Americans and strengthened the exploitative and oppressive economic arrangements that defined their working lives. Racial terror and state action—disenfranchisement, segregation, and new coercive measures such as lien and vagrancy laws—fortified the prevalent relations of domination. A quasi-free market may well have led the freedmen and women into serfdom, but in the New South that market was not entirely free, given the monopoly on land and labor in an agrarian economy and state measures that enforced unfair and unequal economic contracts.<sup>97</sup> These conditions followed from the failures of emancipation and the abandonment of Reconstruction.

The collapse of Reconstruction in 1877 meant that the North would no longer provide emancipated blacks with security, much less the means for elevation.<sup>98</sup> Washington said the South had “appealed to the North ... to leave the whole matter of the rights and protection of the Negro to the South, declaring that it would see to it that

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<sup>96</sup> Quincy Ewing, “The Heart of the Race Problem,” *Atlantic Monthly* 103 (March 1909): 396.

<sup>97</sup> For the radicalism of the redeemer movement and its resulting racial violence within the larger transformations from slavery to the post-Reconstruction era, see, for example, Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 111–326; Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Foner, *Forever Free*. For a view from the vantage point of local and state politics, and, in particular, the place of African American politicians in the violent wars of Reconstruction, see Douglass R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America’s Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

<sup>98</sup> See Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*; Foner, *Reconstruction*; Foner, *Forever Free*.

the Negro would be made secure in his citizenship.”<sup>99</sup> From “the President down,” Washington added, was “inclined more than ever” to leave the “destiny of the Negro to the Negro himself and to the Southern white people among whom the great bulk of Negroes live.”<sup>100</sup> The South had displayed no signs that it was willing to treat African Americans as anything less than slaves, much less as equals, and yet the federal government capitulated to its request, which paved the way for Jim Crow.

The historical accuracy of Washington’s account of these events is less important than the rhetorical force of the arguments. Washington was, essentially, depicting the North as having betrayed blacks, having surrendered their rights and due protections to their former masters. He was very aware that his readers knew how things had turned out. Washington’s revisionist and popular history was intended as a form of social criticism, one that was meant to convey a stern warning to his readers: in the struggle against white supremacy, African Americans are on their own. Washington said that the “question of the rights and elevation of the negro is now left almost wholly to the south.”<sup>101</sup> The “policy of non-interference, on the part of the North and the Federal Government,” would essentially place the political destiny of the race in the “sacred trust” of their former oppressors.<sup>102</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that the federal government and Northern whites were going to intervene on behalf of African Americans in the affairs of the South. Washington knew this. Moreover, there was even less evidence that black

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<sup>99</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 254.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Interview in the *Atlanta Constitution*, November 10, 1899,” *BTWP*, 5:261–62.

<sup>102</sup> Washington, *Story of My Life and Work*, 150.

Southerners had the political, social, and mobilization resources necessary to effectively challenge Jim Crow. This, too, he knew. Besides, Northerners' ambivalence was, partly, a consequence of the war; no American war left greater wounds than the Civil War did.<sup>103</sup> If it left the North unwilling to entangle itself with racial injustice in the South, it also had the cruel result of delivering the emancipated slave into the fury of Southern resentment, and without the means of self-protection. But, as we will see in the following discussion, racism, more than anything else, kept the North on the sideline.

Because slavery was so vital to the economic, social, and cultural life of the South, the abolition of slavery was experienced as the annihilation of Southern life. "The Southern people had lost (so it seemed at the time at least) everything that was worth having and fighting for,—their 'cause,' their property in slaves, their prestige, and their political supremacy."<sup>104</sup> The linear relationship Washington drew is a telling one. The South's "cause," economic base, prestige, and political power were all bound up in its property in slaves. As Ira Berlin argues, a slave society is significantly different than a society with slaves; in slave societies, "slavery stood at the center of economic production, and the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relations: husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee."<sup>105</sup> Emancipation was therefore experienced as a loss of an entire social world, a way of

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<sup>103</sup> For a study of the traumatic aftermath of the war, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009). For a history of the Civil War in American memory and the place of race, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 247.

<sup>105</sup> Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 9–12; Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877*, 9.

life. “The slaves, as property, were now free,” Washington said, “and this freedom was regarded as a punishment visited upon their former masters.”<sup>106</sup> And the wounded “honor” of the South was not easily assuaged. “The difficulty was that the Southern people could not in a day, or in a decade, change their inborn conviction that emancipation was forced upon them as a punishment.”<sup>107</sup> White Southerners “accepted this punishment in a spirit in which injured pride, the sense of loss of property, loss of ‘cause,’” Washington observed, “and revenge were elements. But with all these losses and defeats, the imperious temper of the Southern people suffered no impairment, and they were in no mood to take hold of the work of Reconstruction in the spirit of the victorious North.”<sup>108</sup>

Given the South’s resentment, trauma, and the deepening economic crises of the postemancipation era, the consequences were predictable. Washington speculated that if “the Southern white people could have overcome their fears of Negro freedom, the work of reconstruction would have been greatly simplified.”<sup>109</sup> But they did not overcome those fears. In fact, those racial anxieties shaped the landscape of the New South, leaving African Americans under a perpetual sentence of death, forced to live out their lives against the daily threat of the lynch mob, state violence, and race riots.<sup>110</sup> Blacks were “murdered often without a cause,” Washington somberly

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>110</sup> For the political use of violence in the postemancipation South, see Wells, *On Lynchings*; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), his edited volume, *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), and Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons*

reminded his readers.<sup>111</sup> And he added that “since freedom there have been at least ten thousand colored men in the South, murdered by white men, and yet with perhaps a single exception, the record at no court shows that a single white man has ever been hanged for these murders.”<sup>112</sup> “Awful as were the quick deaths in lynchings, murders, and riots and the slower deaths of the convict lease system,” writes Joel Williamson in *The Crucible of Race*, “these probably accounted for only a few of the vast numbers of victims.”<sup>113</sup>

A “lynching could happen anytime to any black person.”<sup>114</sup> “I think but few people in the South realize to what extent the habit of lynching, or the taking of life without due process of law, has taken hold of us,” Washington noted, “and to what extent it is hurting us.”<sup>115</sup> The period 1832–1930 was a troubling time for African Americans, an era when lynch mobs murdered 3,220 African Americans.<sup>116</sup> It is telling that Washington made such observations in 1889—reproducing them in T. Thomas Fortune’s paper, *The New York Age*—before Ida B. Wells published her

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*Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002); Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 1–54, 166–201. For an account of lynching as a ritual see Mary Esteve, *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118–51, and Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). And for its place within the larger system of Jim Crow, see, for example, Hahn *A Nation under Our Feet*, 425–31; and Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 280–325.

<sup>111</sup> Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women’s New England Club, January 27, 1889,” 3:28.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>113</sup> Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 58.

<sup>114</sup> Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 284.

<sup>115</sup> Washington, *Story of My Life and Work*, 150.

<sup>116</sup> Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 15.

antilynching essays.<sup>117</sup> Wells would have known these essays, as she was at one time mentored by Fortune.<sup>118</sup> Washington tried to appeal to moderate and liberal whites by refuting the common claims given in support of lynching.

Lynching was instituted some years ago, with the idea of punishing and checking outrage upon women. Let us examine the cold facts and see where it has already led us, and where it is likely further to carry us, if we do not rid ourselves of the habit.... During last year 127 persons were lynched in the United States ... that only 24 of the entire number were charged in any way with the crime of rape; that is, 24 out of 127 cases of lynching.... Let us take another year, that of 1892, for example. During this year (1892) 241 people were lynched in the whole United States.... Of the 241 lynched in the whole country, 160 were Negroes and five of these were women. The facts show that out of 241 lynched in the entire country in 1892, but 57 were even charged with rape, even attempted rape, leaving in that year alone 184 persons who were lynched for other causes than that of rape.... Within a period of six years about 900 persons have been lynched in our Southern States. This is but a few hundred short of the total number of soldiers who lost their lives in Cuba during the Spanish-American war.<sup>119</sup>

He tracks not only the statistics of those lynched but also the number of unfounded accusations of rape, much like Ida B. Wells did.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, he added that “there is little excuse for not permitting the law to take its course ... for almost without exception the governor, the sheriff, the judges, the juries and the lawyers are all white men.”<sup>121</sup>

But white supremacy was animated by a fear of free blacks, which leveled the symbolic order and therefore deepened poor whites’ fear of economic and social competition. Wells described the reasoning of the lynch mob: “The Negroes are

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<sup>117</sup> Wells, *On Lynchings*.

<sup>118</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*.

<sup>119</sup> Washington, *Story of My Life and Work*, 150–52.

<sup>120</sup> Wells, *On Lynchings*.

<sup>121</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 152.

getting too independent,' they say, 'we must teach them a lesson.'"<sup>122</sup> Wells added that the "mob spirit has grown with the increasing intelligence of the Afro-American. It has left out-of-the-way places where ignorance prevails, has thrown off the mask and with this new cry stalks in broad daylight in large cities, the centers of civilization, and is encouraged by the 'leading citizens' and the press."<sup>123</sup> Lynching, we can say, was an act of terror intended to police the boundaries of the political community and reestablished a racial order. Whites had a monopoly on state power, the police, and courts, which meant that lynching was hardly about "swift and severe" justice. But lynching was also symptomatic of a much larger struggle within the South; in part, it was a response to the South's confrontation with modernity, the rise of bureaucratic authority, the centralization of political power, and the rise of corporate capitalism.<sup>124</sup>

It is worth noting that Washington did not just track the instances of lynching and murder but illustrated their use as political instruments. He situated, for example, instances of extra-legal and vigilante violence within a repertoire of power that elucidated the system of white supremacy. When recounting his experiences during Reconstruction, Washington said that the violent actions of the Klan had left a lasting "impression" on him.<sup>125</sup> He recalled that white supremacists, organized into terrorist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, had two clear goals: the social subordination of blacks and their political oppression.

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<sup>122</sup> Wells, *On Lynchings*, 45. For a statistical study of the economic motivations behind lynchings, see Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 55–165.

<sup>123</sup> Wells, *On Lynchings*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 12–42.

<sup>125</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 255.

The ‘Ku Klux’ were bands of men who had joined themselves together for the purpose of regulating the conduct of the coloured people, especially with the object of preventing the members of the race from exerting any influence in politics. They correspond to the ‘patrollers’ of whom I used to hear a great deal during the days of slavery.... The “patrollers” were bands of white men—usually young men—who were organized largely for the purpose of regulating the conduct of the slaves at night in such matters as preventing the slaves from going from one plantation to another without passes, and from preventing them from holding any kind of meetings without permission and without the presence at these meetings of at least one white man.... They were, however, more cruel than the “patrollers.”<sup>126</sup>

These forces sought to reestablish a sharp racial order and to also eliminate the possibility of mobilizing political challenges to the new social order. To achieve the second objective, they intimidated, murdered, and lynched Africans Americans who challenged Jim Crow through electoral or other formal arenas of democratic politics. Their “objects, in the main, were to crush out the political aspirations of the Negroes,” Washington wrote. But he added that “they did not confine themselves to this, because school-houses as well as churches were burned by them, and many innocent persons were made to suffer. During this period not a few coloured people lost their lives.”<sup>127</sup>

But in a shockingly revisionist sentence, Washington said: “To-day there are no such organizations in the South,” and there are “few places in the South now where public sentiment would permit such organizations to exist.”<sup>128</sup> Washington himself had lived under constant death threats, as I show later on. It is worth bearing in mind that he spoke to several audiences at the same time, often having to do so within the same article or book, and this was especially true for *Up from Slavery*, his popular and

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

serialized autobiography, from which these remarks are taken. Washington knew that African Americans and liberal whites were aware of lynching and race riots, but he wanted to make the further argument that the social subordination and political oppression of the race did not require these spectacular forms of domination. Disenfranchisement and segregation could just as, if not more, effectively enforce the exploitative and oppressive relations of the postemancipation South and do so in a consistent and predictable way, all under the guise of politics as usual. Remember, he stressed that the lynch mob wanted “to crush out the political *aspirations*” of the race.

The lynch mob proved a disorganized and unreliable source of social control and therefore at best a necessary supplement to the state. They clearly failed at crushing the political aspirations of the race. So, the planter class exploited the racial sentiments of the lower classes and leveraged its own economic power to capture county and state governments, which it then used to politically disenfranchise African Americans. In doing so, elite whites of the black belt had gained a double victory. They eliminated the black electorate, effectively giving the planters control over the black belt region, and in doing so they crushed their political competitors.<sup>129</sup> The most

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<sup>129</sup> For a synthesis on the historiographical debate over the origins and ends of disenfranchisement, see Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disenfranchisement in the South, 1888–1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1–8. V. O. Key had argued that it was the conservative forces of the black belt that drove the policy for disenfranchisement (*Southern Politics in State and Nation* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950], 533–54). C. Vann Woodward essentially agreed, but he stressed the pivotal role of the black vote in an electoral context that featured the rising threat of the Populist movement. So the black-belt Democrats, the old slaveholding class, sought to disenfranchise blacks in order to prevent poor and Populist whites from gaining electoral advantages and threatening the economic order (*Origins of the New South, 1877–1913*). But Woodward later changed course and emphasized the role of poor whites themselves in the march to disenfranchisement (*Strange Career of Jim Crow*). J. Morgan Kousser Jr. affirmed Woodward’s conclusion in *Origins* but does so by drawing heavily on archival research that shows that disenfranchisement did not originate with poor whites or the Populists (*The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One Party South, 1880–1910* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974]). Joel Williamson locates the source of disenfranchisement as an outcome of the struggle between radical and conservative whites,

significant electoral competition was the insurgent Populist movement, which threatened the economic status quo.<sup>130</sup>

Washington's reading suggests that the upheavals of the New South were, to a great degree, efforts to prevent African Americans from having access to the means necessary for social mobility and economic advancement—the capacities and opportunities that could enable exit from exploitative and oppressive social relations, such as alternative sources of income and basic public goods like education. We do not have to view these claims as reductionist or overtly agential. Washington's always underscored consequences. For him, it mattered little whether white planters had disenfranchised blacks to eliminate a white insurgency or whether they did so to bolster their power over blacks. The effect was the same. African Americans were rendered politically powerless.

Regardless of the motivations of the architects of disenfranchisement, the South learned an important lesson from its immediate effects: legislation, supplemented by the lynch mob, could be more effective and lasting. A delegate to the Alabama convention of 1901 summed up the thinking of many whites. "At first, we used to kill them [Black southerners] to keep them from voting; when we got sick of doing that we began to steal their ballots; and when stealing their ballots got to troubling our consciences we decided to handle the matter legally, fixing it so they

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but he locates this struggle in an amorphous background of culture and thought that does not seem to bear out in actual institutional evidence (*The Crucible of Race*). For a discussion of the role of women in the disenfranchisement campaigns, see Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*.

<sup>130</sup> Lawrence Goodwin, *The Populist Movement: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

couldn't vote."<sup>131</sup> "The white South not only held back," wrote Washington, "but opposed the political advances of the [N]egro. It said to Congress, 'You can pass laws putting the [N]egro on equality with the white man, but without local public sentiment these laws cannot be executed,' and they were not."<sup>132</sup> As Woodward noted, the "barriers of racial discrimination mounted in direct ratio with the tide of political democracy among whites. In fact, an increase of Jim Crow laws upon the statute books of a state is almost an accurate index of the decline of reactionary regimes of the Redeemers and triumph of white democratic movements."<sup>133</sup> Disenfranchisement and segregation were carried out through a faux democratic process in which white citizens consented to uphold the terms of racial caste.

Washington noted that there "can be but one object in passing of these laws—to disenfranchise the [N]egro."<sup>134</sup> These same conventions also provided legal enforcement of exploitative lien and sharecropping contracts through new vagrancy and convict-leasing laws.<sup>135</sup> As V. O. Key puts it, the slaveholding class created a New South.

The slaveholding minority, territorially segregated in a small part of the South, had sufficient political skill to rally southerners generally to their cause. Similarly, in the disenfranchising movement, the generating force came fundamentally from whites in the predominantly black

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 227.

<sup>132</sup> Booker T. Washington, "Letter to the Editor of the New York *Herald*, October 20, 1895," *BTWP*, 4:61.

<sup>133</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913*, 212.

<sup>134</sup> Washington, "An Interview in the Atlanta *Constitution*, November 10, 1899," 5:262.

<sup>135</sup> For the most extreme forms of such contracts, see, for example, David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Douglas A. Blackburn, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil-War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996).

counties, and one of their chief motives was the preservation of white control over local government.<sup>136</sup>

This New South looked an awful lot like the old one. Washington had little doubt as to the objectives behind the political transformations he was witnessing. He said that “the Southern people in private conversation do not attempt to hide the fact that they regularly and systematically resort to means to nulify [*sic*] the colored vote—that they are resolved in every case where the colored vote is large enough to have a controlling influence in an election, to see that the colored vote is not counted.”<sup>137</sup> Their instruments were blunt, he observed, but also effective, for the “‘understanding’ clause will serve to keep the [N]egroes from voting.”<sup>138</sup>

A leader of the Democrats insisted that the “plan” is “to invest permanently the powers of government in the hands of the people who ought to have them—the white people.”<sup>139</sup> The always vitriolic and violent James K. Vardaman, who would become governor of Mississippi, did not mince his words. “There is no use to equivocate or lie about the matter,” he said, “Mississippi’s constitutional convention of 1890 was held for no other purpose than to eliminate the nigger from politics; not the ‘ignorant and vicious,’ as some of those apologists would have you believe, but the nigger.... Let the world know it just as it is.”<sup>140</sup> And when the federal government came off the sideline, it was only to offer support to the South. A House of Representatives report from the

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<sup>136</sup> Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 541.

<sup>137</sup> Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women’s New England Club, January 27, 1889,” 3:29.

<sup>138</sup> Washington, “An Interview in the *Atlanta Constitution*, November 10, 1899,” 5:263.

<sup>139</sup> Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 224.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

53rd Congress (1893–1895) said that “every trace of reconstruction measures be wiped from the books.”<sup>141</sup>

In addition to safeguarding the status quo, the new state constitutional conventions also tried to defund public education for African Americans. Education expressed the broader aspirations of the race. This fact was why schools became a primary target for white supremacists. In 1871 twenty-six schools were burned in Monroe County, Mississippi.<sup>142</sup> But by the 1890s, legislation was doing much of this work. When black children did attend school, it was sporadic. Schools were now in the crosshairs of the state. Washington wrote to Cable in 1892 that whites were able to do so because education was left to local authorities.<sup>143</sup> He further argued that the “state had not been able to build schoolhouses in the country districts, and, as a rule, the schools were taught in the churches or in log cabins.”<sup>144</sup> But it was not a matter of capacity. Washington noted that each black “child in Alabama will receive for its education this year 81 c from the state, [whereas] [e]ach child in Massachusetts about \$15.00.”<sup>145</sup> “Sixty per cent of the colored children attended no school last year,” he stressed.<sup>146</sup> Labor demands, due to their parents’ economic dependency, often

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<sup>141</sup> Richard Velely, *The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>142</sup> Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 278–80.

<sup>143</sup> Booker T. Washington, “Letter to George Washington Cable from BTW, August 31, 1892,” *BTWP*, 3:262.

<sup>144</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 276.

<sup>145</sup> Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women’s New England Club, January 27, 1889,” 3:27.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

determined attendance. Washington contended that in “the country districts the public schools are kept open on an average of 3 1/2 months in the year.”<sup>147</sup>

It would, however, be wrong to assume that there was a consensus among white Southerners as to the best means for effectively subordinating blacks. As Washington noted, the rise of white supremacy cannot be divorced from the intrawhite struggle of the times. He said that, “to a very large extent, a white man’s quarrel and the Negro was the tennis ball which was batted backward and forward by the opposing parties.”<sup>148</sup> C. Vann Woodward would later argue that white supremacy was really a struggle over “*which whites* would be supreme.”<sup>149</sup> Washington’s point was a simple one. To understand the emergence of Jim Crow, one has to situate its rise within the broader economic and political transformations of the post-Reconstruction South, as well as against the competing white cleavages that vied for power. In short, Washington argued that African Americans “in the South are surrounded by prejudice, deprived of a share in government, in most cases, and are too often shot down and lynched, and denied ... just rights.”<sup>150</sup> The significance of this account is not simply that Afro-Southerners were economically exploited because of the legacies of slavery but rather how the political power of the state, supplemented by white terrorism, entrenched those inequalities.

### **3. Racial Caste as the Social Basis of White Supremacy**

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>148</sup> Washington, *Story of the Negro*, 211.

<sup>149</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913*, 328; emphasis original.

<sup>150</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Article in the *A. M. E. Church Review*, April 1894,” *BTWP*, 3:409.

According to Washington, the history of racial caste in the United States goes a far way in explaining why poor whites were willing to support and enforce Jim Crow. Caste emerged as a defense and justification for slavery, but its consequences soon extended beyond the institution that gave birth to it. The racist attitudes and norms fostered and nurtured over the long history of slavery made it all but impossible to create and sustain fair and equal conditions in the postemancipation South. These observations by Washington are consistent with the historical consensus on race and racism in America.<sup>151</sup> What is of consequence, specially for us, is how racial caste fits within this larger conception of white supremacy as a system of relational injustice, in particular the formative role of caste in providing rationalizations and justifications for white supremacy, providing an ideological coherence for a system of naked exploitation, subordination, and oppression.

Washington would often make the point that slavery had “existed before the foundation of the Union,” but he did so to show that slavery “had been accepted as a fact by the framers of the Constitution. As such, it had a legitimate claim,” which gave it “the protection of the government.”<sup>152</sup> The historian Edmund S. Morgan makes the same argument when he writes that the “men who came together to found the independent United States, dedicated to freedom and equality, either held slaves or

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<sup>151</sup> For a general history of race thinking or racism, see George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2002); Winthrop Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). For a study of racism in the nineteenth century, see Frederickson, *The Image in the Black Image in the White Mind*. And for a discussion “racialist” reformers or liberal racists, see Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865–1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

<sup>152</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 86.

were willing to join hands with those who did.”<sup>153</sup> Washington maintained that slavery was protected not only by the Founders but also by the American people. He said slavery “was fostered and defended as a national institution not only by numerous acts of government, but by public sentiment in the Northern states.”<sup>154</sup> In other words, slavery shaped the overwhelming majority of white citizens’ ideology, disposing them to support and protect the institution. Though socially formed as a response to slavery, caste would soon outlive the institution and, in doing so, make possible the rise of Jim Crow. We should therefore read Washington’s observations as part of a genealogical account of racism in America, meaning, one that identified symptomatic moments in which racial caste ideologically “legitimized” and sustained oppressive regimes.

Describing the popular support for slavery among whites, Washington argued that this support amounted to a practical politics, one resting primarily on economic self-interest. Slavery had begun as “an industrial system,” he said, “a method of obtaining and directing labor.”<sup>155</sup> There were two and a half million slaves, valued “at upward of two billions of dollars.”<sup>156</sup> And no “other interest in the United States at that time approximated to the amount of its invested capital the sum represented in these human chattels. The labor of these slaves was to a very considerable extent the basis of American commerce and credit.”<sup>157</sup> For this reason, he insisted, “the North was quite as willing to legalize and protect slavery as the South, and continued to do

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<sup>153</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975), 4. See also Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>154</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 86.

<sup>155</sup> Washington, *Story of the Negro*, 242.

<sup>156</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 83.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

so as long as it paid and was practicable.”<sup>158</sup> Washington went on to argue that one did not have to look far for evidence. “The acts of Congress, the messages of our presidents, the utterances of our cabinet ministers, and correspondences with the representatives of the nation at foreign courts contain abundant evidence of the constant concern of our government that nothing should be done to impair the security of slave-property in the United States.”<sup>159</sup> Few would disagree with the proposition that the desire for profit lay behind enslavement of human beings.<sup>160</sup>

What is most important is Washington’s further claim that it was “[n]ot the South alone, but the entire nation, [that] was interested, directly or indirectly, in preserving the integrity and maintaining the economic value of slave-labor.”<sup>161</sup> The contention was that the consequences of slavery far exceeded slaveholders’ monetary motivations. Slavery soon came to shape the political institutions and culture of the entire nation. He said “slavery had become, with the course of time, not only an industrial but also a political system and, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, many people in the South had begun to feel that it was absolutely necessary to preserve this system.”<sup>162</sup> And by 1840, “slavery was the one and overshadowing fact

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> For the relationship between capitalism and slavery in antebellum America, see John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume 1: Commerce and Compromise, 1820–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume 2: The Coming of the Civil War, 1850–1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The best single volume on the economic foundations of American slavery is Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Slavery*, Reissue Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013); see also Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1989).

<sup>161</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 81.

<sup>162</sup> Washington, *Story of the Negro*, 242.

in our national life.”<sup>163</sup> Giving the point force, Washington depicted slavery as a leviathan, a monster that attached itself to the country, corrupting its institutions as well as its civic norms, attitudes, and habits. Once slavery got “its tentacles fastened on to [*sic*] the economic and social life of the Republic,” he wrote, “it was no easy matter for the Republic to relieve itself of the Institution.”<sup>164</sup>

A republic founded on the idea of inviolable rights and inalienable equality also insisted that enslaved blacks be denied all “civil and political rights.”<sup>165</sup> Washington wrote that the “best expression of the innate wrong of slavery” is found in Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin’s ruling in *North Carolina v. Mann* (1829), which “affirmed the rights of the master to inflict any kind of punishment upon a slave, short of death.”<sup>166</sup> Quoting directly from the decision, Washington underlined the role of arbitrary and unchecked power.

Justice Ruffin ... said: “The end is the profit of the master; his security, and the public safety; the subject, one doomed in his own person and his posterity to live without knowledge and without capacity to make anything his own, and to toil that another may reap the fruit.... Such obedience is the consequence only of uncontrolled authority over the body. There is nothing else which can operate to produce the effect. The power of the master must be absolute to render the submission of the slave perfect.”<sup>167</sup>

The slave was subjected to the “unlimited authority of the master.”<sup>168</sup> As the authors of *Cato’s Letters* put it: “Slavery is, to live at the mere Mercy of another.”<sup>169</sup> His

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<sup>163</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 81.

<sup>164</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 222.

<sup>165</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 94–95.

<sup>166</sup> Washington, *The Story of Slavery*, 23–24.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 94–95.

contention was that the social relation of master to slave was based on and given its fullest meaning in the law. The law guaranteed that the slave was socially dead, as Orlando Patterson has argued.<sup>170</sup> And many scholars would agree with this conclusion.<sup>171</sup> Washington noted that the slaveholder's powers were extensive and they included: "the unlimited authority of the master or owner of slaves"; the "abrogation of marriage and the family relation among slaves," the "power to enforce labor without wages"; the incapacity "of slaves to acquire and hold property," the "incapacity to enjoy civil, domestic, and political rights"; the "incapacity to make contracts or bargains"; the "liability of the slave to be sold like other chattels, and separated from relatives"; and the "power of the master to forbid education, and to permit religious gatherings at his own discretion."<sup>172</sup>

But the real question is why did nonslaveholding whites endorse and protect such a ghastly institution, one that stood in stark contrast to their professed ideals and values? Washington said that racism provided an answer. "At first the only legal distinction between the bond servant and the Negro slave was that the one was a servant for a period of years and the other was a servant for life."<sup>173</sup> But one "of the effects of the passing away of white servitude was to make the distance between the

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<sup>169</sup> Quoted in Pettit, *Republicanism*, 33.

<sup>170</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

<sup>171</sup> A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race & the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., *Shades of Freedom: Racial Politics and Presumptions of the American Legal Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Derrick A. Bell, *Race, Racism, and American Law*, 6th ed. (New York: Aspen Publishers, 2008); Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U. S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>172</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 94–95.

<sup>173</sup> Washington, *Story of Slavery*, 21.

free white man and the black slave seem greater than ever.”<sup>174</sup> Slavery in America had generated racial ascriptions that would, in turn, serve as rationalizations and justifications for the institution and, later, for its very expansion. It “grew up in the minds of white people,” Washington argued, “the notion that slavery was the natural condition of the Negro just as freedom was the natural condition of the white man,”<sup>175</sup> because the slave was of “a different race and he was doomed to perpetual servitude. The result was, as time went on, [that] it came to be regarded as the natural vocation and destiny of the man with the black skin to be the servant and the slave of the white man.”<sup>176</sup> It “was generally assumed that, on the whole, the Negro was better off in slavery than as a free man. Though the Northern people did not favor the extension of slavery, they were disposed to meet in the spirit of conciliation every demand for more protection, more power, and more territory for this traffic.”<sup>177</sup>

Edmund S. Morgan’s study of seventeenth-century Virginia, British North America’s first slave colony, offers a concise description of the early formation of racism in America. He argues that while race was not a necessary condition for the emergence of slavery, race “*was* an ingredient,” and as a result the new social order was “determined as much by race as by slavery.”<sup>178</sup> Virginia slaveholders, possessing power in property, moved to strengthen and protect the new social order against possible insurgency by poor whites acting alone or in concert with blacks. “If freemen

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 86.

<sup>178</sup> Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 315; emphasis original.

with disappointed hopes should make common cause with slaves of desperate hope,” the new order of things would be threatened.<sup>179</sup> To ward off this threat, slaveowners strategically appealed to the white lumpenproletariat offering landless white masses symbolic recognition as co-members of the superior race, which in the absence of a ballot and under conditions of colonial dependence amounted to significant social standing. The white yeomanry received “social, psychological, and political advantages that turned the thrust of exploitation away from them and aligned them with the exploiters.”<sup>180</sup> That is, the white lumpenproletariat would share “a common identity” with their exploiters: “neither was a slave ... and both were equal in not being slaves.”<sup>181</sup> Racism became the obvious answer to interracial solidarity because a “screen of racial contempt” could block the possibility of a politics predicated on shared aims.<sup>182</sup>

Washington’s most important argument is the claim that slavery had evolved into a social order with far-reaching consequences, the most significant of which was the formation of racial caste. A set of degrading physical, psychological, and social characteristics were ascribed to *all* African Americans.<sup>183</sup> “People began to feel that the black man did not have the same human feelings as the white man; that his pains and his sorrows were somehow not real and did not have to be considered in the same

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>183</sup> For the relationship between racial ascription and American citizenship, see Smith, *Civic Ideals*. For the place of racial ascription as an American political tradition, one that rivals both liberalism and republicanism, see Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: Multiple Traditions in America,” *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 549–556.

way that one would consider these same feelings in a white man.”<sup>184</sup> As I will show in the following discussion, the entrenched nature of caste provided an ideological wall against public appeals and protest. “All the forces of conservatism in the country were ... in favor of preserving the *status quo*.”<sup>185</sup> “In practice,” Washington said, the black Northerner “was not regarded as a member of political society and was, consequently, almost wholly without the guarantee of civil rights.”<sup>186</sup>

As a result, he said that there was a “steady growth in the United States, both North and South, of a caste system which excluded the Negro from the ordinary privileges of citizenship exclusively upon the ground of his color.”<sup>187</sup> Free African Americans were denied access to many occupations and barred from education, and were politically unfranchised in many states.<sup>188</sup> Even “schools were closed against” free blacks “by popular prejudice.”<sup>189</sup> “A Negro, even though a free man, could not at that time testify in a case in which a white man was a party, and Negroes were not admitted to public schools.”<sup>190</sup> For African Americans, racial caste closed the distance between slavery and freedom. Washington thus argued that so powerful was caste that it “imposed ... limitations and burdens on the free Negroes” that “reduced that unfortunate class to a condition often counted worse than that of slavery.”<sup>191</sup> “The lack

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<sup>184</sup> Washington, *Story of Slavery*, 21.

<sup>185</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 90; emphasis original.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>187</sup> Washington, *Story of the Negro*, 117.

<sup>188</sup> See Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961).

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>190</sup> Washington, *Story of the Negro*, 117.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

of economic and industrial opportunities of the free colored people, prior to the Civil War,” Washington added, “can be easily inferred from what has already been said concerning the general sentiment of proscriptions that prevailed.”<sup>192</sup>

Moreover, a “free Negro might be sold into slavery to pay taxes or to pay fines, and in Maryland free Negroes might be sold into perpetual slavery for the crime of entering the state.... There were other means by which a considerable number of free Negroes were re-enslaved.”<sup>193</sup> Responding to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, Marin R. Delany, the radical abolitionist and emigrationist, made the same argument: “The Bill [Fugitive Slave Law] had one object in its provisions ... that is, the reduction of every colored person in the United States ... to a state of relative *slavery*.”<sup>194</sup>

These conditions were allowed to emerge and persist because of caste. As Washington often noted, the “state of public feeling ... fully justified the government and its officials in everything they did to protect slavery, since their action was sanctioned by a sentiment national in extent and character.”<sup>195</sup> One way to read Washington’s observations is to interpret them as amounting to a single claim: in a nation professing inalienable rights and inviolable equality in the presence of human bondage, racist ideologies proved pivotal and lasting.<sup>196</sup> The historian Barbara Fields

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<sup>192</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 213.

<sup>193</sup> Washington, *Story of the Negro*, 115.

<sup>194</sup> Martin R. Delany, “The Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent,” in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 272.

<sup>195</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 88.

<sup>196</sup> For the transformations of racial ideology from 1877 to 1914—which included a transition from paternalism to the new paternalism, to biological inferiority and the “vanishing” race, and then to “the

says that “racial ideology supplied the means of explaining slavery to people whose terrain was a republic founded on radical doctrines of liberty and natural rights, and, more important, a republic in which those doctrines seemed to represent accurately the world in which all but a minority lived.”<sup>197</sup> Ideologies are “conceptual social maps” that rely on both reason and emotion.<sup>198</sup> They can therefore affirm our virtuous commitment to rights and freedom and sustain our struggle for justice, as well as provide rationale and justifications for our most invidious prejudices and injustices.

Because ideologies fill a need, be it for explaining the given or motivating change, there was no need to formulate a systematic racist ideology justifying the oppression of Afro-Americans when the overwhelming majority of whites lacked political rights and had social recognition just above the station of a slave and little to no economic protection. The standard justifications of inequality would suffice.

Barbara J. Fields explains why:

Only when the denial of liberty became an anomaly apparent even to the least observant and reflective members of Euro-American society did ideology systematically explain the anomaly. But slavery got along for a hundred years after its establishment without race as its ideological rationale. The reason is simple. Race explained why some people could rightly be denied what others took for granted: namely, liberty, supposedly a self-evident gift of nature’s god. But there was nothing to explain until most people could, in fact, take liberty for

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Negro as beast,” and, later, “accommodationist racism,” see Frederickson, *The Image in the Black Image in the White Mind*, 198–319. The best single work on the intellectual history of social Darwinism in American is Richard Hofstadter’s *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944). But Hofstadter often confines his discussion of race and social Darwinism to American imperialism (see esp. 170–200). For the influence of social Darwinist ideas on the development of post-Reconstruction white supremacy, see Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69–95, and Frederickson, *The Image in the Black Image in the White Mind*, 228–55.

<sup>197</sup> Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 141.

<sup>198</sup> Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 30.

granted—as the indentured servants and disenfranchised freedmen of colonial America could not.<sup>199</sup>

Slaveholders have always sought to explain themselves: how, for example, they could profess Christian principles and defend their ownership of souls. But societal racism does not amount to a systematic ideology explicitly defending racial slavery on the grounds that Afro-Americans had no claim to inalienable rights. The need to do so presupposes a popular belief in universal rights and it was not until the 1830s that this self-evident truth impressed itself on the majority of people. This is not to say that Afro-Americans or whites did not profess human equality prior to the 1830s. They certainly did. But those arguments were often grounded in religious rather than liberal principles. What was in question was not Afro-Americans' inalienable rights but their sacrosanct souls.

Theodore Dwight Weld, who published the first great antislavery primer in 1839, wrote that the slaveholder “does not contemplate slaves as human beings, consequently does not *treat* them as such; and with indifference sees them suffer privations and writhe under blows, which, if inflicted upon whites, would fill him with honor and indignation.”<sup>200</sup> But the failure to “contemplate slaves as human beings” did not come out of thin air. Fields argues that

race did not spring into being simultaneously with slavery, but took even more time than slavery did to become systematic. A commonplace that few stop to examine holds that people are more readily oppressed when they are already perceived as inferior by nature. The reverse is

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<sup>199</sup> Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 141.

<sup>200</sup> Quoted in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 7.

more to the point. People are more readily perceived as inferior by nature when they are already seen as oppressed.<sup>201</sup>

Racial ideologies are strategic social responses intended to justify slavery—the legal extortion of labor, the sanctioned exploitation of black bodies. The malleability of these ideologies is seen most clearly when we track them along the lines of American political development, revealing how they adapt to institutional and ideational changes, altering the defense of race-based domination in light of institutional innovation and increasing protections, as well as shifting public opinion.<sup>202</sup> For Washington, the significance of racial caste lay in its ability to explain, rationalize, and justify the social world, economic practices, and political institutions that buttressed white supremacy, in an intuitive and emotional, though unscientific, way. He often marveled at its effective incoherence.

For much of history, proslavery forces could take comfort in knowing that the human condition was one of stark inequality. Any survey of proslavery thought illustrates that human bondage was taken for granted.<sup>203</sup> The ideals and principles of Enlightenment liberalism were not socially transmitted into a collective self-understanding and given popular force until the 1830s, after the British Empire's

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<sup>201</sup> Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 129.

<sup>202</sup> In many ways, Washington is deeply attentive to the process by which racial rule results from transformations in the major social and political institutions of the state. The classic work is, of course, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986). For a comparative perspective, see Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For the making and unmaking of racial formations in American politics, see Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, *Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama's America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). See also Joseph Lowndes, Julie Novkov, and Dorian T. Warren, *Race and American Political Development* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>203</sup> Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

abolishment of slavery and rise of Jacksonian democracy in America. The increasing presumption of freedom and equality encouraged abolitionists to turn away from religious appeals and toward a language of rights. This shift forced proslavery activists to modify their defense of racial slavery, which, in turn, led to a proliferation of more coherent racial ideologies—as coherent as they could be—intended to combat the presumption of natural rights, in other words, proslavery arguments for why African Americans did not have claims to inalienable rights. These ideologies deployed religious and scientific justifications that denied the personhood of Afro-Americans and thus its resultant rights and protections.

George M. Frederickson, for example, argues that racism as an ideology of “inherent black inferiority” did not emerge until the 1830s as a response to abolitionism; the defenders of slavery “needed a justification of the institution that was consistent with the decline of social difference and the extension of suffrage rights among white males, a democratization process that took place in the South as well as the North.”<sup>204</sup> Eugene Genovese has offered the most systematic account of the slaveholding ideology. He argued that the South was a “unique kind of paternalist” society, but he added that “Southern paternalism, like every other paternalism, had little to do with Ole Massa’s ostensible benevolence, kindness, and good cheer. It grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation.”<sup>205</sup> As Frederickson himself observed, racism is a “scavenger ideology.”<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Frederickson, *Racism*, 79.

<sup>205</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 4.

<sup>206</sup> Frederickson, *Racism*, 22.

To assume that slavery required a *rigorous* and *coherent* ideology, even after the 1830s, rests on the deeper assumption that members of a slave society, especially slaveholders, shared the moral and philosophical premise that all human beings are equal. In fact, it is human equality that required a defense. “Few slaveholders ever bothered to offer a coherent racial defense of bondage” because so “engrained were their racist assumptions that slaveholders were most likely to reveal themselves by recoiling in shock from the mere hint of racial egalitarianism or antislavery sentiment.” “Slaveholders were thus accustomed to thinking in crude racial terms,” argues James Oakes, “and it was upon these assumptions [that] they rested their defense of black slavery.” Oakes adds that their “casual remarks indicate that slaveholders had no trouble holding at once to environmental, religious, biological and cultural explanations of black degradation.”<sup>207</sup>

In returning, time and again, to the historical relationship between slavery and racial caste, Washington sought to illustrate the endurance of racism in American politics. He did so in order to elucidate the ideological strength and coherency of white supremacy not only in the South but also in the North. He did not, however, think that racism itself required consistency and soundness in order to bolster Jim Crow. He put the point forcefully in an article in the *American Magazine* in 1913:

Many people believe that it is much easier for a colored man to succeed in the North than in the South, because there is no “color line” in the North as there is in the South, at least no color line that is clearly marked and officially recognized. And yet, one of the most baffling and discouraging obstacles in the way of colored people in the North is this

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<sup>207</sup> James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 131–32.

same “color line”—*all the more perplexing because it is so vague, so inconsistent and so changing.*<sup>208</sup>

An African American in the postbellum North was as likely to have his or her life prospects severely constrained by the prevalence of racism, regardless of how incoherent the ideology turned out to be.

Washington therefore stressed the force of *de facto* forms of white supremacy in achieving the same ends as *de jure* forms of Jim Crow. He considered the latter a more codified and intense practice of racial rule. “Let the Negro students enter a Southern white school, [and] if the [N]egro remains,” Washington said, “the school will break up. Let a [N]egro merchant enter a northern factory as a laborer, and if the negro remains, the factory will break up.”<sup>209</sup> He further argued that there are many “wrongs growing out of prejudice. You see in the newspapers that the [N]egro is murdered often without a cause, that is true; that he is cheated, that is true; that he is often deprived of political franchise, that is true, that on public highways he is often made to pay for first class accommodations, then forced to accept second class fare, that is true.”<sup>210</sup>

In many ways, Washington’s answer to why poor whites enforced Jim Crow anticipated Du Bois’s famous conclusion at the end of *Black Reconstruction*, where Du Bois observed that while the white yeomanry of the postemancipation South remained poor, they were “compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological

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<sup>208</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Article in *American Magazine*, June 1913,” *BTWP*, 12:225; emphasis added.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women’s New England Club, January 27, 1889,” 3:27.

wage.”<sup>211</sup> Du Bois goes on to explain that poor whites received psychological rewards from their enhanced social standing in sociopolitical institutions and civil society. The brutality that became the hallmark of Southern racism, lynching and mob violence, he concluded, were the net effects of structurally positioning one social group so as to have arbitrary power over another:

They [poor whites] were admitted freely to all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them.... On the other hand, in the same way, the Negro was subject to public insult, was afraid of mobs ... and was compelled almost continuously to submit to various badges of inferiority.... Mob violence and lynching were the inevitable result.<sup>212</sup>

Poor whites were structurally advantaged in the New South, and their newfound power and standing—political, civil, and social, even if not economic—placed them in an asymmetrical position to the powerlessness and marginalization of Afro-Southerners, thus incentivizing and even authorizing whites of all classes to arbitrarily exercise power over Afro-Southerners. But one must ask why these psychological wages paid so well. As Woodward aptly observed: “It took a lot of ritual and Jim Crow to bolster

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<sup>211</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*, 700. See also David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Books, 1991). This line of argument can be taken too far, as Barbara J. Fields has argued. She notes that Du Bois had also argued that a black man “is a person who must ride ‘Jim Crow’ in Georgia.” Fields notes that being “forced to ride Jim Crow is the key. Not identity as sense of self, but identification by others, peremptory and binding, figuring even in well-meant efforts to undo the crimes of racism. The victim’s intangible race, rather than the perpetrator’s tangible racism, becomes the center of attention.” Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 158.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

the creed of white supremacy in the bosom of a white man working for a black man's wages."<sup>213</sup>

#### **4. The Limits of Protest Politics**

Washington believed that while protest was essential to challenging white supremacy, it also had its limits. The economic dependency and powerlessness of the race, reinforced by disenfranchisement and white terrorism, further strengthened by the social subordination resulting from caste, yielded a system of oppression that would prove resilient to a politics predicated primarily on protest. In 1914 Washington wrote privately to C. Elias Winston, a black minister and "race man" from St. Louis. He said that the "two lines of thought and work must go hand in hand; condemnation of wrong and constructive effort."<sup>214</sup> He added, "I realize fully the importance of condemning wrong—such wrongs as segregation,—but I realize, too, the danger of our spending too much time and strength in mere condemnation without attempting to aid our cause by progressive, constructive work as well as condemnation."<sup>215</sup> "Condemnation is easy," Washington said, but "construction is difficult. The constructive action should employ the major portion of our time."<sup>216</sup> The point was that after destroying slavery and liberating black Southerners, the federal government and Northern whites did not fully recommit to constructing a democratic and free South.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 1877–1913, 211.

<sup>214</sup> "Letter to C. Elias Winston from BTW, October 2, 1914," *BTWP*, 13:141.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*; Foner, *Reconstruction*.

A politics relying largely on protesting Jim Crow would likely fail because of the strength and coherence of white supremacy; its economic, political, and ideological entrenchment made Jim Crow resilient to reason and all but deaf to empathy. To be clear, Washington did not say that protest politics was not an important strategy for challenging white supremacy.

The condemnation of wrong should always have a very large and important place; the demands for rights withheld should have a large and important place; but a very large place in all of our discussion and in all of our efforts should be given to something that is constructive. Now, some of us live in the section of the country where we hear of these wrongs. We eat them for our breakfast, for our dinner, for our supper.<sup>218</sup>

Instead, Washington thought that protest strategies in the North should supplement the organized resistance carried out by Afro-Southerners on a daily basis. Given the constraints placed on them by Jim Crow, uplift politics had to be practicable and prudent, concrete, and, at times, inescapably compromising.

He said it “is comparatively easy for you in these atmospheres [the North] to discuss the problem, but do so always with a view of looking not to your own interests, but to those of the larger masses of our people in the South.”<sup>219</sup> “We need organizations,” he insisted, “both national and local in character, in order that all the issues of the race may be reached and may be emphasized.”<sup>220</sup> In the South, challenging white supremacy will require a more constructive, programmatic politics:

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<sup>218</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Extract from the Proceedings of the Washington Conference of the National Sociological Society,” *BTWP*, 7:342.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 341–42.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

“What we can construct, what we can project, is what will bring us relief.”<sup>221</sup>

Washington argued that Afro-southerners would therefore have to economically, socially, and culturally uplift themselves, and to do so under the most trying circumstances. They should not repeat the mistake of old, assuming that a negative politics could positively realize the economic and social bases of freedom. Blacks would have to do this work themselves. His conclusion did not flow from a normative commitment to laissez-faire principles but from cold realism and a somber empirical sensibility.

Let us return to where we began, with Villard. Like so many who viewed white supremacy as a mere continuation of slavery, Villard was unimpressed with Washington’s argument that Jim Crow was a distinct historical conjuncture, a new form of racial domination requiring a new politics. He noted that their disagreement was indeed deep and philosophical, but like most activists and journalists he had an unshakeable faith in the emancipatory power of protest and the pen. All black politics required was the right temperament to set the right action and thought in motion, by which he, of course, meant the “Garrisonian temperament.” Villard wrote to Washington:

But I do not think that bad conditions should be glossed over. I think every leader of the race, for instance, ought to come out and denounce in unmitigated terms the movement towards segregation.... As I said to you in my earlier letter, it seems to me that where we differ is in the fundamental philosophy. You feel that this is the best way to aid the case; I feel that other ways are better, and that stressing the evils of the situation ought never to be neglected for a moment.... I am glad indeed to read the extracts from your speeches which you are good enough to enclose in this letter. They could not be improved upon as far as they

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 342.

go, *but they do not go far enough to satisfy any Garrison*. Perhaps this is the fault of the Garrisonian temperament, but it is a fact.<sup>222</sup>

There is a remarkable confidence in Villard's sense of what is best for black Southerners and what form of leadership they deserve. Washington replied in agitation: "Of course, I can easily understand that it would be much more satisfactory in every way if I would do my work according as you and others direct or would direct, but I imagine I shall have to continue doing it in my own way, bringing about such results as I have been able to bring about, and helping as best I can in the general work of uplift."<sup>223</sup> Washington said, "I could deal in epithet and denunciation as many of my own detractors do, but somehow it has never seemed to me that they got very far with that kind of thing."<sup>224</sup>

As noted, Washington did not object to agitation as a strategy. In 1904 he said to Villard that he understood the impatience of African American leaders in the North but stated further that they did not always appreciate the constraints placed on black leaders in the South. "Of course it is very natural that the colored man in the North should chafe and become restless and impatient over the conditions which the race has to endure," Washington acknowledged.<sup>225</sup> "I have had a good deal of sympathy with this class of our race in the North," he said, "because many of them ... have lived the

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<sup>222</sup> "Letter from Oswald Garrison Villard to BTW, February 7, 1911," *BTWP*, 10:573–74; emphasis added.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 575.

<sup>224</sup> "Letter to Oswald Garrison Villard from BTW, February 11, 1911," *BTWP*, 10:576.

<sup>225</sup> "Letter to Oswald Garrison Villard from BTW, November 16, 1904," *BTWP*, 8:132.

greater part, if not all, of their lives in the North and have never had the opportunity of seeing what the conditions are in the South.”<sup>226</sup>

Unfortunately there is that “class of our people who have always thought that a colored leader was brave in proportion as he cursed the Southern white man regardless of the effect of such cursing.”<sup>227</sup> Washington further insisted: “It takes more courage, in my opinion, for one to keep his mouth closed than to open it, especially when he is a thousand miles from the seat of danger.”<sup>228</sup> Washington reiterated and further elucidated the same point in 1909:

I am not afraid of doing anything which I think is right and should be done. I have always recognized, as I have stated to you more than once, that there is work to be done which no one placed in my position can do, which no one living in the South perhaps can do.... I have always recognized the value of sane agitation and criticism...<sup>229</sup>

He insisted that ignorance of the concrete conditions of the South, the nature and practice of Jim Crow, had led to a naïve faith in the power of protest and unrealistic demands on black leaders living in the South. “I become just as impatient as they do, and wish just as much as they that I could change conditions, but you and I both know that the mere wishing will not make a change, that we have got to go through a long process.”<sup>230</sup>

There are those who “openly advocate my assassination and the destruction of our school property. I received, of course, any number of threatening letters,”

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> “Letter to Oswald Garrison Villard from BTW, May 28, 1909,” *BTWP*, 10:119.

<sup>230</sup> “Letter to Oswald Garrison Villard from BTW, November 16, 1904,” 8:132.

Washington wrote in 1905 to Francis Jackson Garrison, one of the sons of William Lloyd Garrison and uncle to Villard.<sup>231</sup> Francis Garrison wrote back:

Indeed, I have long felt, as I have told you, the possibility of the torch being applied even to Tuskegee in some sudden whirlwind of passion such as may at any time sweep through the Black Belt, and my heart aches to think of the strain to which you are constantly subjected ... I know how many elements of both North and South you have to consider in anything which you may say or write...<sup>232</sup>

If Washington's speech was moderate, it was because the threat was real and not exaggerated, a fact easily substantiated by the Pinkerton Detective Agency files.<sup>233</sup> For example, a white Southerner, C. B. Church Sr., sent a death threat to Washington in 1901: "Wo[e] Nigger the day is not far distant when you will be swept from the face of the earth."<sup>234</sup> During his Southern educational tours, Washington received a letter from J. Matony of Cynthia, Mississippi, warning him: "Please do not make your visit to Jackson, Miss ... you will never leave in peace but in corpse or some other way, but do [*sic*] not like you come."<sup>235</sup> As Judith Shklar has written, a demand for self-sacrifice has no place in politics. "There is absolutely nothing elevated in death and dying."<sup>236</sup> "Self-sacrifice may stir our admiration," she said, "but it is not, by definition, a political duty, but an act of supererogation which falls outside the realm of politics."<sup>237</sup> To ask Washington and black Southerners to openly and defiantly

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<sup>231</sup> "Letter to Francis Jackson Garrison from BTW, October 5, 1905," *BTWP*, 8:395.

<sup>232</sup> "Letter to BTW from Francis Jackson Garrison, October 12, 1905," *BTWP*, 8:402.

<sup>233</sup> Pinkerton Agents #58 and #22, "Three Reports of Pinkerton Detectives," *BTWP*, 8:418–20.

<sup>234</sup> "Letter from C. B. Church Sr. to BTW, 1901," *BTWP*, 6:367.

<sup>235</sup> Pinkerton Agents #58 and #22, "Reports of Pinkerton Detective F. E. Miller," *BTWP*, 9:640–46.

<sup>236</sup> Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 32.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

confront Jim Crow was equivalent to asking them to throw themselves to the lynch mob. That cannot be a political or a moral duty.

Villard and Francis Garrison were not the only members of the Garrison family to reflect on Washington's politics. In 1908 William Lloyd Garrison Jr. came to Washington's defense in a letter to the editor of the *Boston Transcript*. His letter is worth quoting at length because it diagnosed with unique wisdom the terrible context in which Washington was obliged to work. It also identified Washington's unmatched skill in navigating the white supremacist South.

Mr. Washington is working in the most inflammable portion of the South. He not only carries the burden of a great university, but upon his shoulders has fallen the mission to disarm sectional hostility, to draw support from Southern whites with inherited prejudices that must be allayed, ever to keep a hopeful front under circumstances which must at times chill the heart, to discern events in their proper proportion, never to allow discouragement to blind him to the real signs of promise, and to preserve a serenity and poise that are a marvel to his friends and a confusion to his enemies. What unusual qualities meet and blend in one capable of such achievement! ... I appreciate the difficulties which encompass him. I wonder at his patience, courage, and sagacity. For myself, with no restraint of speech, save those of fealty to truth and the requirements of judgment, I am able to wield a free lance. He, on the contrary, lives in a region where a whisper at times precipitates the avalanche.<sup>238</sup>

Washington always had to act and speak in such a way as to advance the cause of racial justice while allaying whites' fear and anxiety in order to minimize the already stifling threat of violence and death. He simply could not inflame an already explosive situation. As the passage shows, Washington carried "the burden of a great university" on "his shoulders" as he tried to "disarm sectional hostility." Du Bois, one of

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<sup>238</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Jr., "Letter to the Editor" of the *Boston Transcript*, January 11, 1908, *BTWP*, 9:438–40.

Washington's staunchest critics, agreed. A man "less shrewd and tactful" could not have pulled off what Washington did.<sup>239</sup> As a result, "he stands as the one recognized spokesman of his ten million fellows," Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*.<sup>240</sup>

If Garrison Jr. had reminded his fellow Boston Brahmins of the form of politics that had to be practiced by the subaltern, it was Seth Low who, in a private letter, explained to Villard the political meaning of Washington's style of politics. Low, the former president of Columbia University and ex-mayor of New York City, was at the time the chairman of the board of Tuskegee Institute. He thus knew Villard and Washington well and worked closely with both men. Low wrote to Villard on April 9, 1913, after reading Villard's most recent criticisms of Washington.

I fancy that your honored Grandfather, to whom you refer, might easily have said to President Lincoln what you say of Washington, "How pitiful it is that this big man cannot also be brave!" From my own observation Dr. Washington does not seem to me to lack any courage; but his philosophy of the situation is radically different from your own. Personally, I think there is room and need for both philosophies. To borrow a military figure, your own is a frontal attack; Dr. Washington's is a flank movement. But while both movements may be good, those who are identified with one cannot ordinarily be useful in the other; and I think that Dr. Washington represents a force of too great value to justify him in exposing himself to misunderstanding by active cooperation with those whose fundamental philosophy is so different from his own. On this point I think Dr. Washington's judgment is far more likely to be correct than either yours or mine; and, therefore, I think that he is entitled to be kindly interpreted in the stand that he takes, however much you may regret it.<sup>241</sup>

Most thoughtful students of Southern history eventually came to share Low's interpretation of Washington. When you are caught in a life-and-death struggle,

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<sup>239</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk, Dubois Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 393.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> "Letter from Seth Low to Oswald Garrison Villard, April 9, 1913," *BTWP*, 12:166-67.

explaining yourself to your friends and allies is not your first or even your second priority; surviving is what matters.

Washington was often unambiguous in his own condemnation of racial injustice. “The minute you deprive one-eighth of the population of the right of franchise, by reason of the accident of birth and race, that minute this country cease[s] to be a republic.”<sup>242</sup> Washington thus argued, “I would not have the Negro deprived of any privilege guaranteed to him by the Constitution of the United States. It is not best for the Negro that he relinquish any of his constitutional rights.”<sup>243</sup> He said that if black Southerners did not openly challenge Jim Crow through formal politics, it was because they had been completely disenfranchised, blocked from the formal arenas of democratic politics. He wrote that “the whole election machinery is in the hands of the whites, and it is very convenient to fulfill that part of the law.... In the districts where the colored people outnumber the white there the colored people have the least chance of expressing themselves politically.”<sup>244</sup> Given the level of threat and intimidation, the use of lynching, race riots, and murder as instruments of social control, a protest politics was equally unlikely to emerge.

As we have seen, Washington insisted that caste was not only deeply rooted in the basic structure of American society but was a social practice that went to the heart of American self-understanding. Racism was not ignorance or shoddy thinking, a false belief that could be easily corrected. “There are some people who are very active in

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<sup>242</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Address to the Metropolitan A. M. E. Church, May 22, 1900,” *BTWP*, 5:539.

<sup>243</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 57.

<sup>244</sup> Washington, “A Speech Delivered before the Women’s New England Club, January 27, 1889,” 3:30.

their efforts to fight race prejudice—some people in the North and some people in the South. They are trying to fight it by argument.”<sup>245</sup> But Washington maintained that racial caste would prove unassailable by reason or argument. “If prejudice, whether race prejudice or any other sort of prejudice, were based on reason it would be possible to deal with it. It would then be possible to argue with a man who was prejudiced. But race prejudice is not based on reason.”<sup>246</sup> Moreover, given the conditions in the South and their resultant vulnerabilities of the race, a protest movement emerging in the South would be limited to public criticism and propaganda. Given the lack of support from the federal government, exclusion from electoral politics, pervasiveness of racial terror, and deepening racism in the entire country, there was little political opportunity at hand. Afro-Southerners simply lacked, at this time, the political capacity and mobilization resources necessary for sustaining an effective frontal attack on Jim Crow.

## **Conclusion**

“To begin with, it must be borne in mind that the condition that existed in the South immediately after the war, and that now exists,” Washington wrote in *Future of the American Negro*, “is a peculiar one, without a parallel in history.”<sup>247</sup> Extreme poverty, landlessness, lack of access to fair credit markets and public education, disenfranchisement, segregation, and racial terror constituted the relevant background

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<sup>245</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Symposium on Race Prejudice,” *The International* 4 (July 1911): 30–31, in *BTWP*, 11:287.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Future of the American Negro* (Boston: Boston, Small & Company, 1900), 31–32.

conditions against which the average black Southerner had to carry out her life. These conditions, taken together, constituted an exploitative and oppressive system that would prove resilient against a frontal attack. African Americans had to soberly acknowledge that beyond platitudes and philanthropy, Northern whites and the federal government would not come to their aid, much less rescue. They would therefore have to “uplift” themselves. To do so, they would have to provide for their own material and social improvement in the face of deep racism and Northern neglect, at best, and violent opposition, at worst. This recognition compelled Washington to favor pragmatic strategies of self-improvement that emphasized the material and social preconditions to political progress. The challenge, then, was to formulate and practice such a politics, one that prioritizes a structural foundation or the social and economic bases required to carry out an effective challenge to Jim Crow. As Edward L. Ayers, in *The Promise of the New South*, wisely observed: “Washington dug in for a long war on white racism.”<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 326.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Uplifting the Race

It was—I am sorry to say that—only at Tuskegee [that] I found enthusiasm in the South at all.

—Max Weber<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

In 1905 Thomas Dixon Jr. bolstered his reputation as the foremost artist of white supremacy when he published *The Clansman* (1905), which inspired D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). A review of the novel in the February 9, 1905, edition of *The Independent* said: "*The Clansman* is second of this series. (We learn that the third is to be called 'The Fall of Tuskegee,' a prophecy of the outcome of present tendencies; but this is private information and the reader is requested not to mention it."<sup>2</sup> The reviewer added that the "motive of such a man never changes," and "let us hope that there will be no place for it in 'The Fall of Tuskegee.'"<sup>3</sup> Instead, Dixon would title the third part of the trilogy—the "Trilogy of Reconstruction"—*The Traitor: The Story of the Fall of the Invisible Empire*. Dixon was profoundly troubled by Washington's Tuskegee Institute. In August 1905 Dixon wrote an article to warn

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<sup>1</sup> "Letter from Max Weber to BTW, September 25, 1904," *BTWP*, Library of Congress, containers 96–97.

<sup>2</sup> "The Clansman," *The Independent*, February 9, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

whites not to fall for Washington's accommodationist rhetoric. He further cautioned them that the Tuskegee Institute was, in fact, a Trojan horse in the heart of the South.

The trouble with Mr. Booker T. Washington's work is that he is really silently preparing us for the future heaven of Amalgamation—or he is doing something equally dangerous, namely he is attempting to build a nation inside a nation of two hostile races. In this event he is storing dynamite beneath the pathway of our children—the end at last can only be in bloodshed. Mr. Washington is not training Negroes to take their place in any industrial system of the South in which the white man can direct or control him. He is not training his students to be servants and come at the beck and call of any man. He is training them all to be masters of men, to be independent, to own and operate their own industries, plan their own fields, buy and sell their own goods, and in every shape and form destroy the last vestige of dependence on the white man for anything.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting that Dixon saw right through the walls of the Tuskegee Institute, saw its political possibilities and ambitions, its latent yet subversive power, especially since some of its Northern white boosters only observed in its mission expressions of their deeply held racial assumptions.

Dixon would press Washington to contest and contradict his judgment that Washington harbored broader political aspirations for his race and was secretly pursuing them through the Tuskegee Institute. “In response to your appeal for funds I hereby offer to contribute \$10,000 from the profits of ‘The Clansman’ to Tuskegee Institute, provided you give complete and satisfactory proof that you do not desire Social Equality for the Negro and that your School is opposed to the Amalgamation of the races,” Dixon wrote to Washington on January 23, 1906, after attending a public fundraiser for the university.<sup>5</sup> Mark Twain, who knew Washington, was in attendance.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Dixon Jr., “Booker T. Washington and the Negro,” *Saturday Evening Post*, August 19, 1905.

<sup>5</sup> “Letter from Thomas Dixon Jr. to BTW, January 22, 1906,” *BTWP*, 8:508.

He wrote down, among his notes for his autobiography, Dixon's challenge to Washington.

Just before Booker T. Washington entered the hall a messenger boy handed him a note from Thomas Dixon Jr., in which the writer said he would contribute \$10,000 to Tuskegee if Mr. Washington would state at the meeting that he did not desire social equality for the negro, and that Tuskegee was opposed to the amalgamation of the races. When asked what he had to say on the subject, Mr. Washington said: "I will make no answer whatsoever. I have nothing to say."<sup>6</sup>

The sum Dixon offered Washington amounts to around \$500,000 today. Dixon followed up his note with a warning to Washington: "the American people will demand that you face squarely sooner or later" these questions.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter seeks to provide a synthesis of Washington's uplift politics, which I reinterpret as a politics of individual and collective empowerment and transformation. To ensure both, Washington insisted that African Americans must create and maintain an organization or institutional context that provides essential opportunities for acquiring the information, skills, training, and everyday practices essential for individual and collective empowerment. Washington dedicated much of his professional life to organizing such efforts. In this chapter, I focus on the three themes that predominated in Washington writings and activism: education, labor, and representation. In other words, Washington's uplift politics was primarily concerned with individual and communal empowerment and self-transformation. Given that the black population in the South was predominantly rural and disenfranchised, it follows

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Twain, *Autobiography of Mark Twain: Volume 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 160.

<sup>7</sup> "Letter from Thomas Dixon Jr. to BTW, January 23, 1906," *BTWP*, 8:508–9.

that it lacked access to organizations and institutions that provide resources, skills, and training essential for cultivating economic, social, and civic capacity.

I begin with a rather simple but oft-overlooked question: What is the normatively and strategically appropriate political response for a racial minority living under conditions of regional violent subjugation, political disenfranchisement, and segregation? African Americans in the South were legally denied the use of formal arenas of democratic politics such as voting, and they were violently repressed and prevented from mobilizing for protest or more “agonistic” forms of politics. Moreover, as I showed in the previous chapter, a direct frontal attack on white supremacy was simply not available to black Southerners in the way it was available to African Americans in the North. The external constraints of legal and extra-legal racist violence, as well as the deepening dependency and powerlessness, shaped the form of politics Afro-Southerners could feasibly take up. This was the era of lynching, race riots, and state oppression. Washington insisted that protest and agitation were essential to the struggle for racial justice, but he argued that black leaders, who are more safely located in the North, should pursue them. He argued that black Southerners, within the encampment of white supremacy, should embrace a politics of empowerment and transformation, a politics that prioritizes the cultivation of individual and collective capacity as means for eventual political empowerment. Through autonomous and local institutions and organizations (e.g., schools, farmers and workers alliances and conferences, and local organ of representation, such as newspapers and magazines), Afro-Southerners should seek to acquire, as best they

can, the social, material, and symbolic and informational resources, skills, and training that will be necessary for effectively challenging Jim Crow.

Understood within and against the context of white supremacy, racial uplift, despite its bourgeois ethics of self-help, was neither conservative nor a retreat from politics. White supremacy, as a system of political rule and social control, directly targeted the most basic, mundane, and intimate of human needs, functions, and relationships. Almost every aspect of life was regulated and controlled by segregation laws. One's ability to vote or move (transportation), where she could eat and with whom, where she could excrete, who she could have sex with or marry, who she could pray with and learn with, and, even in death, where she would be buried and among whom, was determined by the policies of white supremacy. Political disenfranchisement makes sense as an instrument of racial oppression. If Afro-Southerners cannot vote, then they cannot use the democratic process to challenge Jim Crow. But why not just throw away black Southerners' ballots? Why make Afro-Southerners stand there and fail a literacy test? It was not enough to deny African Americans rights and freedoms, but it was also—maybe even more so—important that African Americans be forced to publically perform their social subordination and inferiority, to visibly affirm whites' supremacy. But why target, say, consumption and excretion, the ability to have a meal at an establishment that served whites or to use a bathroom that whites can use? Why pass laws on who can use which water fountain? By racially regulating the most basic of needs, functions that cannot be waived, the system of white supremacy sought to make its power inescapable, to have African Americans experience their subordination, suffering, and indignity in the most private

and necessary features of biological life. In this way, not all of the anguish and disgrace of Jim Crow depended on public shame.

And as I have discussed in chapter 3, the literature on African American political thought underscores two responses to racial exclusion and domination: integration and separatism. Much of the literature emphasizes the black-nationalist strain of separatism and often ignores uplift politics, which it treats as either a form of practical accommodation or conservatism. Washington's uplift politics was reformist in tone, realist in orientation, and moderate in practice. It expressed a political patience that can be easily mistaken as conservative. Washington's uplift politics was also motivated by ideas that exceeded narrow pragmatic and realist concerns.

The prevailing interpretation of Washington's uplift politics is that it was a retreat from politics, a cowardly acquiescence to white supremacy or an uncritical embrace and promotion of the laissez-faire assumptions and the social Darwinism of the day. Sensitive critics do not take such a stark and dismissive view of uplift politics, more generally, and almost always acknowledge that its spokesmen and women and its practitioners were pursuing what they judged to be the best course of action available to them. Kevin K. Gaines's *Uplifting the Race* is an important study of "uplift" as a politics.<sup>8</sup> Gaines says his "study is concerned less with the material aspects of class formation than with the ideological and cultural dimensions of status that figured in representations of class."<sup>9</sup> He adds that his specific focus is on the "internal content and tensions of uplift ideology, its external influences, namely, the

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

ideologies and social forces that shaped its concerns and the process by which it, in turn, shaped and continued to reshape dominant perspectives on race, black leadership, and social theory and public policy toward African Americans.”<sup>10</sup>

Gaines notes at the beginning that uplift held “mixed meanings for African Americans.”<sup>11</sup> Taking shape in the nineteenth century as a response to slavery, uplift expressed a yearning to transcend the “worldly oppression and misery” of slavery, a “desire for social mobility and the economic and racial barriers to it,” as well as a “struggle for a positive black identity” within the deeply racist society that was the Jim Crow South.<sup>12</sup> He identifies uplift as bourgeois ideology, a politics that reproduced the very thing it was opposing—deep racism. He says that “uplift ideology has worked to maintain (and sometimes challenge) relations of power and dominance.”<sup>13</sup> “Elite African Americans were replicating,” he further argues, “even as they contested, the uniquely American racial fictions upon which liberal conceptions of social reality and ‘equality’ were founded.”<sup>14</sup> For Gaines, the central “problem with *racial* uplift ideology is thus one of unconscious internalized racism.”<sup>15</sup> He argues, in essence, that the middle class had so thoroughly imbibed the laissez-faire values and social Darwinist assumptions of the era that they failed to even see how they were reproducing the conditions of their own oppression. “Black elites espoused a value system of bourgeois morality whose deeply embedded assumptions of racial

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1–3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 14–15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6; emphasis original.

difference were often invisible to them. It was precisely as an argument for black humanity through evolutionary class differentiation that the black intelligentsia replicated the dehumanizing logic of racism.”<sup>16</sup>

“For many black cultural elites,” argues Gaines, “uplift described an ideology of self-help articulated mainly in racial and middle-class specific, rather than in broader, egalitarian social, terms.” This approach “departed from the liberation theology of the emancipation era.”<sup>17</sup> For Gaines, then, uplift ideology was a thorough break from the abolitionist politics of the antebellum period. And he identifies abolitionism with an egalitarian politics and uplift with social climbing.

In the antebellum period, uplift had often signified both the process of group struggle and its object, freedom. But with the advent of Jim Crow regimes, the self-help component of uplift increasingly bore the stamp of moral degradation of the masses. The shift to bourgeois evolutionism not only obscured the social inequities resulting from racial and class subordination but also marked a retreat from the earlier, unconditional claims black and white abolitionists made for emancipation, citizenship, and education based on Christian and Enlightenment ethics. It signified the move from anti-slavery appeals for inalienable human rights to more limited claims for black citizenship that required that the race demonstrate its preparedness to exercise those rights.<sup>18</sup>

For Gaines, what is most worrying about uplift is its emphasis on conduct and character: “the displacement from societal oppression to the moral, behavioral realm.”<sup>19</sup> He adds that “uplift transformed the race’s collective historical struggle

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 6.

against the slave system and the planter class into a self-appointed personal duty to reform the character and manage the behavior of blacks themselves.”<sup>20</sup>

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham offers a very different view of uplift politics in *Righteous Discontent*, in which she studies the role of women in the black church in the post-Reconstruction era.<sup>21</sup> Several historians have taken a similar revisionist reading of black uplift politics as more aspirational and reformist, even if not radical, than the domination view of uplift as compromise or a politics of respectability that sought to impose middle-class ideals onto the black working class.<sup>22</sup> Higginbotham follows a long line of historians who note that the black church “constituted the backbone of the black community” and had “long promoted a sense of individual and collective worth and perpetuated a belief in human dignity that countered the racist

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>21</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Stephanie J. Shaw recovers the organizing efforts and their underlying progressive social and political ideals of black professional women in the South. *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). Tera W. Hunter, too, looks at the black women in the South, but her study focuses on the immediate aftermath of the Civil War and draws on the struggles of a much broader swath of black women, including the poor. *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). Claudia Tate rereads popular fiction by black women writers of the era of Jim Crow as having expressed a far more complex and radical set of political desires, often held by black middle-class women. *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine’s Text at the Turn of the Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Michelle Mitchell has written an important study on the relationship between gender, conduct, and sexuality in post-Reconstruction black politics, specifically focused on the concept of “racial destiny.” She argues that such discussion of conduct shifted the black political struggle ever more into the private sphere, which despite its broader political and more progressive ends nevertheless solidified more rigid gender and sexual roles. *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). The most recent revisionist reading of the politics of respectability is by Erica L. Ball, who extends the discussion back to antebellum middle-class black politics. *To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Black Middle Class* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012). For a rich and convincing interpretation of the reformist strain of black politics in the South during Jim Crow, specifically interracial alliances that aimed to erode Jim Crow’s more extreme public policies and the men and women who pursued this reformist agenda, see Kimberly Johnson, *Reforming Jim Crow: Southern Politics and State in the Age before Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

preachings of the master class.”<sup>23</sup> At the time, the “church’s autonomy and financial strength made it the most logical institution for the pursuit of racial self-help.”<sup>24</sup> It thus functioned “as an agency of social control, forum of discussion and debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation, and arena for the development and assertion of leadership.”<sup>25</sup>

Higginbotham acknowledges uplift’s bourgeois baggage. “The Baptist women’s preoccupation with respectability reflected a bourgeois vision that vacillated between an attack on the failure of America to live up to its liberal ideals of equality and justice and an attack on the values and lifestyle of those blacks who transgressed white middle-class propriety.”<sup>26</sup> Uplift advocates “adhered to a politics of respectability that equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with advancement of African Americans as a group. They felt certain that ‘respectable’ behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America, and hence they strove to win the black lower class’s psychological allegiance to temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals.”<sup>27</sup> But Higginbotham counters with a revisionist account of uplift politics that seeks to recover its more subversive core, even if buried or nurtured in middle-class values and liberal ideals.

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<sup>23</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 5. The most important and definitive study is Raboteau, *Slave Religion*.

<sup>24</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

“At the individual level, but especially when collectively joined,” she argues, “black churches represented not an escapist and other-worldly orientation but the only viable bastion of a community under assault.”<sup>28</sup> Given segregation, disenfranchisement, the destruction of black schools, and lynching, “the church afforded African Americans an interstitial space in which to critique and contest white America’s racial domination.”<sup>29</sup> Higginbotham says the “church constituted a public that stood in opposition to the dominant white public.”<sup>30</sup> It was “a social space for discussion of public concerns” and thus “functioned as a discursive, critical arena—a public sphere throughout the larger black community.”<sup>31</sup> Through their membership and activism within the church, black women “confronted and influenced their social and political milieu.”<sup>32</sup> The church, then, “stood between individual blacks, on the one hand, and the state with its racially alienating institutions, on the other. The church’s ability to sustain numerous newspapers, schools, social welfare services, jobs, and recreational facilities mitigated the dominant society’s denial of these resources to black communities.”<sup>33</sup> The “church itself became the domain for the expression, celebration, and pursuit of a black collective identity.”<sup>34</sup> This made newspapers essential because “publishing was vital to the creation of a black civic vision.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 10, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 11.

Before turning to Washington's politics, it is worth noting his use of the metaphor of uplift. An author often chooses a recurring metaphor, work, or image in order to appeal to a given set of intuitions and ideals rather than other intuitions and ideas. The language of uplift begins with domination, especially those inhering in the prevailing social and economic order. The thesis that African American uplift politics was middle-class gradualism or merely a politics of respectability resting on Victorian ideals is overstated. The vertical metaphors that structure Washington's texts allow some insight to the theoretical significance of the term itself. In an 1888 speech, Washington quoted Douglass as saying: "The progress of the Negro should not be judged so much by heights to which he has risen as by the depths from which he has come."<sup>36</sup> To illustrate the depths of domination, Washington said that on

many of the plantations the people are but little advance of where slavery left them.... The colored people on these plantations are held in a kind of slavery that is in one sense as bad as the slavery of antebellum days. I mean the Southern mortgage system. This is the curse of the Negro. It is the mortgage system which binds him, robs him of independence, allures him and winds him deeper and deeper in its meshes each year till he is lost and bewildered.<sup>37</sup>

Horizontal metaphors, such as the "color line," speak to exclusion and inclusion and are often employed within a liberal-integrationist framework. Washington's use of vertical metaphors conveys domination. As Danielle Allen has argued, "metaphors of up and down ... suggest that some people are 'on top' and others are 'under.'"<sup>38</sup> Of

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<sup>36</sup> Booker T. Washington, "A Speech before the Boston Unitarian Club, 1888," *BTWP*, 2:503.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Danielle Allen, "Invisible Citizens: Political Exclusion and Domination in Arendt and Ellison," in *NOMOS XLVI: Political Exclusion and Domination*, edited by Mellissa S. Williams and Stephen Macedo (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 30.

course the etymological root of oppression is to press down, immobilize or subordinate; one is oppressed when she is held in a lowly state.

### **1. Education and Social Transformation**

“The first great passion of the Negro race after the war was for education. If the church stands for the first great interest in which the Negro, as a race, has sought salvation,” wrote Washington, “it may be said that the schoolhouse represents the second.”<sup>39</sup> Washington placed great emphasis on education as enabling individual and social transformation. Merle Curti was right when he observed that Washington’s “emphasis on the social significance of a purposeful education” lies at the heart of his “social philosophy.”<sup>40</sup> Thus Washington underlined the need for black communities to build, sustain, and expand educational institutions, associations, and organizations despite the fact that Southern states were defunding black education. Two themes dominate Washington’s educative work. The first is his vision of the school as a site of social, economic, and political activity. The local school, as the center of the black community, should dedicate itself to training not only children but also training and organizing adults. It should knit the interest of the members of the community together and create opportunities to articulate, discuss, and debate the nature of exploitation and oppression in the local community as well as create chances for local residents to work diligently toward chipping away at the institutions and practices of white

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<sup>39</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Negro College Town,” *World’s Work*, September 1907.

<sup>40</sup> Merle Curti, *The Social Ideals of American Educators* (New York: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1965), 293.

supremacy. Essential to this larger mission was a distinct pedagogy, one that began with the social circumstances of the student.

Olivia Davidson, Washington's first wife and fellow teacher at Tuskegee Institute, expressed most clearly the social mission of the local school. In 1882 she wrote in a letter to the *Southern Workman* that Tuskegee had opened a "model school" that replaced two local schools, one Baptist and one Methodist, and in so doing created a public space for social cooperation that was not subject to the sectarian prejudices and fights that so often leave the local black community scattered. "To day [*sic*], for the first time here in many years, I suppose, the children of the two denominations met in school together. We hope for much good in the way of influence upon both parents and children as a result of this union."<sup>41</sup> Washington believed that schools could socially knit the black community together. Though the church had been the hub of the black community, where much of its social and cultural life revolved, the school, Washington believed, was a more appropriate institution in which to nurture and develop essential social and civic skills and capacities necessary for challenging the sociopolitical status quo and challenging the prevailing economic arrangements.

The leaders of the church exercised the most sway over the masses, and the church also served as the bonds for community. Religion, however, was inadequate for realizing democratic life.<sup>42</sup> First, religious membership often divided the people into sectarian groups. Second, the form of leadership was charismatic and top-down rather

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<sup>41</sup> Olivia A. Davidson, "Letter to Editor," *Southern Workman* 11 (November 1881): 109.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

than democratic and bottom-up. Third, the church was more concerned “with the horrors of hell and of the glories of heaven” than the immediate problems facing the community.<sup>43</sup> Instead, Washington argued that the schoolhouse should replace the church as the political hub of the black community.

At just about the age when a boy or a girl begins to think about leaving home and striking out in the world for himself; just at the age when there comes, if ever, to a youth the desire to know something about the larger world ... just at this time the boys and girls are sent away to spend two seasons or more in rural high school.... There they make the acquaintance of other young men and women who, like themselves, have come directly from the farms, and this intercourse and acquaintance helps to give them a sense of common interest and to build up what the socialists call “*class consciousness*.” All of this experience becomes important a little later in the building up of the cooperative societies.<sup>44</sup>

What is important is the democratic form: the importance of being brought together; the discussion, deliberation, and sharing of information about material, social, and economic conditions; and the extension of social networks. But what is most important here is that it is about race, and therefore the axis of racial domination and not the means of production is the basis of identification.

Imperative to this vision as intended to “regenerate the masses of the people” was that despite its shared features with Armstrong’s missionary model, Washington insisted that African Americans and not whites must do this work. Agents of uplift must come from within the ranks of working-class blacks and not from outside. Washington insisted that there “are some things that one individual can do for another, and there are some things that one race can do for another. But on the whole, every

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 276.

individual and every race must work out its own salvation.”<sup>45</sup> The schools would be established and paid for by the local communities. The inspector of schools for the Freedmen’s Bureau reported that “throughout the entire South an effort is being made by the colored people to educate themselves.” And in “the absence of any other teaching they are determined to be self-taught; and everywhere some elementary text-book, or the fragment of one, may be seen in the hands of negroes.”<sup>46</sup> This practice of “self-teaching” and “native schools” is ubiquitous among the freedmen and freedwomen. And in 1867 the Freedmen’s Record complained about the tendency of ex-slaves to prefer to send their children to black-controlled private schools rather than supporting the less expensive northern-white-dominated “free” schools. These “native schools” were founded and maintained exclusively by ex-slaves; the ex-slaves contributed money, labor, and materials to make these schools, which first emerged around 1862, possible. In 1866 the inspector wrote that there were “at least 500 schools of this description ... already in operation.” This view of Washington’s educative thought runs counter to the prevailing reading of “uplift” politics as middle-class gradualism.<sup>47</sup>

In 1890 Washington published an article titled “The Colored Ministry, Its Defects and Needs,” where he identified three institutional weaknesses of the black church.<sup>48</sup> First, the ministerial leadership is untrained. “I have no hesitancy in asserting that three-fourths of the Baptist ministers and two-thirds of the Methodists are unfit,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*.

<sup>48</sup> Washington, “The Colored Ministry,” 3:71–75.

either mentally or morally, or both, to preach the Gospel to anyone or to attempt to lead any one.”<sup>49</sup> Second, the people are divided along sectarian lines. “In their religious opinion,” the race is divided between the Baptist, Methodist (which itself is divided into the “African, Zion, Wesleyan, Northern, and Colored Methodist braches”), Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and so forth.<sup>50</sup> Third, and most importantly, these ministers are more concerned with their salaries than with the social welfare of their local community. Washington quotes the following from the *Alabama Baptist Leader*:

“The greatest object of over two-thirds of the Baptist ministers of Alabama is to collect salaries. They care no more for the moral and intellectual training of the people than they care for the snap of their finger. They care no more for schools, for public enterprises, than if there were no such things.... In some parts of the country where our missionaries travel, they find preachers who do not take a paper of any sort, nor read the Bible; in fact, they cannot read and yet they are attempting to lead the people.” So far as it goes, the foregoing extract tells the truth.<sup>51</sup>

These weaknesses that Washington identified lead unavoidably to the conclusion that the black church was incapable of uplifting the race. On a practical level, Washington was a lifelong educator, and thus his own interests would be well served if more resources and energy were given to education than religion. Washington’s decision as a young man to leave seminary and attend postsecondary education, that is, to pursue the vocation of a professor and administrator rather than that of a minister, suggests that he had decided to place his faith in education rather than religion, schools rather than churches.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 72–73.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Washington directly tied his turn to education with the rise of disenfranchisement and other state-based forms of racial exclusion and oppression that closed off the democratic arenas of politics to Afro-Southerners. “Tuskegee Institute was started, in a small way, in the summer of 1881. At that time the negro had lost practically all political control in the South. As early as 1885 there were scarcely members of my race in the National Congress of state legislatures, and long before this date [they] had ceased to hold state offices.”<sup>52</sup> The race, Washington said, “had practically no political control or political influence.”<sup>53</sup> “It became evident to many thoughtful negroes that the members of the race could no longer look to political agitation and the opportunity,” and thus African Americans should turn to other avenues.<sup>54</sup> It is also worth noting that public education for blacks was all but defunded by local and state governments in the Southern states.

Washington sought to exploit what he could out of this oppressive fact in his founding of the Tuskegee Institute. He said the following in May 1881: “The opportunity opened for me to begin my life-work.”<sup>55</sup> Armstrong had received a letter from three state commissioners in Alabama requesting that he recommend a principal for a normal school in Tuskegee; he wrote back saying, the “only man I can suggest is one Mr. Booker T. Washington, a graduate of the institution.... The best man we ever had here.”<sup>56</sup> The commissioners accepted the recommendation and Washington

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<sup>52</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Excerpt from an Article in *The Nautilus*, February 1912,” *BTWP*, 11:470.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 271.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*, 109–33.

reached Tuskegee in early June. He then took a loan from Hampton Institute and made an offer on an old farm of one hundred acres. Washington then made a shrewd decision, one of his finest. He said, “We expect to have it [the school] deeded so that the state will have no control over the land... then in case the state withdrew its appropriation at any time the school could still live.”<sup>57</sup> He argued that once the autonomy of the institution was in place, it must be rooted in the interest and aspirations of those the school serves. There would be only one way to ensure this and that was to acquire deep—rather than superficial—knowledge of the prospective students’ lives, realities, dreams, and barriers. “When I went to Alabama to begin this work,” Washington wrote, “I spent some time in visiting towns and country districts in order to learn the real conditions and needs of the people. It was my ambition to make the little school which I was about to found *a real service in enriching the lives of the most lowly and unfortunate.*”<sup>58</sup> “With this end in view,” he added, “I not only visited the schools, churches, and farms of the people but slept in their one-room cabins and ate at their tables.”<sup>59</sup> Washington consulted with “the citizens of Tuskegee” and “set July 4, 1881, as the day for the opening of the school in the little shanty and church which had been secured.”<sup>60</sup> It was a powerful symbolic act, to say the least, by a man who bears a significant name. When the school opened, “thirty students reported for admission ... equally divided between the sexes,” and Washington was the only teacher. He said, the “greater part of the thirty were public-school teachers, and some

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>58</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Working with the Hands* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1904), 13; emphasis added

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 278.

of them were nearly forty years of age.”<sup>61</sup> He concluded that few “students who came during the first year were able to remain during the nine months’ session for lack of money, so we felt the necessity of having industries where the students could pay a part of their board in cash.”<sup>62</sup>

Upon Washington’s account, a university or college at the center of a town provides local citizens invaluable practical and civic resources. Washington sought out a form of politics that would challenge Jim Crow through permanent and stable institutions and organizations, a civic community in which blacks, regardless of how marginalized and oppressed they are within the larger white society, can nevertheless retreat to, draw inspiration from, and turn to in order to change their circumstances, however small that change may be. “The little Negro community at Tawawa Springs—now known as Wilberforce—was Southern in its origin, and the school out of which the present College eventually grew was an attempt to redress some of the wrongs that sprang from slavery.”<sup>63</sup> Washington was referencing the early history of Wilberforce. He said he did so “in order to emphasize the permanence ... of the community.”<sup>64</sup> “The individual who grows up without feeling himself a part of some permanent community, which exercises at once a controlling and an inspiring influence upon his life,” Washington argued, “is placed at a great disadvantage.”<sup>65</sup> Like the Tuskegee Institute and Wilberforce College, the mission of the university or

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>62</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 31.

<sup>63</sup> Washington, “A Negro College Town.”

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

college should provide a socially informed education, opportunities for civic engagement, and serve as an inspiring and stabilizing source. The black college and local school is tasked with such difficulties because, to a large degree, black Southerners must constitute a civil society independent of the larger white society in which they are subordinated and degraded. Much of black public life revolved around church and fraternities, and Washington proposed greater institution building dedicated to schools, workers and professional alliances and organizations, and organs of representation, such as newspapers.

Given the peculiar condition of black Southerners, Washington said black colleges and local high schools must create a pedagogy that is deeply attentive to the social and economic circumstances of students. Washington's recurrent highlighting of the practical goals that should inform education for African American children in the South has been widely criticized as narrowing the dreams of black children.<sup>66</sup> But Washington's vision was far more complex.

As the solution of the problems of the individual colored man consists very largely in turning his attention from abstract questions to the concrete problems of daily life—consists, in other words, in intersecting and connecting himself with the local, practical, commonplace work and interests of the people among whom he lives—so, too, the solution of the Negro schools consists in connecting the studies in the classroom with the absorbing and inspiring problems of actual life.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*; Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007); Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*. Christopher M. Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862–1875* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> Booker T. Washington, "What I am Trying to Do," *World's Work*, November 1913, in *BTWP*, 12:358.

By orienting education to practical and communal needs, Washington developed an educational philosophy that cultivated practical intelligence, a disposition to apply theoretical reason to concrete social problems. “Another thing I am trying to do,” he said, “is to get people to see that education in books and in the schoolroom can be articulated into the life and activities of the community surrounding the schoolroom in a way to make the local activities the basis for much of the mental training that is supposed to be furnished by the old traditional abstract education.”<sup>68</sup> In doing so he brought students and farmers and teachers and workers into closer bond. Such an education will “enable” students “to observe, think about, and deal with objects and situations of actual life.”<sup>69</sup> Washington aimed, above all, to formulate and realize an educational institution that trained students and cultivated a sense of service to their community and race.

Washington recalled how he first struck on these ideas. He said that he was more “strongly convinced than ever, after spending [a] month in seeing the actual life of the coloured people,” that “in order to lift them up, something must be done more than merely to imitate New England education as it then existed ... to take the children of such people as I had been among for a month, and each day give them a few hours of mere book education.”<sup>70</sup> He said that “it seemed perfectly plain that there was a condition” in the rural South “that could not be met by the ordinary process of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 74.

<sup>70</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 278.

education.”<sup>71</sup> “At Tuskegee,” he added, “we became convinced that the thing to do” was to “make a careful, systematic study of the conditions and needs of the South, especially the Black Belt, and to bend our efforts in the direction of meeting these needs, whether we were following a well-beaten track or were hewing out a new path to meet conditions probably without a parallel in the world.”<sup>72</sup> The prevailing “missionary effort ... was to try to force each individual into a certain mould, regardless of the condition and needs of the subject or of the ends sought ... without paying attention to the actual life and needs of those living in the shadow of the institution and for whom its educational machinery must labor.”<sup>73</sup> At Tuskegee, over the next decade, Washington developed an education specifically for meeting the needs of the dispossessed who lived in the long shadow of slavery. Washington understood the relationship between freedom, self-rule, and universal education, which means he, too, saw the school as a vital institution for political formation and transformation.

Washington thus conceived of education as transformative, the “art of giving shape to human powers and adopting them to social service.”<sup>74</sup> Washington wanted Tuskegee Institute and the black colleges and schools to function similarly to Jane Addams’s settlement. Addams argued that “we are impatient with the schools which lay all the stress on reading and writing ... suspecting them to rest upon the

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<sup>71</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Future of the American Negro* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1900), 90.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–91.

<sup>73</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 133.

assumption that all knowledge and interest must be brought to the children through the medium of books. Such an assumption fails to give the child any clue to the life about him, or any power to usefully or intelligently connect himself with it.”<sup>75</sup> But what was most significant was the fact that Addams’s Hull House and Washington’s Tuskegee Institute were both animated by a “gospel of service,” which was a large part of the settlement movement, which took hold in the 1880s and 1890s in America and England.<sup>76</sup> As Lawrence Cremin has put it, to “look back on the nineties is to sense an awakening of social conscience, a growing belief that this incredible suffering was neither the fault nor the inevitable lot of the sufferers, that it could certainly be alleviated, and that the road to alleviation was neither charity nor revolution, but in the last analysis, education.”<sup>77</sup>

Above all, Washington stressed service to one’s community, mutual obligations, and cooperation. What was needed, argued Washington, was a form of education that would make students “independent, honest, unselfish, and, above all, good.” “Call education by what name you please,” Washington argued, “and if it fails to bring about these results among the masses, it falls short of its highest end. The science, the art, the literature that fails to reach down and bring the humblest up to the enjoyment of the fullest blessings of our government is weak, no matter how costly the buildings or apparatus used or how modern the method of instruction employed.”<sup>78</sup>

For education to accomplish all of this, Washington would have to do more than bend

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 62.

<sup>76</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 149.

<sup>77</sup> Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*, 59.

<sup>78</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 18–19.

Armstrong's missionary ideals. Washington did nothing short of performing an educational revolution similar to the work of not only Jane Addams in Chicago but also William Torrey Harris and Calvin M. Woodward of Washington University (St. Louis), John D. Runkle at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, A. D. White and Hyde Bailey at Cornell, and the Wisconsin University system. Scholars of Washington often overlook how the early progressives—concerned with farmers' children (Runkle at MIT, with industrial workers' children)—shaped his thought and practice.<sup>79</sup> This seems strange considering that when you look at Washington's syllabi for the courses he taught at Tuskegee, you see a professor steeped in the latest trends in his discipline.<sup>80</sup> But the view that social reform and transformation—and the 1890s obsession with regeneration—was best achieved through education did not begin in the postemancipation era.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> There are a few important works that shed light on this movement. The most comprehensive is Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*. But Booker T. Washington is not mentioned in the book. A second work, which emphasizes the social ideals of the progressive educators, does discuss Washington. It is Curti's *The Social Ideals of American Educators*, 291–304. Curti, however, draws a fairly traditional conclusion. And why not? As early as 1933 he began corresponding with W. E. B. Du Bois regarding the African American experience, and in particular what Du Bois understood Washington's social significance to be. Cremin corrected his oversight of black educational efforts, and he does discuss Washington in the third volume of his masterful history of American education. Cremin, *American Education*, 121–22, 699. Still incredibly relevant for a more empirical and sociological study of the conditions and social order that gave rise to these ideas is Richards Richey, *The School in the American Social Order* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 449–839, and especially 712–804. The best reading of the movement's "self-help" strategy and its assumed "anti-intellectualism" remains Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in America* (New York: Vintage, 1962), 3–54 and 233–392.

<sup>80</sup> Washington taught Daniele Putnam, *Manual of Pedagogics* (New York: Silber, Burdett and Co., 1895), and he also taught Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860). See *Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute* (1893–1914) and *Southern Letter* (1889–1904).

<sup>81</sup> The most important study syntheses are: Cremin, *American Education and American Experience: The National Experience, 1783–1876* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), but I think the best reading of the political significance of American education, in particular the role of Jacksonian ideals, is to be found in Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 1–302, especially 144–301. For the historical roots of this movement, specifically in the common school movement, see Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Public: Common*

In short, the substance of Washington's program at Tuskegee rested on the goal of closing the intellectual gap between the head and the hand, intellectual pursuits and practical needs. At Tuskegee, the curriculum wove writing and literature with engineering and workmanship. Today, we would say it had a STEM—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—emphasis that grounded but did not replace its study of the humanities and liberal arts. “The instructors lay out the courses in theory and written work, and the mathematical studies are applied in work on blueprint drawings and free-hand sketches,” Washington noted.<sup>82</sup> He said, “[There] is an indescribable something about work with the hands that tends to develop the student's mind.... There is something, I think, in the handling of a tool that has the same relation to close, accurate thinking that writing with a pen has in preparation of a manuscript. Nearly all people who write much will agree.”<sup>83</sup> In *Working with the Hands*, Washington argued: “Knowledge of things near at hand should be acquired first, and later of things more distant ... is made the basis of the teaching.”<sup>84</sup>

When a problem or object is the basis of intellectual reflection, Washington said the “pupil is encouraged to talk simply and naturally about something he has seen or heard or read. He is taught to exercise care for unity, logical sequence of ideas, and

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*Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 3–29, 75–103, and 182–226, especially his discussion of the role of political parties; Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For a more chastened view that reads the modern public school as a conservative response to industrialization, see Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). Katz, in my opinion, has also produced the best discussion of models available to American education in the nineteenth century: paternalistic voluntarism, democratic localism, corporate voluntarism, and incipient bureaucracy. See his very important *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1–57, 111–35.

<sup>82</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 76.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

smoothness of transition.”<sup>85</sup> Juxtaposing his educational ideas with the older elitist views, which, ironically, Du Bois had been championing as a response to what he saw as a threat to the study of the humanities and the higher ideals it inspires, Washington outlined why his educational work better serves the worse off, those most in need of uplifting. “There was a constant temptation therefore for schools and teachers to keep everything connected with education in a sort of twilight realm of the mysterious and supernatural. Quite unconsciously they created in the minds of their pupils the impression that a boy or a girl who had passed through certain educational forms and ceremonies had been initiated into some sort of secret knowledge that was inaccessible to the rest of the world,” argued Washington.<sup>86</sup> “Connected with this was the notion that because a man had passed through these educational forms and ceremonies he had somehow become a sort of superior being set apart from the rest of the world,” Washington further contended.<sup>87</sup> Washington then turned to direct criticism of Du Bois, saying that the educated black man or woman is perceived as “a member of the ‘Talented Tenth’ or some other ill-defined and exclusive caste.”<sup>88</sup> “Nothing, in my opinion,” he insisted, “could be more fatal to the success of a student or to the cause of education than the general acceptance of any such ideas.”<sup>89</sup> “The surest way to success in education, and in any other line for that matter,” Washington concluded, “is to stick

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 85–86.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 138–39

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

close to the common and familiar things—things that concern the greater part of the people the greater part of the time.”<sup>90</sup>

Underlying this claim is the idea that a common concern—even if our views of it and our powers of perception differ—provides the basis for democratic discussion and deliberation because it imposes the burden of reasonableness. “Besides the discussion relative to industrial pursuits,” Washington said that “the pupils consider questions important to them as future citizens and men of business. This phase of the English work trains the pupil to rigorous methods of reasoning, and to clearness and forcefulness in public discourse.”<sup>91</sup> In addition to practical reasoning, Tuskegee, he said, stressed literature, because “contact with finished style gives to the pupil a sense of what is most fitting and beautiful in expression, thus providing an invaluable aid to his own oral and written diction ... to appreciate thought expressed by others.”<sup>92</sup> But “the element of teaching should be made the first consideration, and the element of production secondary,” he always said.<sup>93</sup>

He later cautioned: “Industrial education for the Negro has been misunderstood. This has been chiefly because some have gotten the idea that industrial development was opposed to the Negro’s higher mental development.... I would not have the standard of mental development lowered one whit; for, with the Negroes as with all races, mental strength is the basis of all progress.”<sup>94</sup> Washington explicitly

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>94</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 81.

argued that “far deeper than the mere commercial advantage of academic studies is the fact that they afford incentives to good conduct and high thinking. To make a boy an efficient mechanic is good, for it enables him to earn a living and to add his mite to the productiveness of society; but a school must do more—must create in him abiding interests in the intellectual achievements of mankind in art and literature, and must stimulate his spiritual nature.”<sup>95</sup> One reason historians and social critics continue to misrecognize the content of Washington’s educative work and its place in American thought is because the history of African American education is written mostly by social historians, working in isolation from intellectual historians who have worked on the changing idea of education in American thought.<sup>96</sup> Conversely, many intellectual historians ignore African American educational thought altogether. As a result, Washington’s educative thought remains in the blind spot between the two areas of expertise.<sup>97</sup>

The “problem that Tuskegee Institute keeps before itself constantly,” he said, is “how to prepare ... leaders” to meet the challenge of white supremacy and in particular the destitution and social subordination of the rural black masses.<sup>98</sup> “Having been fortified at Tuskegee by education of mind, skill of hand, Christian character, ideas of thrift, economy, and push, and a spirit of independence, the student is sent out

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<sup>95</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 84.

<sup>96</sup> Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*; Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*; Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*; Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*; Williams, *Self-Taught*; Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*.

<sup>97</sup> The two best readers of Washington’s educational work, however, remain Charles S. Johnson and Horace Mann Bond. Charles S. Johnson, “The Social Philosophy of Booker T. Washington,” *Opportunity Magazine* 2:102–6 (April 1928); Bond, *Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, 84–190, and especially “The Role of Booker T. Washington,” 116–26. See also Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 1–110, 195–225, 262–86.

<sup>98</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 111.

to become a center of influence and light in showing the masses of our people in the Black Belt of the South how to lift themselves up.”<sup>99</sup> And “from the Negro colleges and industrial schools in the South there are going forth each year thousands of young men and women into dark and secluded corners, into lonely log school-houses, amidst poverty and ignorance; and though, when they go forth, no drums beat, no banners fly, no friends cheer, yet they are fighting the battles of this country just as truly and bravely as those who go forth to do battle against a foreign enemy.”<sup>100</sup>

Many of the graduates of Tuskegee Institute identified with the lifeworlds of the poor black farmers and artisans; they were the daughters and sons of these men and women and were but a few years removed from such conditions. Washington thus told the students of Tuskegee: “I want to see you go out through the South and establish local conferences. Call them together, and teach the same kind of lessons that we teach at these gatherings at Tuskegee.”<sup>101</sup> As “soon as the teacher goes into a community, he should organize the people into an educational society or club,”<sup>102</sup> and in “every way there will be an opportunity for that person to revolutionize the community.”<sup>103</sup> “Are you going to suffer for your own people until they can receive the light which they so much need? Most certainly do I hope that you are going to carry out into these dark communities the light which you receive here from day to

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>101</sup> Washington, *Character Building* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1903), 162.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 196.

day.”<sup>104</sup> Upon graduation, these students were expected to venture back into the Black Belt and reconstitute the communities and local institutions in order to enable the capacities presupposed in democratic citizenship.

Because of the exclusion of African Americans from the public sphere through disenfranchisement laws and legal and informal segregation, the graduates were expected to help empower African Americans who were worse off. But Washington identified the quality of ministerial leadership and denominational fragmentation, which led to sectarian prejudices, as reasons why the church seemed to do more harm than good. As Higginbotham shows, the black church was, in fact, the center of local community and did much of the social and educative work Washington hoped to transfer to the school. Washington argued that in the rural South, most ministers were inattentive to their parishioners’ concrete social and economic conditions. And even when these ministers were attentive, most of them were illiterate and lacked the skills and resources, as well as vision, to offer much practical guidance and personal inspiration. A new cadre of leaders would be required. But first, at Tuskegee the teachers “keep it constantly in the minds of [their] students and graduates that the industrial or material condition of the masses of our people must be improved,” Washington continued, “as well as the intellectual, before there can be any permanent change in their moral and religious life.”<sup>105</sup> Washington often drew a direct relationship between economics, politics, and ethics. The exploitative and oppressive conditions of the South forced African Americans into moral compromises, much like

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>105</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 121.

slavery had done. “We find it a pretty hard thing to make a good Christian of a hungry man,” he often said.<sup>106</sup> Washington argued that binding the people, holding “the people together,” required a “constructive, progressive program ... work in constructive effort” because it “gets hold of men and binds them together.”<sup>107</sup> Washington noted that the church was “the most influential organization among Negroes.”<sup>108</sup>

In sum, the local school and its teachers should serve as the center of uplift. As a social worker and leader, the teacher should organize and sustain activities and programs, establish and consolidate disparate social action into local associations and institutions housed in or facilitated by the school, and do so for the social elevation, poverty relief, and enablement of vital political skills, civic virtues, and habits. Universities like Tuskegee Institute can be regional and organizational hubs, but this work has to be carried out in the local school. The school has to be the house of politics.

## **2. Earning and Empowerment**

After emancipation and during Reconstruction, African Americans in the South mobilized in pursuit of the right to work for wages, to negotiate and sell their labor, and to earn a decent living that would enable them to care for their children. It is intuitive why the theme of work dominated postemancipation black politics. Slavery was above all the legal and forceful extortion of labor. And as we saw in chapter 3,

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 69.

<sup>108</sup> Washington, *Character Building*, 20.

slavery's brutality was as routine as it was monstrous. Slavery's cruelty and suffering were not confined to the whipping post but also realized in every aspect of the slave's life, from the pallet she slept on, to the food she ate, to the cotton bales she had to fill. Washington wrote that "during slavery labour was forced out of the Negro," that is, "as a slave the Negro was worked," but he also stressed that there "is a vast difference between working and being worked. Being worked means degradation," he insisted.<sup>109</sup> Thus for the emancipated slave, gaining control over her working life was inextricably linked to the promise of freedom.

Whereas white workers invoked "slavery" as a metaphor for their own economic exploitation as "wage slavery," the freedmen and women had lived racial slavery, and thus for them the right to earn and individual freedom were joined in ways not immediately appreciated by most. Because African Americans had lived the direst consequences of dependency and paternalism, free labor, even if yielding meager earnings, nevertheless promised control over one's life and possibilities. As we saw in chapter 4, the vestiges of slavery—destitution, landlessness, and illiteracy—left the freedmen and women highly vulnerable to exploitative labor arrangements. As a result, they were quickly in new socioeconomic relations of servitude and domination. Few former slaves could avoid such arrangements because they needed work to acquire basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Upon Washington's account, economic dependency was a constitutive feature of white supremacy.

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<sup>109</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 16–17.

African American farmers, tradesmen, artisans, and workers shared Washington's reasoning that if black Southerners could gain control over their working lives and achieve a moderate level of economic self-sufficiency, they could better control their individual as well as their social and political fate. If, for instance, a farmer can control the means of production, that is, own the land he works, then he would no longer have to be at the whim and mercy of his landlord. He would certainly not be insulated from the threat of the lynch mob, but he would nevertheless gain important freedoms. In this way, Washington saw economics and politics as inseparable.

But Washington did not promote an ideology of atomistic individualism and liberal capitalism though much of the literature interprets him as having done precisely that. "If one yields to the getting hold of money, of getting hold of material possessions, in order that he may ride over his fellows, in order that he may set himself upon a pinnacle higher than others and thereby minister to his own selfish ambition, his own desires, however great his success in business, in the material life, that individual is leading the lower life."<sup>110</sup> Those with possessions merely have "means through which to serve their fellows."<sup>111</sup> Thus the "Negro should be taught that material development is not an end," Washington wrote, "but simply as a means to an end. As Professor W. E. B. Du Bois put it, 'The idea should not be simply to make men carpenters, but to make carpenters men.'"<sup>112</sup> Washington's uplift politics

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<sup>110</sup> Booker T. Washington, "An Address at Hampton Institute: The Higher and the Lower Life, August 4, 1907," *BTWP*, 9:326.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 64.

stressed this sense of service as collective self-help, specifically the idea that African American politics should prioritize economic uplift. To be effective, Afro-Southerners would have to dedicate their efforts to creating and maintaining organizations and institutions for coordinating and nurturing individual and communal efforts and strategies for exiting exploitative economic arrangements. At a practical level, poverty meant working for whites and, at times, even one's former owner. Economic independence meant working for oneself.

Hence the reason Washington emphasized the instrumental value of economic independence. It is true that Washington prioritized the search for feasible means for exiting exploitative labor relations that constrained African Americans' social and political agency. As demonstrated in chapter 4, Washington outlined the concrete ways in which economic dependency constrained black Southerners' social and political opportunities and capacities. "Until there is industrial independence," Washington argued, "it is hardly possible to have good living and a pure ballot in the country districts."<sup>113</sup> A black sharecropper, for example, could not directly challenge the practices and policies that his white landlord endorsed so long as he, the sharecropper, remained economically fettered to land he did not own, lived in a cabin owned by the landlord, and remained dependent on the landlord for his and his family's food. As long as one is in debt, he may consider himself "free" in form, but he is certainly not free in substance. Any speech or action or even disposition that threatens the economic, social, and political status quo could be met with severe punishment. Economic independence did not liberate one from the threat of racial

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<sup>113</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 38.

violence, but it nevertheless afforded important freedoms of movement, expression, and choice. At the most basic level, private property provides a degree of legal protections and rights. Washington therefore argued that any feasible challenge to white supremacy must begin by addressing the entrenched poverty of the race and the dependency it begets. As simply a matter of security, African Americans in the South would first need to gain some modicum of economic independence and then disentangle themselves from white landlords and employers whose goodwill they depended on for survival.

It is important to reiterate that Washington took for granted that his readers understood that African Americans in the South were effectively disenfranchised and lived under segregation. They could therefore not use the electoral arena to challenge Jim Crow. Washington noted that the “Negro has continued for twenty years to have fewer representatives in the state and National legislatures. The reduction has continued until now it is to the point where, with few exceptions, he is without representatives in the lawmaking bodies of the state and of the nation.”<sup>114</sup>

Washington argued that African Americans should dedicate much of their politics to identifying the best means available for exiting exploitative economic arrangements. Washington insisted that the “material condition of the masses of our people must be improved, as well as the intellectual, before there can be any permanent change.”<sup>115</sup> They must have the “ability to free themselves from industrial

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 121.

slavery.”<sup>116</sup> He knew his embrace of a politics of collective self-help and self-reliance, even if born of a resolute realism, would nevertheless be taken as affirming the racist logic of white supremacy, the prevailing view that the material and social inequalities tracking black life are consequences of their purported “natural inferiority” and the “failure” of the race to cultivate an independent and industrious character, which was assumed to be a requirement for citizenship. Washington rightly reasoned that given Jim Crow’s institutional and symbolic power and Northern whites’ reluctance to pursue racial justice, Afro-Southerners were on their own. They had to work out their collective fate in the South. Consequently, Washington contended that African American farmers, workers, businessmen and women, and other professionals should create and sustain organizations and institutions for identifying the concrete conditions and instruments that leave them in a relative state of dependency and unfreedom. More importantly, they should formulate feasible strategies for eroding those conditions and breaking those instruments so that they can eventually free themselves from exploitative economic arrangements.

But Washington also emphasized that economic autonomy had intrinsic value. Economic independence was not only a means for achieving individual freedom but essential to its exercise. This is an enduring republican idea. Washington’s argument for the social importance of work illustrated his commitment to the free labor ideology. Laboring with one’s hands for one’s own ends was redemptive and transformative. “When I saw and realized that all this [gardening] was a creation of my own hands, my whole nature began to change. I felt self-respect, and

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 34.

encouragement, and a satisfaction that I had never before enjoyed or thought possible.”<sup>117</sup> “Above all else,” he added, “I had acquired a new confidence in my ability actually to do things and to do them well. And more than this, I found myself, through this experience, getting rid of the idea which had gradually become a part of me, that the head meant everything and the hands little in working endeavor, and that only to labor with the mind was honorable while to toil with the hands was unworthy and even disgraceful.”<sup>118</sup> He further noted: “[As] I began to reap satisfaction from the works of my hands, I found myself planning over night how to gain success in the next day’s efforts.”<sup>119</sup> The agricultural metaphors are not accidental. As Sheldon Wolin has argued, tending is “to apply oneself to looking after another, as when we tend a garden or tend to the sick. It implies active care of things close at hand, not mere solicitude.”<sup>120</sup> “The idea of tending is one that centers politics around practices, that is, around habits of competence or skill that are routinely required if things are to be taken care of.”<sup>121</sup>

Washington gave further emphasis to the political consequences and individual effects of free labor rather than mere profit making, efficiency, or utility. “The very effort to do something, to make something ... regardless of intrinsic value of the thing produced or achieved, has been helpful and developing in its tendencies. We learn by

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<sup>117</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>120</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 89.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

doing and ‘rise on the stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things.’”<sup>122</sup> That the rise of corporate capitalism and rampant industrial and agrarian exploitation were awaiting the freedmen and women does not change the fact that for former slaves such ideals carried the promise of freedom. Washington was tapping into a widespread civic ideal when he stressed work as a central platform for black politics. In other words, he was giving long-held republican ideas renewed meaning. Diminished self-esteem, deprivation, and lack of basic capabilities were not only the outcome of slavery but also the consequences of present labor conditions in the postemancipation South. Thus landownership in an agrarian political economy was a priority.

As a rule I suppose the man on the soil has always represented the most backward and neglected portion of the population. This class has everywhere, until recent years, had fewer opportunities for education than the similar classes in cities and, where the people who tilled the soil have not succeeded in getting possession of the soil—as is especially true in certain parts of Austria-Hungary and lower Italy. They have remained in a condition of greater or less subjection to the land-owning classes. In lower Italy, where the masses of the farming population have neither land nor schools, they have remained in a position not far removed from slavery. In Denmark, on the contrary, where the farming class is, for the most part, made up of independent landowners, not only has agriculture been more thoroughly developed and organized than elsewhere, but farmers are a dominating influence in the political life of the country.<sup>123</sup>

The remedy, then, was to become a “producer.”<sup>124</sup> Heather Cox Richardson rightly notes that Washington, in his Atlanta Speech, was reclaiming “the Republican vision of African-Americans as traditional mid-nineteenth-century workers, [and] he was attempting to erase the negative images of political, civil rights, and labor agitation of

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<sup>122</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 88.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>124</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Speech at the Old South Meeting House, Boston,” *BTWP*, 3:200.

the past decades that had conflated to place constant negative pressure on the black community.”<sup>125</sup> “Critical to the Northern view of the traditional laborer—the image that Washington insisted on applying to black Americans—was the idea that the traditional laborer would climb to a prosperity that dictated political and social prominence. By evoking this very strong stereotypical image of workers who succeeded economically, socially, and politically,” she continued, “Washington was making a powerful statement for the advancement of black people.”<sup>126</sup>

The social and political thought expressed in Washington’s writings on labor was steeped in the republican ideals of Thomas Jefferson, the Jacksonians, and Lincoln. Jefferson, as we know, powerfully defended the view that economic autonomy was inextricably tied to individual freedom and democratic government, a view that was given its fullest expression in the image of a small, independent farmer diligently working *his* land. “The small landowners are the most precious part of a state,” Jefferson wrote.<sup>127</sup> Jefferson had explained why in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*:

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own casualties and caprice of customers, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of

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<sup>125</sup> Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, 5.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to Reverend James Madison,” in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology*, ed. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 358.

customers. Dependency begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.<sup>128</sup>

Jefferson privileged the farmer and agricultural labor because it fostered the virtue of independence, in practice and thought.

Judith Shklar reminds us that modern “citizenship is not confined to political activities and concerns.”<sup>129</sup> She said that for a person to “be recognized as an active citizen at all he must be an equal member of the polity, a voter, but he must also be independent, which has all along meant that he must be an ‘earner,’ a free remunerated worker, one who is rewarded for the actual work he has done, neither more nor less. He cannot be a slave or an aristocrat.”<sup>130</sup> Earning parallels voting because it “is in the marketplace, in production and commerce, in the world of work in all its forms, and in voluntary associations that the American citizen finds his social place, his standing, the approbation of his fellows, and possibly some of his self-respect.”<sup>131</sup> She further argued that enforced dependency in the form of slavery gave earning its civic force. To earn signified more than independence—it meant not being a slave.

It was, after all, Shklar who observed that

Booker Washington certainly never gave up the aspiration for eventual political rights for black Americans, but he was not alone in the age of energy and economic expansion to think that productive work and wealth were socially significant. The sense that conditions of work defined a person more than political rights also came to affect the

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<sup>128</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Query XIX, *Notes on the States of Virginia*,” in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology*, ed. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 347–48.

<sup>129</sup> Shklar, *American Citizenship*, 63.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

outlook of Northern white workers, who since the years before the Civil War complained of being reduced to wage slavery.<sup>132</sup>

The importance of a minimum standard of living, a level of basic independence, that secures one from falling into social relations of domination goes back to modern republicanism and was an essential principle to both Jeffersonian and Jacksonian political thought, both of which died a slow death in the rural South, with its agrarian political economy. Restricting Afro-Americans' opportunities for economic and social elevation guaranteed the old slaveocracy, turned plantocracy, an exploitable body of cheap labor. Monopolizing the local and state governments meant that social provisions, such as public education, could be distributed such as to ensure intergenerational poverty and powerlessness.

The republican reading of Washington, while important for distilling the practical and normative relationship between economic independence and individual freedom, does not, in itself, capture the whole of how Washington thought of economic uplift, especially his emphasis on its communalism. Washington had a complex and enlarged vision of the worker and farmer as active members of the community. Even if denied formal political equality and interracial social standing, the members of black communities should still be active citizens of their local communities. Thus his efforts to organize farmers were motivated by intrinsic and not only instrumental goals. By creating and maintaining autonomous organizations and institutions dedicated to addressing the challenges black farmers and workers faced, Washington revealed his deeper commitment to the idea that regardless of the depths

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 20.

of oppression one must find a way to create conditions in which one can be an active, informed, and educated member of the community, even if the community remained oppressed and marginalized.

Washington understood the struggle for freedom and justice in both local and comparative terms. He said that “the cause of the Negro is the cause of the man who is farthest down everywhere in the world.”<sup>133</sup> Washington wrote that he had witnessed the deplorable conditions of peasant life and the systematic domination and racial marginalization of Jewish peasants and Southern Italians in his travels throughout Europe. In these cases, Washington said that he discovered different ways in which an oppressed rural class could come together to formulate their shared grievances and pursue collective goals. Washington observed that whereas African American tenant farmers in the South are isolated on small plots, in Hungary “labourers, men and women together, practically camp in the fields,” and “working and living together” in this way, “they come to have a strong sense of their common interest, all the stronger, perhaps, because they are looked down upon by the rest of the population, and particularly by the small landowners with whom they were associated up to the time of their emancipation in 1848.”<sup>134</sup> Because of their encampment together, “the Socialists ... found the people prepared to listen to their doctrines.”<sup>135</sup> Washington further argued that socialism was their only hope for political salvation. “I have attempted to describe at some length the character of the Socialistic movement as I found it in

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<sup>133</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Man Farthest Down: A Record of Observation and Study in Europe* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1912), 72.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

Hungary and Italy, because it represents on the whole the movement of the masses at the bottom of life in Europe. Through this party, for the first time, millions of human beings who have had no voice in and no definite ideas in respect to the Government under which they lived are learning to think and give expression to their wants.”<sup>136</sup> He added, in short, that “[he] found that where the masses of the people are oppressed, where the people at the bottom are being crushed by those who are above them, there Socialism means revolution.”<sup>137</sup>

In Italy, Washington observed that “the large estates ... [were] not managed as in Hungary, by proprietor, but by middlemen and overseers.”<sup>138</sup> Although the “peasants in northern Italy were nominally given their freedom in 1793, their condition until a few years ago, has been described ... as ‘little better than that if they were slaves.’”<sup>139</sup> He also said that this condition leads to a multigenerational cycle of domination: “The overseer claimed, also, just as the overlord did in the days of feudalism, the rights to the labour of the peasant and his ... children were expected to work as servants in his household at a nominal price.”<sup>140</sup> Washington observed that for “a number of years there had existed among the small farmers numerous societies for mutual aid of various kinds.... The most important of these societies have been, perhaps, the cooperative credit organizations, by means of which all landowners have

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 97–98.

been able to escape the burden of heavy interest charges they were formally compelled to pay.”<sup>141</sup>

The argument here is not that Washington was a socialist or inspired by socialism. Rather, his reflections illustrate that his commitments had a great deal in common with socialist and utopian movements. He was quick to note that socialism stood no chance in the South. “I live in the Southern States, a part of the country which, more than any other part of the civilized world, still believes that the best government is the government that governs least; the government that you can wear like an old coat, without feeling it.”<sup>142</sup> “More than that,” Washington added, “I believe that the best and only fundamental way of bringing about reform is not by revolution, not through political machinery that tries to control and direct the individual from the outside, but by education, which gets at the individual from within; in short, fits him for life but leaves him free.”<sup>143</sup> To use education as a means for social, economic, and political reform, Washington transfigured the missionary tropes predominant in nineteenth-century America toward a grassroots political effort that combined a secular, democratic education with pragmatic strategies for collective empowerment. The school, as such, was a training ground for citizenship not only for students but also for local residents.

The Tuskegee Negro Conference, an annual conference for black farmers and workers and their wives, which Washington began in 1892 at Tuskegee University, expressed both the concrete challenges he sought to address head on and his normative

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid..

commitments, what he understood as necessary conditions for individual freedom as well as its practice. The Tuskegee Negro Conference is “a gathering that meets every February, and is composed of about eight hundred representatives, colored men and women, from all sections of the Black Belt.”<sup>144</sup> Washington wrote, “[The] purpose of these gatherings is severely practical—to encourage those who have not had the advantages of training and instruction, and to give them a chance to learn from the success of others.”<sup>145</sup> He added that the “purpose” of the conference “is to help the farmers who are too old, or too bound down by their responsibilities, to attend school or institutes; to do for them, in a small way, what Tuskegee and other agencies seek to do for the younger generation.”<sup>146</sup>

Washington took for granted that the majority of Afro-Southerners had little choice but to remain in agricultural work, given the agrarian economy of the South. “As I have said many times, it is my conviction that the great body of the Negro population must live in the future as they have done in the past, by the cultivation of the soil, and the most hopeful service now to be done is to enable the race to follow agriculture with intelligence and diligence.”<sup>147</sup> More specifically, he said that “the matters considered at the conference are those that the colored people have it in their power to control.”

[S]uch as the evils of the mortgage system, the one-room cabin, buying on credit, the importance of owning a home and putting money in the bank, how to build school-houses and prolong the school term, and to improve their moral and religious condition.... Besides the Negro

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<sup>144</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 5:348.

<sup>145</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 135.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

Conference for the masses of the people, we now have a gathering at the same time known as the Tuskegee Workers' Conference, composed of the officers and instructors of the leading coloured schools in the South.<sup>148</sup>

Washington said he wanted the farmers and their wives to “consult about the methods and means of securing homes, of freeing themselves from debt, of encouraging intelligent production.”<sup>149</sup>

These conferences are important because they provide an institutional and organizational context for sharing and receiving information essential for a better understanding of the economic policies and conditions that leave the majority of black farmers and workers in poverty. Only from a deep knowledge base can a possibly effective strategy be devised for eroding exploitative conditions. For this reason, Washington stressed information gathering and diffusion.

In my opening address I impressed upon them the fact that we wanted to spend the first part of the day in having them state plainly and simply just what their conditions were. I told them that we wanted no exaggeration and did not want any cut and dried or prepared speeches, we simply wanted each person to speak in a plain, simple manner, very much as he would if he were about his own fire-side speaking to the members of his own family. I also insisted that we confine our discussion to such matters as we ourselves could remedy.... At the first meeting of this Negro Conference we also adopted the plan of having these common people speak themselves and refused to allow people who were far above them in education and surroundings to take up the time in merely giving advice to these representatives of the masses.<sup>150</sup>

These annual conferences allowed for the sharing of information essential for organizing local and collective responses to exploitation. They also enabled discussions and debates that yielded ideas, methods, and strategies that could be taken

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<sup>148</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 5:348

<sup>149</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 138.

<sup>150</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 137.

back to the local communities and states and inform local farmers' alliances and organizations dedicated to eroding the economic dependency of the race. The particular form white supremacy took in local communities differed widely. Thus a single, centrally authored strategy would prove inadequate for the task at hand.

The conferences also provided a model for an autonomous social space or organization that would enable democratic discussion and deliberation, such as the articulation of shared grievances, opportunities for collective investigation and the mutual formulation of programs and plans of action to uplift the race. Thus farmers left the conferences with more than new strategies and practical instruments. They gained a greater sense of social efficacy and developed political will, both of which came from having stood up to their daily oppression and helped to formulate a collective response, one they helped author as an equal member among equals. Few institutional contexts at the time provided such opportunities to poor, illiterate, black farmers and workers. Such organizing exemplified Washington's vision of the farmer as an informed and socially active citizen. From these regular exchanges, the rural poor will develop broader intellectual interests.

I have little respect for the farmer who is satisfied with merely "making a living".... For the young farmer to be contented he must be able to look forward to owning the land that he cultivates, and from which he may later derive not only all the necessities of life, but some of the comforts and conveniences.... He must be helped to cherish the possibility that he and his family will have time for study and investigation, and a little time each year for travel and recreation, and for attending lectures and concerts.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Washington, *Working with the Hands*, 33.

Again, the goal is not wealth but material and intellectual independence. Mere earning was not the ultimate end; labor has to enable freedom not only in movement but also in thought.

To realize this vision, Washington pursued a series of cooperative efforts aimed at founding self-sufficient black communities. He first helped to found and organize the Southern Improvement Company, which bought four thousand acres of land and sold them off in small plots at very low interest rates to black farmers. Each lot came with a house and forty acres. Given their relative proximity to Tuskegee Institute, the farmers in this model community had access to agricultural education as well as a broader intellectual life. In 1914 Washington established Baldwin Farms, which allowed recent graduates to purchase forty acres and a house cheaply and with low interest rates. He also purchased land on Hilton Head in the South Carolina Sea Islands from the shipping magnate William P. Clyde. Clyde agreed to allow a thousand acres to be used as part of Washington's experiment before committing an additional nine thousand acres. The plan was to provide cheap land and a house for black farmers in a community with access to public education and a vibrant civil life. These experiments were intended to illustrate African Americans' capacity of self-government and economic success. Washington founded *The Messenger*, published by Tuskegee Institute, to advertise the success of these communities and counteract the prevailing racist ideologies.

### **3. Representations of the Race**

“It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Progressive mind was characteristically a journalistic mind,” wrote Richard Hofstadter.<sup>152</sup> Washington’s leadership and popularity paralleled Progressivism (1890–1920).<sup>153</sup> And Washington cultivated and disseminated his public persona through strategic and deft use of newspapers and magazines, as well as photography. His most famous work, *Up from Slavery*, was first a serialized account of his life for *The Outlook* magazine in 1900. Washington also witnessed, firsthand, the rise of what would become the “golden age” of journalism, and he saw, up close, the emergence of investigative journalism—the “muckrakers.” Even more important was Washington’s close relationship to the two men of the era who most effectively used newspapers to shape public sentiment and mobilize political action, as well as cultivate their own personal power: Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft.<sup>154</sup> Washington dedicated an entire chapter to newspapers and journalism in *My Larger Education*, his last semiautobiographical work. He singled two sources of inspiration: Roosevelt and Andrew Carnegie (but he also knew Taft very well).

Washington’s writings on newspapers, his own journalism, and his efforts to build up the African American press illustrate his desire to extend his uplift politics beyond the black community. These efforts also evidence the fact that Washington did not ignore the ideological foundations of white supremacy and its symbolic forms of

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<sup>152</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 186.

<sup>153</sup> Although Progressivism is characterized by the intellectual and policy responses to a diverse set of socioeconomic and cultural challenges resulting from mass industrialization in the North, Washington’s thought is closer to rural and Southern Progressives. See William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>154</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

oppression. He explicitly sought out novel ways to study the cultural and symbolic dimensions of white supremacy and to undermine and counteract their practical and psychological consequences. For example, he widely disseminated stories of black social and economic uplift and hired photographers to document the rise of the Tuskegee Institute and take pictures of black civic life. He would then send those pictures out to national and local newspapers and magazines to accompany stories about Afro-Southerners who were succeeding socially and economically. In this era, newspapers did not send out photographers when they were doing a profile on a place, event, or person but rather requested a picture from the institution or person. This practice allowed Washington the opportunity to publically counter the symbolics of white supremacy. He often did so by juxtaposing pictures of impoverished and downtrodden black farmers and workers against well-dressed black workers and farmers, often engaged in cooperative work and with sophisticated machines and tools or teachers and students steeped in study. These images had even greater force for a readership that included a large number of semiliterate individuals.

Because newspapers were essential to the struggle for justice, Washington insisted that any leader or activist had to nurture relationships with the white press as well as build up a black press. “Ever since I have known Colonel Roosevelt,” Washington wrote, “one of the things I have observed in his career has been his ability and disposition to keep in close and personal touch with the brightest newspaper men and magazine writers of the country.”<sup>155</sup> Washington underscored the importance of newspapers as the most effective medium of mass communication, and he highlighted

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<sup>155</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 51.

the significance of the press for reaching and cultivating a constituency, as well as establishing a public image. “Any man who is engaged in any sort of work that makes constant demand upon the good-will and confidence of the public knows that it is important that he should have an opportunity to reach thus public directly,” Washington argued.<sup>156</sup> “Both Colonel Roosevelt and Mr. Carnegie have known how to use newspapers as a means of letting the world know what they are doing,” and he added that he “believed that that the popularity of these men [was] due, in very large part, to their ability to get into a sort of personal touch with the masses of the people through the newspaper.”<sup>157</sup>

Washington said that given the importance of newspapers for shaping public sentiment and motivating political action, black leaders had no choice but to cultivate close relationships with the press. “It will be impossible to use the press for the purpose of educating our people if one cuts loose entirely from those who control the press. I have wished many times that the press was in the hands of a different class of people, or that we had one good, strong organ that had behind it individuals who were clean in their private life and unselfish in their public utterances and influences.”<sup>158</sup>

Washington had indeed cultivated close relationships with many editors including Walter Hines Page, among others. But his closest relationship was with the African American civil rights activist T. Thomas Fortune, who was the editor of *The New York Age*. Fortune’s more openly radical politics made him an ideal partner. Washington would, at times, have Fortune sign his name to more radical editorials

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>158</sup> “Letter to Whitefield McKinlay from BTW, December 16, 1901,” *BTWP*, 6:348.

Washington wrote because Washington was afraid it would prove dangerous otherwise, due to his location in the South and his own public indebtedness to white philanthropists.

Much of Washington's writings were akin to journalism rather than philosophical meditation. And he widely distributed his political reflections and social criticisms to magazines and local and national newspapers in order to secure a wide readership. This affected the way he wrote, which was in a more popular, less formal tone, one often indistinguishable from his speeches. This style is true for most of the national politicians and public intellectuals of the era. Washington said, "Through the medium of the newspaper I have been able to get in touch with many hundreds and thousands of persons that I would never have been able to reach with my voice. All this multiplied my powers of service a hundredfold."<sup>159</sup> Newspapers, he added, helped him "keep faith with the public."<sup>160</sup>

Beyond the importance of establishing one's voice and place in public affairs and thus one's reach and power, newspapers also enabled a collective will, the possibility to imagine community, argued Washington. Newspapers, he said, closed the distance between people and thus collapsed their differences. In this way, newspapers had the power to bring people together for common cause.

[A newspaper] gives us a world-wide outlook, and it makes a commendable effort to get the truth. Even if, like the village gossip, it puts the emphasis sometimes on the wrong things and spends a lot of time over personal and unimportant matters, it at least brings all classes of people together in doing so. People who read the same newspaper

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<sup>159</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 52.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

are bound to feel neighborly, even though they may never meet one another, even though they live thousands of miles apart.<sup>161</sup>

This passage could well be taken from the pages of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.<sup>162</sup> The idea that newspapers bind us is an old one. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that the "newspaper ... is the only way of being able to place the same thought at the same moment into a thousand minds," and he added that "without newspapers, there would be hardly any communal action."<sup>163</sup> Tocqueville noted that men and women "fail to see or find each other because they are all very puny and lost in the crowd. Then a newspaper appears to publish the opinion or idea which had occurred simultaneously but separately to each of them. Immediately, everyone turns to the light and those wandering spirits, having sought each other for a long time in the darkness, at last meet and unite."<sup>164</sup> For Tocqueville, then, newspapers are essential for the civic character and politics; they fill "the need for a great number of men to communicate and act together."<sup>165</sup>

Washington said that in addition to shaping public opinion and mobilizing political action, a newspaper also provides important evidence of the prevailing values and ideas, preferences and prejudices of its readers.

The important thing, it seems to me, about the newspaper is that it represents the interests and reflects the opinions and intelligence of the average man in the community where the paper is published. The local press reflects the local prejudice.... If the newspapers were not a reflex of the minds of their readers, they would not be as interesting or as

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>162</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso Books, 1991).

<sup>163</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 600–601.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 601.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 603.

valuable as they are. We should not know the people about us as well as we do. As long as the newspaper exists we not only have a means of understanding how the average man thinks and feels, but we have a medium for reaching and influencing him.<sup>166</sup>

Many newspapers, not only in the South, fueled hatred by disseminating racist stories and imageries, vicious and inflammatory untruths that describe African American men as moral and sexual predators. “A large part of our race troubles in the South,” Washington wrote, “are in the newspapers.”<sup>167</sup> Washington said that harm is often done to African Americans in the South “by exaggerated newspaper articles which are written near the scene or in the midst of specially aggravating occurrences.”<sup>168</sup> This checks “the progress of the Negro,” he added, and “a certain class of Southern white people, who, in the midst of excitement, speak or write in a manner that gives the impression that all Negroes are lawless, untrustworthy, and shiftless.”<sup>169</sup> In this regard, Washington drew the same conclusion as Ida B. Wells, the antilynching activist who sought to expose not only the real causes behind lynching but also the role of newspapers in stoking the flames of racial hatred and those newspapers that went so far as to provide information essential for coordinating the forming of lynch mobs and their executions of African Americans.<sup>170</sup>

Newspapers mirror back to their readers their fears and hatreds, which also means that they provide essential information as to what must be countered. Washington was clear that careful attention to the press is important for formulating a

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<sup>166</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 56.

<sup>167</sup> Booker T. Washington, “The South’s Own Problem,” *BTWP*, 10: 229.

<sup>168</sup> Washington, *Future of the American Negro*, 58.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Wells, *On Lynchings*. See also Giddings, *Ida*.

strategy for challenging white supremacy. He said that “public sentiment among our people, as is true of the white race, is very largely moulded and educated by the press.”<sup>171</sup> If the press had the power to mobilize a lynch mob, then it could also rally efforts toward a boycott; if it could induce anxiety and contempt, then it could just as easily encourage calm and respect. He thus argued that “effort should be made to disseminate a knowledge of the truth in regard to all matters affecting our race, so that the North, the South and the Negro himself may be adequately informed as to race data and conditions.”<sup>172</sup> And Washington dedicated much of his later work to building a black press, a public sphere, that could counter the racial imagery and narratives that proliferated in the mainstream press and circulate counterimages or respectability.

He was unequivocal that the African American press was essential to the struggle for freedom and justice. “No institution, for the uplifting of the Afro-American, has stood out more strongly for forty years, than the Afro-American Press. Many of the editors and publishers have almost pauperized themselves in standing for the rights of the race. The Afro-American press [sic] has held their columns open in defense of the Negro and has advocated his advancement and education,” argued Washington.<sup>173</sup> When you think about it, it is indeed remarkable that almost every nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African American political theorist was at one time or another an editor of a newspaper or magazine.<sup>174</sup> A printing press was easier to

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<sup>171</sup> “Letter to Whitefield McKinlay from BTW, December 16, 1901,” *BTWP*, 6:348.

<sup>172</sup> Booker T. Washington et al, “Summary of the Proceedings of the Conference at Carnegie Hall, January 6, 1904,” *BTWP*, 7:386.

<sup>173</sup> Booker T. Washington, “A Draft of an Editorial, March 11, 1905,” *BTWP*, 8:212.

<sup>174</sup> Henry Highland Garnet (*Colored American*), Frederick Douglass (*North Star*), William H. Allen (*National Watchman*), Mary Ann Shadd Cary (*Provincial Freeman*), Martin R. Delany (*The Mystery*),

come by than an academic position, given racial exclusion. But journalism was a more efficacious use of one's thinking and writing, as a practice of a public philosophy intended to intervene in the pressing social and political questions of the day. The rigid distinction between "high" and "low" brow is twentieth-century practice.

In fact, it was the antislavery public sphere that inspired Washington. He contended that the antislavery movement appealed "to the people by public addresses and through the medium of the press," which he said "constituted the only method of fighting. Agitators on behalf of this cause flooded the country with facts, figures, and arguments."<sup>175</sup> Washington noted that Douglass sought, above all, "an 'organ' of his own" as essential to the antislavery struggle.<sup>176</sup>

"I already saw myself," he said, "wielding my pen as well as my voice in the great work of renovating the public mind and building up a public sentiment which should send slavery to the grave and restore to 'liberty and the pursuit of happiness' the people with whom I suffered."

Among other considerations that moved him to establish his own paper was the conviction that the example of a well-managed and ably edited organ would be powerful evidence that the Negro was too much of a man to be held a chattel.<sup>177</sup>

Washington wrote that Douglass's "newspaper enterprise was his first 'declaration of independence.'"<sup>178</sup> But Washington also insisted that antislavery newspapers did more than achieve the abolition of slavery.

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William Monroe Trotter (*Boston Guardian*), James Weldon Johnson (*Jacksonville Daily American*), Ida B. Wells (*Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* and *Chicago Conservator*), and W. E. B. Du Bois (*The Crisis*).

<sup>175</sup> Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 97.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

He argued that the “development of these moral agencies [newspapers of causes] furnished the masses of the American people with the means of creating a more active interest in public affairs.”<sup>179</sup> Washington wrote that “discussion of public questions” over slavery and the continued oppression of Indians gave a “new sense of the significance and the responsibility of self-government.”<sup>180</sup> As a result, their “revived spirit was aided and advanced by the growing influence of the modern newspaper press and journals dealing with a variety of subjects other than politics. Each moral and social question came to have an organ to spread its views,” Washington insisted.<sup>181</sup> “They brought the republic back to the principles of liberty and justice upon which it was founded. They urged the issue so persistently that no other question was permitted to equal it in public interest.”<sup>182</sup>

Washington was insistent that men like Frederick Douglass or Theodore Roosevelt, public men, leaders, did not just rely on newspapers to enlarge their power and buttress their popularity. Rather, newspapers were the medium through which an individual could transform himself, his very person, into a public image that would be synonymous with a given political cause, say, antislavery or Progressivism. Washington wrote that such men did not “use” the “newspaper merely for the sake of increasing their personal popularity.... In the case of both Colonel Roosevelt and Mr. Carnegie, the names of private individuals have, in each case, become associated in

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 91–92.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 97.

the public mind with certain large public interests.”<sup>183</sup> Such men “have come to be, in a very real sense,” Washington said, “public men because they have embodied in their persons and their lives certain important public interests.”<sup>184</sup> Through his own use of journalistic writings, Washington, too, sought to become associated with racial uplift in the public mind. But Washington had also learned painful lessons along the way. He was reminded of the power of the press in 1901 when newspapers across the country viciously attacked him and Roosevelt for breaking with the etiquette of white supremacy by having dinner together at the White House.<sup>185</sup>

### **Conclusion: Uplift and the Morals of Membership**

Washington, like Tocqueville, stressed the importance of association for civic life and political praxis. And like Tocqueville, Washington did not think acquiring essential political skills, resources, and habits had to be best pursued, or was best pursued within formal political associations and institutions. As Tocqueville noted, “Associations created in civil life whose objectives have no political significance” nevertheless cultivate crucial political skills and resources.<sup>186</sup> “Civil associations,” Tocqueville argued, “pave the way for political associations.”<sup>187</sup> That is because the “more the number of minor communal matters increases, the more men acquire, even

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<sup>183</sup> Washington, *My Larger Education*, 52.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> For a narrative history of the event, see Deborah Davis, *Guest of Honor: Booker T. Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, and the White House Dinner That Shocked a Nation* (New York: Atria Books, 2012). See also Kearns Goodwin, *The Bully Pulpit*, 320–22.

<sup>186</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 597.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 604.

unknowingly, the capacity to pursue major ones in common.”<sup>188</sup> “Citizens who are weak at an individual level are not clearly aware in advance of the strength they can gain by combining; to understand that, they have to be shown.”<sup>189</sup> More specifically, members “learn to surrender their wishes to others and to subordinate their individual efforts to the common endeavor, all of which knowledge is vital no less in civil than in political associations,” and when “citizens have the capacity and the habit of combining in everything, they will be as willing to combine for small as for greater undertakings.”<sup>190</sup>

Associations enhance and support the capacity for democratic citizenship, what Mark Warren calls their “*developmental effects*,” which “underwrite the capacities of individuals to participate in collective judgments that reflect their considered wants and beliefs.”<sup>191</sup> Membership is therefore crucial for individual self-development and transformation toward autonomy. For example, an Afro-Southerner who regularly attended one of the “citizenship schools” at Tuskegee would gain a sense of efficacy or social and political agency: “the self-confidence necessary for action, and the habit of doing something about problems when they arise.”<sup>192</sup> Efficacy is the “reflexive effects of experiences, sedimented in individuals’ biographies over a lifetime and expressed as a psychological disposition,” but feelings of “efficacy (or inefficacy) can be accurate readings of one’s chances of making a difference, which will depend upon

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 605.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 606–07.

<sup>191</sup> Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 61.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 71.

resources, institutional venues, and opportunities.”<sup>193</sup> The brutal and dispiriting psychological consequences of slavery could easily produce a submissive and fatalistic black population in the South, one that would lack “the psychological resources to act even when circumstances permit.”<sup>194</sup> This is not to suggest that emancipated blacks lacked the psychological resources and political skills for challenging Jim Crow but more to propose that even if those resources and skills were present or latent, they nevertheless needed to be further cultivated, enhanced, and organized into a collective effort.

Other developmental effects include information, political skills, capacities for deliberation and political judgment, and important civic habits and virtues. As Warren notes, “Dealing with workplace problems, organizing parent-teacher association activities, or participating in neighborhood watches provide more opportunities for developing political skills than do political associations, which are typically organized on larger scales, focused on distant seats of government.”<sup>195</sup> As Nancy Rosenblum says, the “dynamic of the morality of association is rooted in affective ties. Its essence is reciprocity.”<sup>196</sup> She adds that “engagement and the experience of reciprocity produce cooperation,” but cooperation “enables the worst as well as the best social actions.”<sup>197</sup> In other words, the effects of associational life are not necessarily liberal. Reading this line of thought, and especially Warren, in relation to black civic

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>196</sup> Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Members and Morals: The Personal Uses of Pluralism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 51.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 59.

associations and organizations, we can argue that they, too, have “*public sphere effects*” that “develop agendas, test ideas, embody deliberations, and provide voice,” all of which are in turn essential for “*political autonomy*, that is, the public reasoning through which collective judgments are justified.”<sup>198</sup> Specifically, they “constitute public agendas by communicating information and developing issues, enter into public deliberations, represent marginal and excluded voices, and often remind us of our commonalities.”<sup>199</sup> Finally, uplift institutions contribute to what Warren terms the “*institutional* conditions and venues that support, express, and actualize individual and political autonomy as well as transform autonomous judgments into collective decisions.”<sup>200</sup> Warren rightly notes that associations “empower citizens by enabling the collective action necessary to resist, cause mischief, organize votes, initiate lawsuits, withdraw support or resources, and engage in other tactics that increase the force of the message within strategic contexts of power.”<sup>201</sup>

The literature on moral and political effects of membership or associational life does not map seamlessly onto the Afro-American uplift politics at the turn of the century in the South. That is so because uplift associations, organizations, and institutions had to constitute what Sara Evans and Harry Boyte call “free spaces,” that is, “particular sorts of public places in the community ... in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more self-assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue. Put simply, free spaces are settings

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<sup>198</sup> Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 61.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision.”<sup>202</sup> They add that “democratic action depends upon these free spaces, where people experience a schooling in citizenship and learn a vision of the common good in the course of struggling for change.”<sup>203</sup> As Margaret Kohn aptly puts it: “Political spaces facilitate changes by creating a distinctive place to develop new identities and practices.”<sup>204</sup> She goes on to argue that “mutual aid societies, union halls, night schools, cooperatives, [and] houses of the people” are all “radical democratic spaces because they are political sites outside of the state where the disenfranchised generated power.”<sup>205</sup> I am not sure that makes them “radical” or “democratic,” but I do not think they have to be either to be of deep political significance.

Higginbotham conceives of the black church—or more precisely black women’s transformation of the church, within limits—as what Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner call a “subaltern counterpublic.”<sup>206</sup> Nancy Fraser argues that “subordinated social groups ... have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics.” She calls these “*subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate

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<sup>202</sup> Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 17.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>204</sup> Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

oppositional interpretation of their identities, interests, and needs.”<sup>207</sup> Michael Warner says that subaltern counterpublics’ “participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general.”<sup>208</sup> For Warner, counterpublics “remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power.”<sup>209</sup> The “subordinated status” of a subaltern counterpublic “does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members’ identities are formed and transformed.”<sup>210</sup> “It can work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations.”<sup>211</sup>

Fraser cautions us that subaltern counterpublics are not “always necessarily virtuous; some of them, alas, are explicitly antidemocratic and antiegalitarian, and even those with democratic and egalitarian intentions are not always above practicing their own modes of informal exclusions and marginalization.”<sup>212</sup> We do not have to take a romanticized view of uplift politics as necessarily radical and democratic for it to have nevertheless been politically powerful. For Fraser, “the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies.”<sup>213</sup> Fraser offers a less heroic view of subaltern counterpublics as offsetting rather than eradicating inequality and injustice, which I agree with.

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<sup>207</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interrupts: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 81; emphasis original.

<sup>208</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 57.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Fraser, *Justice Interrupts*, 82.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

The point is that, in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward the wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. This dialectic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies.<sup>214</sup>

Most critics of uplift have overstated the ideological motivations animating some of the ideas and values that espoused and informed the practices in Afro-Southerners' organizations, associations, and institutions. Some have seen it as withdrawal, a consequence of black Southerners' passiveness and fatalism, and rarely consider it a basis or "training ground for agitational activities." Washington's emphasis on collective organizing around education, labor, and representation show that uplift politics held out far more radical aspirations than is otherwise recognized.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

### The Legacy of Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington took ill on October 25, 1915, after delivering two lectures in New Haven, the first at Yale University before the American Missionary Association and the National Council of Congregational Churches and the second at A. M. E. Zion Church. He then traveled to New York City for medical attention, and upon doctors' advice he decided to stay in the North to get rest and further care. But by Friday, November 12, the doctors caring for him told him he had only a few days, maybe a few hours, to live. Margaret Murray Washington, who was with him, sent a telegram to Julius Rosenwald, which summed up Washington's condition. "Washington is very weak—very ill. The doctors all agree that I should go South at once.... Every day he is weaker and weaker."<sup>1</sup> "It is terrible Mr. Rosenwald to see him so broken all at once it seems and yet he has not been well for a long time," she added.<sup>2</sup> Washington's health had been in decline for several months, in part because he refused to scale back his heavy workload and lecture schedule. Margaret also sent a telegram to Emmett Scott, Washington's private secretary: "We are leaving for home this afternoon. Will reach Chehaw on train due at nine o'clock Saturday night. Please have two good autos meet train and wait if it is late."<sup>3</sup> From Charlotte, North Carolina, she sent Scott a second

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<sup>1</sup> "Telegram from Margaret James Murray Washington to Julius Rosenwald, November 11–12, 1915," *BTWP*, 13:435.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> "Telegram from Margaret James Murray Washington to Emmett Jay Scott, November 12, 1915," *BTWP*, 13:436.

telegram: "Send ambulance to Chehaw tonight nine o'clock with plenty blankets and sheets."<sup>4</sup> And on Sunday morning, November 14, Emmett Scott wired Seth Low, one of the trustees: "Dr. Washington accompanied by Mrs. Washington reached institute grounds from New York twelve o'clock last night. It becomes my solemn duty to inform you that he passed away this morning at four forty five o'clock [*sic*]. Funeral services to be held Tuesday morning."<sup>5</sup>

When Washington died, he was only fifty-nine years old. And, by all accounts, he was the most famous black man in the world. Tuskegee Institute stood as a testament for African American ingenuity and perseverance in the face of terrible conditions. And though Washington's influence had declined, he was still the most important and influential black leader at the time of his death, in part because the overwhelming majority of African Americans continued to live in the South. Afro-Southerners' lives had changed a great deal from 1881, when Washington founded Tuskegee Institute, to 1915. In his lecture at Yale, Washington highlighted the achievements of the race in education:

Fifty years ago the education of the Negro in the South had just begun. There were less [*sic*] than 100 schools devoted to this purpose. In 1867, there were only 1,938 schools for the freedmen, with 2,087 teachers, of whom 699 were colored. There were 111,442 pupils.... In 1915 there are almost 2,000,000 Negro children enrolled in the public schools in the South, and over 100,000 in the normal schools and colleges. The 699 colored teachers have increased to over 34,000, of whom 3,000 are teachers in colleges and normal and industrial schools.

When the American missionary association began its work among the freedmen there were in the South no institutions for higher and secondary education of the Negro. There were only 4 in the entire

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<sup>4</sup> "Telegram from Margaret James Murray Washington to Emmett Jay Scott, November 13, 1915," *BTWP*, 13:439.

<sup>5</sup> "Telegram from Emmett Jay Scott to Seth Low, November 14, 1915," *BTWP*, 13:439.

United States. In 1915 there are in the South 50 colleges devoted to their training. There are 13 institutions for the education of Negro women. There are 26 theological schools and departments. There are 3 schools of law, 4 of medicine, 2 of dentistry, 3 of pharmacy, 17 state agricultural and mechanical colleges, and over 200 normal and industrial schools.<sup>6</sup>

In 1880, 76.2 percent of black Southerners (age ten and over) were illiterate compared to 21.5 percent of white Southerners. By 1920, 26.3 percent of black Southerners were illiterate.<sup>7</sup> By any measure, the rise in literacy rates for blacks in the South was a remarkable achievement, especially given that public education for blacks was all but unfunded or defunded by the states and counties.<sup>8</sup> Washington said, “Taking the Southern states as a whole, about \$10.23 per capita is spent in educating the average white boy or girl, and the sum of \$2.82 per capita in educating the average black child.”<sup>9</sup> It is not an exaggeration to argue that Washington was the most pivotal person in the educational efforts of his race from 1880 to 1915. Washington’s work in soliciting philanthropy for schools and libraries for African American schools in the South was nothing short of remarkable.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Booker T. Washington, “An Address before the American Missionary Association and National Council of Congregational Churches, October 25, 1915,” *BTWP*, 13:411.

<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Margo, ed. *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880–1950: An Economic History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*. See also Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*.

<sup>9</sup> Washington, “An Address before the American Missionary Association and National Council of Congregational Churches, October 25, 1915,” 13:413.

<sup>10</sup> See Horace Mann Bond, “The Role of Booker T. Washington,” in *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), 84–114. Stephanie Deutsch outlines how Washington shaped the formation of what became the “Rosenwald School” in *You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2011). For Washington’s work on industrial education, see Virginia Lantz Denton, *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993).

A few months earlier, Washington had underscored the economic development of the race. "From 1900 to 1910, the Negro's farm property increased 128 per cent."<sup>11</sup> These incredible attainments are not to be ignored, and we should not forget the role Washington played in the educational and economic advancement of African Americans in the post-Reconstruction South. In an editorial in *The Crisis* a few weeks after Washington's death, Du Bois wrote:

The death of Mr. Booker T. Washington marks an epoch in the history of America. He was the greatest Negro leader since Frederick Douglass, and the most distinguished man, white or black, who has come out of the South since the Civil War. His fame was international and his influence far-reaching. Of the good that he has accomplished there can be no doubt: he directed the attention of the Negro race in America to the pressing necessity of economic development; he emphasized technical education and he did much to pave the way for an understanding between the white and darker races.... We may then generously and with deep earnestness lay on the grave of Booker T. Washington testimony of our thankfulness for his undoubted help in the accumulation of Negro land and property, his establishment of Tuskegee and spreading of industrial education and his compelling of the white south to at least think of the Negro as a possible man. On the other hand, in stern justice, we must lay on the soul of this man, a heavy responsibility for the consummation of Negro disenfranchisement, the decline of the Negro college and public schools and the firmer establishment of color caste in this land.<sup>12</sup>

Yes, disenfranchisement and segregation won the day, but African American education did not decline but increased, and largely because of Washington's uplift politics.

Washington's legacy remains in shreds in part because his rise to power and prestige, his increasing celebrity, and his expanding influence corresponded with the

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<sup>11</sup> Booker T. Washington, "An Address before the National Negro Business League, August 18, 1915," *BTWP*, 13:348.

<sup>12</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "Booker T. Washington," *The Crisis*, December 1915 (Du Bois acknowledged authorship of this editorial in *Dusk of Dawn*).

escalation and intensification of white supremacy. New constitutions in Southern states had effectively disenfranchised most blacks. State and municipal statutes created a system of racial segregation—in housing, public transportation, schooling, libraries, marriage, even restaurants and public bathrooms—that efficiently subordinated African Americans and intensified their political oppression. Where law and custom proved too restrained, white mobs lynched more than 2,500 African Americans between 1884 and 1900.<sup>13</sup> In short, Du Bois and many others held Washington responsible for the triumph of Jim Crow. But this line of reasoning would logically impeach every black leader from 1915 to the 1960s, before Martin Luther King Jr. Du Bois, too, would have to be charged for failing to turn back Jim Crow. No one person was going to defeat white supremacy, and certainly no one black leader was responsible for its triumph and devastation.

The first, and overarching, goal of this study has been to offer a revisionist reading of Booker T. Washington's political thought, one that demonstrates his structural account of white supremacy and reconstructs his pragmatic politics. In doing so, I challenged the dominant reading of Washington as merely a capitalist and a compromiser. Instead of identifying Washington with any one strain of contemporary political theory and asserting a purported radicalism he could not have embraced in his time and his circumstances, I chose to emphasize the historical, social, and political contexts within which Washington's thought and activism developed and took shape. To richly situate Washington's thought and politics within the unavoidable constraints imposed by white supremacy in the post-Reconstruction South and his need to retain

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<sup>13</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 4.

the financial backing of white philanthropists in the North, I drew heavily on Washington's private correspondences, speeches, and institutional and organizational work to supplement his more moderate, placating, public articulations of his political vision. Reading his autobiography *Up from Slavery* with and against his activism and private correspondences, we begin to see a far more robust and complex body of political thought.

Washington continues to be dismissed. The overt prejudices of his contemporary competitors and critics have crystallized into a mythical certainty that goes unquestioned by contemporary. To say that he is rarely read, much less interpreted, is putting the matter quite lightly. The exegetical style I employed throughout this study, my providing lots of textual and contextual primary source evidence, was intended to let Washington speak for himself. Of course this is an interpretation of Washington, one in which he hardly speaks for himself. By turning up the volume on Washington's voice, I provided readers enough material and interpretation to derive a clear impression of Washington the man, the thinker, and the activist. I used historical archives and contextual documents to show the specific ways in which white supremacy constrained both the substantive content of Washington's thought—which was often pragmatically realized through his activism and institution building—and his public articulation of his politics, that is, how it imposed the imperative of realism and practicality. In doing so, I was practicing the historical reconstruction of situated political theory, public philosophy in a context of persecution. As a result, a richer and more complex view of Washington came to light, that of a thinker working under unimaginable oppression and discrimination, both of

which left permanent scars on the body of his thought and work. Washington was not an entirely consistent thinker.

Washington's overarching purpose was to end racial oppression. Inconsistencies in his ideas should not detract from his position as a major figure in the history of American political thought. On the one hand, his tragic pragmatism was a consequence of the consequences and constraints imposed by Jim Crow. What is most important is that Washington's thought should not be severed from the prevailing social, political, and intellectual forces, and the historical context of white supremacy. Washington had to be attentive to audiences, supporters, and opponents of the race, and therefore had to appeal to and appease many competing interests. As a result, his arguments varied and shifted, evolved and changed, to be more effective in his goal of eroding racial oppression. Washington sincerely believed that a direct, protest-based, political response to white supremacy was too dangerous for black Southerners to take up, especially given their poverty, illiteracy, and other material and social liabilities, which, taken together, made the rural blacks highly vulnerable to violent retaliation by white supremacists and the state.

On the other hand, Washington also thought that his reformist, uplift politics—anchored in autonomous black institutions focused on education, economic empowerment, and representation—would lay down more tracks that would prove more permanent and enduring political change. It should become clearer now just how fraught any verdict on political possibility truly is and how difficult it was for Washington—or any other thinker in that moment—to have been fully self-aware of the ideological and epistemological impediments to his own political judgment. The

vantage point of history allows us to see things he could not have seen or known. There were strategies he judged more practical and desirable, but now we can see how ill-fated they truly were; there were approaches he judged infeasible that were, in fact, wide-open and thus potentially groundbreaking. My historical approach provides a framework to examine Washington's political thought, and I hope it also contributes to restoring his place in the history of political theory.

This study did not set out to argue that Washington's vision was the right one and others' were not. Rather, it simply hunted for that vision. To discover and then recover Washington's political thought, with all of its beaming hopefulness and sad realism, I situated Washington's thought firmly within the intellectual context of post-Reconstruction America. In chapter 2, I outlined the more familiar reading of Washington as an accommodationist before destabilizing that interpretation of Washington. I did this by offering a close reading of Du Bois's evolving criticisms of Washington, moving from what remains the prevailing view of Washington to a more nuanced interpretation outlined in Du Bois's later work. I showed that Du Bois came to the conclusion that uplift politics had radical potential; he argued in *Dusk of Dawn* that the only feasible course for blacks to take was to turn inward and embark on collective social and economic empowerment as means to political empowerment. In the late 1930s and 1940s, Du Bois came to many of the conclusions Washington had reached four decades earlier.

With the hardline reading of Washington somewhat shaken, I turned to his most important intellectual authority: Frederick Douglass. In chapter 3, I traced Douglass's influence on Washington's thought, specifically Washington's lifelong

emphasis on the structural nature of racial oppression—first, slavery and then Jim Crow—and the importance of a realist politics. Washington always displayed and emphasized to his students and all African Americans the need to cultivate a political praxis that acknowledges the independence of politics from morals, one that recognizes the need for dissimulation as a means of surviving white supremacy. Chapters 2 and 3, taken together, reorient how we should approach Washington. I showed that it is anachronistic to read Washington through Du Bois, as well as to read him as solely a contemporary rival of Du Bois. Washington was wrestling with a very different thinker: Douglass. And it is the later Douglass who we should read Washington with and against.

In chapter 4, I reconstructed Washington's materialist and structural interpretation of white supremacy and why he believed it constituted a sociopolitical system that would be difficult to defeat through a direct confrontational politics. The economic dependency of the race combined with the persistent threat of extra-legal violence made it difficult if not impossible to mobilize against disenfranchisement and segregation. We saw that Washington arrived at this claim after careful study of how deeply embedded white supremacy was in the South's economy, politics, and social order. We can now see that Washington was not, nor did he ever become, an advocate of *laissez-faire*. He was not a precursor to black neoliberal conservatives who currently tout the free market as a panacea. In fact, we saw that Washington often identified and condemned free-market instruments of racial oppression. Given this, Washington concluded that the best course of action was to find pragmatic ways to erode the social and material bases of white supremacy. In chapter 5, we saw that

Washington underlined educational and economic empowerment as the best means by which to do so. Washington's uplift politics rested on the assumption that cultivating the civic capacity of the race—that is, by increasing African Americans' economic and social power—was the best method to achieving effective political change, over time.

I also show that it is incorrect to conclude that Washington ignored the optics or resistance. Washington never failed to publically challenge white supremacy. His challenges did not take the form of his more radical contemporaries, like Du Bois and Wells, but he nevertheless voiced loud and clear protest against disenfranchisement and segregation. In an article Washington wrote for the *New Republic*, "My View of Segregation Laws," he summarized the injustices of racial segregation, saying:

1. It is unjust.
2. It invites other unjust measures.
3. It will not be productive of good, because practically every thoughtful Negro resents its injustice and doubts its sincerity. Any race adjustment based on injustice finally defeats itself. The Civil War is the best illustration of what results where it is attempted to make wrong right or seem to be right.
4. It is unnecessary.
5. It is inconsistent.
6. There has been no case of segregation of Negroes in the United States that has not widened the breach between the two races. Wherever a form of segregation exists it will be found that it has been administered in such a way as to embitter the Negro and harm more or less the moral fibre of the white man. That the Negro does not express this constant sense of wrong is no proof that he does not feel it.

Washington by no means advocated quiescence. He underscored the need for a black public sphere and dedicated great effort to building up black newspapers. He insisted, as we saw, that Afro-American newspapers were essential to the struggle for justice because they could communicate widely the injustices of white supremacy; provide

African Americans a sense of community, pride, and hope; and motivate and coordinate social action. He appreciated the symbolic and psychological foundations of political efficacy.

But what seems to really eat at us in regard to Washington is the lack of rage in his writings and speeches. He is at times even meek. Washington did not publically trade punches with white supremacists, and even when his blood came to a boil, he kept his public remarks temperate. This makes us distrust him. He should have been angrier, he should have taken the entire white South to task, and he should have spared none of them. Washington's lack of rage, in his work and his writings, his speeches and his reflections, is almost unforgivable to many of his critics. "It often requires more courage to suffer in silence than to rebel," Washington used to like to say, "more courage not to strike back than to retaliate, more courage to be silent than to speak."<sup>14</sup> Washington refused to publically trade blows because he was judicious. But he also was once a slave and thus still carried the physical and psychological scars of slavery. Washington knew slavery's truths and terror; it was Washington who felt the lash of a white overseer, as Du Bois reminded us. Because Washington was once a slave, like the overwhelming majority of Afro-Southerners, he reached them in a way that few thinkers before or immediately after him ever did or could.

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<sup>14</sup> Booker T. Washington, "The South and the Negro," *The Southern Workman* 34, January 1905.

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