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The Influence of Personalities on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama, I

HORACE MANN BOND

Whatever importance be assigned to the rôle of personalities in the historical process, the habit of thinking and writing of social processes in terms of individualities makes the subject one of significance. In Alabama the presence of a commanding personality, and the school Tuskegee Institute, which was "his lengthened shadow," requires a detailed attention to this force in the interpretation of education of Negroes in the state.

Booker Taliaferro Washington was born in Virginia at sometime in the middle 'fifties of the eighteenth century.¹ His life, he said, "had its beginning in the midst of the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings."² He entered Hampton Institute in 1872, finishing the course of instruction there in 1875.³ After teaching in West Virginia for two years, he spent a fruitless year at Wayland Seminary, a classical school in Washington; later returned to Hampton Institute as an assistant in charge of the Indian boys domiciled there at that time, and later served as instructor in the Night School for work students.⁴ In May of 1881 Samuel Chapman Armstrong, Hampton Principal, received a letter from Alabama asking him to recommend a principal for a new school to be established at Tuske-

gee, in Macon County.⁵ Washington was selected; and he arrived in Alabama late in June, 1881, to take up his new duties.⁶

INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Hampton Institute was a foundation of the American Missionary Association and of the Freedmen's Bureau, as were so many of the colleges for Negroes established in the South immediately after the Civil War. As such, it was a product of New England humanitarianism, as were other institutions of like origin. It was unique in its principal, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the son of missionary parents resident in the Sandwich Islands.⁷ Armstrong graduated from Williams College, in 1862, during the presidency of Mark Hopkins. "Whatever good teaching I may have done," said Armstrong, "has been Mark Hopkins' teaching through me."⁸

More important than the Williams' background in Armstrong's educational planning appears to have been his youthful experience in Hawaii. Unlike other "missionary" teachers, Armstrong had a perspective including the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107; Emmett J. Scott and Lyman B. Stowe, *Booker T. Washington, Builder of Civilization*. New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1926. p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁷ Edith Armstrong Talbot, *Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a biographical Study*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1901. *passim*.

⁸ Samuel Chapman Armstrong, *Twenty-Two Years' Work of Hampton Institute*. Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893. p. 1.

¹ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery, An Autobiography*. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1901. p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 87, 94.

application of humanitarianism to a "folk"; and there can be no doubt that this colonial experience affected the adaptation of humanitarian theory which he invoked at Hampton. In explaining his work at Hampton, he acknowledged his debt to the institutions established for natives in Hawaii.

[There] were two institutions; the Lahainaluna [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, under the devoted David B. Lyman and his wife. 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.⁹

At Fisk University, in Nashville, Erastus Milo Cravath instituted a curriculum taken bodily from the classical course of study at Oberlin College, where he had studied. At Atlanta University, Edmund Asa Ware and Horace Bumstead adopted, without change, the curriculum which they had studied at Yale. General O. O. Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau, was a graduate of Bowdoin College, and, in inviting Armstrong to establish a school at Hampton, doubtless had in mind the same sort of institution which his New England agents set up elsewhere in the South. But Hampton, under Armstrong, became a school with a "policy of only English and generally elementary and industrial teaching."¹⁰

As a product of such a school, Booker T. Washington, aside from his talents of intellect and of personal force, differed radically from the hundreds of young Negroes in the immediate post-

war period who flocked to the mission schools in the South in search of an education.

THE ORIGIN OF TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE

It is a significant reflection of his policy that Booker T. Washington never published the complete story of the founding of Tuskegee Institute. In his *Autobiography*, he says:

I found that a year previous to my going to Tuskegee some of the coloured people who had heard something of the work of education being done at Hampton had applied to the state Legislature, through their representatives, for a small appropriation to be used in starting a normal school in Tuskegee. This request the Legislature had complied with to the extent of granting an annual appropriation to two thousand dollars.¹¹

In a description given by a less subtle historian¹² of this event, the "application" of the Negroes for a school is further illuminated.

It came about that in the year 1880 in Macon county, Alabama, a certain ex-Confederate colonel conceived the idea that if he could secure the Negro vote he could beat his rival and win the seat he coveted in the State legislature. Accordingly, the colonel went to the leading Negro in the town of Tuskegee, and asked him what he could do to secure the Negro vote, for Negroes then voted in Alabama without restriction. This man, Lewis Adams by name, himself an ex-slave, promptly replied that what the race most wanted was education, and what they most needed was industrial education, and that if he (the colonel) would agree to work for the passage of a

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

¹² In *Up From Slavery*, p. 259, Washington says of Emmett J. Scott, ". . . my faithful secretary, who handles the bulk of my correspondence and keeps me in daily touch with the life of the school, and who also keeps me informed of whatever takes place in the South that concerns the race. I owe more to his tact, wisdom, and hard work than I can describe."

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

bill appropriating money for the maintenance of an industrial school for Negroes, he (Adams) would help to get for him the Negro vote and the election. This bargain between an ex-slaveholder and an ex-slave was made and faithfully observed on both sides, with the result that the following year the Legislature of Alabama appropriated \$2,000 a year for the establishment of a normal and industrial school for Negroes in the town of Tuskegee.¹³

When Washington arrived at Tuskegee, he found that the appropriation was limited to the payment of salaries only. Washington in later years frequently referred to the "generosity" of the Alabama Legislature in appropriating the initial sum. The money was appropriated out of the Negro public school fund, and, according to constitutional restrictions, not more than four per cent of any money from the fund could be appropriated for any purpose other than that of teachers' salaries.¹⁴

On the 4th day of July, 1881, Washington opened his school in a "little shanty and church."¹⁵ From this beginning flowed an international reputation for the man and for his school, grown great in the course of the years. A recent appraisal cited him as follows:

... leader of his race, and friend to all races: who achieved for himself and the Negro people a genuine freedom through service: great teacher of the dignity of humble labor. . . . Washington's plan consisted chiefly in teaching that the way to authentic freedom lay in doing well the work at hand.¹⁶

¹³ Scott and Stowe, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁴ John O. Turner, *Special Acts of Public Schools Laws of the State of Alabama*. Montgomery: The Brown Printing Co., 1897.

¹⁵ *Up From Slavery*, p. 119.

¹⁶ Department of Superintendence, National Education Association, Eleventh Yearbook. *Educational Leadership*, Wash-

The manner in which this personality affected the education of Negroes in Alabama can best be understood through the medium of contemporary individualities and forces with which it was associated.

JABEZ LAMAR MONROE CURRY

J. L. M. Curry was born in the state of Georgia in 1825.¹⁷ His biographers record certain youthful incidents that may have significance for his future career. His father owned a number of slaves, and his boyhood companions were Negro children.¹⁸ A mulatto preacher, Adams, frequently officiated at the "Double Branches" Church where the Curry family attended religious services. "For a colored man to preach to white congregations was no offense."¹⁹ In 1838 the family moved out to "the frontier," to a new plantation in Talladega county, Alabama.²⁰ In 1845 Curry graduated from the University of Georgia, where Benjamin Harvey Hill, Joseph LeConte, and Linton H. Stephens were among his fellow-students.²¹

Following graduation from college, Curry entered the Dane Law School of Harvard college in September, 1843.²² Rutherford B. Hayes was a classmate.²³ As a student he attended public meetings where he listened, among others, to Frederick Douglass

ington: Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association, 1933. Insert bet. pp. 270-271.

¹⁷ Edwin Anderson Alderman and Armistead Churchill Gordon, *J. L. M. Curry, A Biography*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911. p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

and William Lloyd Garrison; "The negro and white abolitionist agitators."²⁴ He followed with interest the controversy between Horace Mann and the Boston school masters.

Mann's glowing periods, earnest enthusiasm and democratic ideas fired my young mind and heart; and since that time I have been an enthusiastic and consistent advocate of universal education.²⁵

Following his graduation from the law school in 1845, Curry entered the practice of law, and the pursuit of politics, in his home county in Alabama.²⁶ In 1847 he campaigned for the General Assembly as a Democrat, voicing particular support for free schools and for the University.²⁷ In the sessions of 1853-1854, he was a member of the Committee on Education, and helped perfect and carry through the legislature the law establishing a system of public schools in Alabama.²⁸ He was a prominent advocate of internal improvements, and voted for the measures to subsidize the railroads which characterized the session of 1855-1856.²⁹ In all of the interlocked web of political and business interests apparent in this survey, nothing is stranger than the fact that Curry's father was a director and large stockholder of the Tennessee and Alabama Railroad, and that Curry was, himself, an agent for the road in obtaining subscriptions for its extension.³⁰

Elected to the United States Con-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 108. This was the Sloss railroad, which, with George Houston, Sloss, and Pryor as directing agents, consolidated with the Louisville and Nashville R.R. in 1868, and played so prominent a part in Reconstruction politics.

gress in 1856, Curry resigned in 1861, and during the Civil War served the Confederacy both as a member of the Confederate Congress, and in the field as a soldier.³¹ After the War, he served as president of Howard College at Marion, Alabama, for a brief period.³² In 1866 he called a committee which "prepared and introduced resolutions favoring the education of the colored people by the white people of the South."³³

Following a period of preaching and teaching in Richmond, Virginia, Curry's application for the Agentship of the Peabody Fund was answered by a letter from his former classmate, Rutherford B. Hayes, announcing his "unanimous election."³⁴ This election was in February, 1881—three months before the appointment of Booker T. Washington as principal of Tuskegee.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND J. L. M. CURRY

The career of Washington at Tuskegee was peculiarly bound to the same social and economic class to which Curry belonged, and to the work of the latter as General Agent of the Peabody Fund. Washington's initial appropriation of \$2,000 was increased in 1882 to \$3,000 by the General Assembly³⁵; Curry's first speech as Agent of the Fund was delivered before the General Assembly of that year.³⁶ Busy with plans for expansion, Washington obtained a grant of \$500 from the Peabody Fund in 1882, and \$1,000 from

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-193.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

³⁵ Washington, *Up From Slavery*, p. 193.

³⁶ Alderman and Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

the Slater Fund, with which Curry was closely associated.³⁷

From his first report, Curry lauded the work of Washington at Tuskegee, and the emphasis he placed on industrial education.³⁸ Washington himself always referred to Curry in the most glowing terms.³⁹ To Washington, the attitude of Curry toward the education of Negroes seemed all the more remarkable on account of the fact that, as he told Washington, "he had been bitterly opposed to every movement that had been proposed to educate the Negro" immediately after the War. He added that after visiting several Negro schools, he had become an advocate of the education of Negroes.⁴⁰

³⁷ Washington, *Up From Slavery*, p. 193.

³⁸ Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education, Being Chapters from my Experiences*. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1911, pp. 57-58.; *Up From Slavery*, pp. 194-195, 247, 305.

³⁹ *Proceedings of the Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund*, Boston: John Wilson and Co., 1875. III, pp. 136, 162; IV, p. 268.

⁴⁰ *My Larger Education*, p. 58. This testimony is not to be found in any other published literature on Curry. Both he and his biographers emphasize the fact that he was, from the very end of the Civil War, heartily in favor of the education of Negroes. Alderman and Gordon, *J. L. M. Curry*, state: "Curry was, from the moment of the fall of the Confederacy, occupied in mind and heart with the probable future of these people. On May 15, 1866, he had a conference at Marion. . . with reference to the education of the freedmen of the town." (p. 201) "Curry first appeared as a friend of negro education in the summer of 1865 [sic], when he presided over a mass meeting in Marion which made provision for negro schools" (p. 424). In the same volume, Curry is quoted as saying, "it may be pardonable vanity to record the fact that in Marion, Alabama, in 1866, aided by Gov. Moore and Messrs. McIntosh and Raymond, the pastors of the Baptist and Presbyterian Churches, a meeting was called which passed resolutions, prepared and introduced by myself, favoring the education of the colored people *by the white people of the South*" (p. 334; italics mine).

Washington could have been mistaken; or he might have left out part of the story; or Curry may not have told all of the story to him. If Washington was accurate in re-

As the General Agent of the Peabody Fund, and, later, as the administrative head of the Slater Fund, devoted exclusively to the education of Negroes, Curry's chief activity became that of an educational propagandist. Much of his time was spent in making public speeches before citizens and legislative bodies in an effort to influence favorable action toward public schools.⁴¹ Curry addressed the Alabama legislature during the sessions of 1882-1883, 1885-1886, 1889-1890, 1896-1897, and 1900-1901.⁴²

There is an instructive conflict between the dual rôle of J. L. M. Curry as the representative of a dominant social class, and J. L. M. Curry as the advocate of public, tax-supported education. He defended the theory of taxation responsible for the poor condition of Alabama schools in an article published three years after assuming the administrative leadership of the Peabody Fund.⁴³ The enjoyment of property rights was endangered, he said, "by bad men, and chiefly by in-

porting this conversation, Curry's qualification that his early efforts favored "the education of the colored people *by the white people of the South*" becomes intelligible, as does his reference to the changed attitude experienced after visiting several Negro schools. For the only Negro schools in Marion at that period (1866) were supported by "Northerners," *i.e.*, the American Missionary Association and the Freedmen's Bureau. It would also confirm the opinion of Buckley, that the support of the movement to educate Negroes in Alabama just after the Civil War, on the part of the Southern whites, was prompted by "an appeal to sectional and sectarian prejudice, lest (the work being inevitable) the influence which must come from it be realized by others" (*Third Semi-annual Report, Schools for Freedmen*, p. 16).

⁴¹ Alderman and Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 456-457.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ J. L. M. Curry, "Limitations of Taxation," *The Baptist Quarterly Review*. Cincinnati: Published by J. H. Barnes, 1884. Issue of April, May, and June; pp. 155-166.

justice and tyranny of governments."⁴⁴ There were two dangers that tax-payers in the United States needed to guard against. They were:

1. The power of combined wealth.
2. Universal suffrage may often imperil property rights. Agrarianism and communism are seen, not merely in strikes and "bread or blood riots," but in the growing heresy that government must provide labor for the unemployed.

... It seems to be the very acme of injustice for a man who pays no taxes to vote taxes on all the property around him for an alleged public good and a resulting private benefit. When the Sultan of Turkey confiscates private property we condemn the act in no honeyed phrase, but is it any the less an outrage for men who bear none of the burdens of taxation to impose taxes wantonly for other men to pay?⁴⁵

To protect property against these dangers, Curry described the limitations which had been placed on expenditures in several Constitutions, and approved them as measures designed to prevent "the contraction of public debts and the extravagant appropriation of public money."⁴⁶ "The state should tie its own hands."⁴⁷ "Jealousy of excessive taxation is a test of liberty."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159. In the Brookings Institution *Survey of Taxation in Alabama* (Vol. 4, Part 3, pp. 42-56, Montgomery: The Wilson Printing Co., 1932), identical sentiments are quoted from certain Alabama men of public life. The *Survey* editors make this comment: "It is a sad commentary on representative government if the claim is justified that the representatives of the people are arbitrary in their enactments and cannot be trusted to translate into law the will of the majority. It is doubtful, however, that this sentiment rests wholly upon such a questionable base. It is more likely that it runs much deeper and involves a distrust of democracy itself." *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

⁴⁶ J. L. M. Curry, "Limitations on Taxation," p. 165.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

We may be permitted to conclude that Curry, like modern Alabama men of kindred opinions, had a deep and fundamental distrust of Democracy. He thought of education as a cure for the dangers of the mass mind placed in control of property.

Property must pay a ransom for the privileges it enjoys, and it will find it to its advantage to provide insurance against the risks to which it is exposed, to guard against the perils of ignorance, agrarianism, nihilism, and dynamite.⁴⁹

The perils of "agrarianism" in Alabama were represented by the Populist party, during Curry's lifetime.

CURRY'S ARGUMENTS FOR THE EDUCATION OF NEGROES

To no small degree, Curry, when arguing for the education of Negroes, was arguing against himself; the man who said it was an "outrage" for non-tax payers to tax other men was, in his new rôle, arguing that Negro non-tax payers should receive public tax funds derived from taxes on other men. The resolution of this fundamental conflict is of interest, as it appears in Curry's published speeches on the problem.

Although Curry's efforts were cast in a period of steadily rising economic and political discontent in the South, his whole argument was directed to the political masters the Populists called "The Oligarchy." When he spoke before legislatures, he asked the aid of "the intelligent and more refined class of the white people," on whom the Negroes had depended in the past and in the future must depend "to prevent a widening of the breach between the races and to bring about their higher

⁴⁹ *Peabody Proceedings*, III, p. 268.

advancement."⁵⁰ Two principal reasons were given for extending this aid to the Negro. The first was in the spirit of *noblesse oblige*. White Supremacy was an inevitable law of nature, and in the best interests of the Negroes. "History demonstrates that the Caucasian will rule. He ought to rule."⁵¹ The education of the Negro must be undertaken as a part of the white man's burden. "The Caucasian . . . made our Constitution; he achieved our independence; he is identified with all the true progress, all high civilization, and if true to his mission . . . he will lead out all other races as far and as fast as their good and their possibilities will justify."⁵²

A moral obligation to assist in the education of the Negro grew out of his inferior status. "It must be eternally right to Christianize and to educate the Negro."⁵³ Since it was to the best interests, both of the Negro and of the white man, that the Negro remain in an inferior position, education should be controlled and administered by Southerners, rather than by "agitators provoking strife and racial conflict."⁵⁴ Curry felt very bitterly toward the missionary teachers from the North who had established schools and colleges for Negroes during Reconstruction.

It is not just to condemn the negro for the education which he received in the early years after the war. That was the period of reconstruction, the saturnalia of misgovernment, the greatest possible hindrance to the progress of the freedmen, an unmitigable

curse, the malignant attempt to use the negro voter as a pawn in the corrupt game of manufacturing members of Congress. The education was unsettling, demoralizing, pandered to a wild frenzy for schooling as a quick method of reversing social and political conditions. Nothing could have been better devised for deluding the poor negro, and making him the tool, the slave of corrupt taskmasters. Education is a natural consequence of citizenship and enfranchisement, I should say of freedom and humanity. But with deliberate purpose to subject the Southern States to negro domination, and secure the states permanently for partisan ends, the education adopted was contrary to common sense, to human experience, to all noble purposes. The curriculum was for a people in the highest degree of civilization; the aptitudes and capabilities and needs of the Negro were wholly disregarded. Especial stress was laid on classics and liberal culture, to bring the race *per saltum* to the same plane with their former masters, and realize the theory of social and political equality. . . . Colleges and universities established and conducted by the Freedmen's Bureau and Northern Churches and societies, sprang up like mushrooms, and the teachers, ignorant, fanatical, without self-poise proceeded to make all possible mischief. It is irrational, cruel to hold the negro, under such strange conditions, responsible for all the ill consequences of bad education, unwise teachers, reconstruction villainies and partisan schemes.⁵⁵

The second general reason for the education of Negroes, Curry found in the self-interest of white men. If the white men of Alabama did not assume the responsibility for lifting the Negro up, he "will drag you down to hell."⁵⁶ The same economic arguments for the education of white children applied to Negroes with even greater force. "Education," Curry said, "is the fun-

⁵⁰ Alderman and Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Alderman and Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

⁵⁴ *Address before General Assembly of Alabama*, reported in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 2, 1889.

⁵⁵ *Address before Montgomery Conference on Race Problems*, p. 108.

⁵⁶ *Address before General Assembly*, reported in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 23, 1900.

damental basis of general and permanent prosperity. Poverty is the inevitable result of ignorance. Capital follows the school-house."⁵⁷ The Negroes furnished to the South, in their ignorant condition, only "brute force"; education was the only means by which their productivity could be raised to a profitable level.⁵⁸ "If you do not lift them up they will drag you down to industrial bankruptcy, social degradation and political corruption."⁵⁹

It is, of course, impossible to say precisely to what extent Curry's propaganda activities aided Negro schools, or, indeed, white schools. The Alabama public school could not obtain more money until the limitations on taxations imposed by the Constitution of 1875 were removed. It is immensely significant that it was not until the white opponents to the "intelligent and more refined class of white people" in Alabama got control that tax limitations for schools were revised. In increasing, through developing public opinion, the demand of the white people for schools, it might be said that Curry was increasing the danger to the Negro schools. In 1894 Curry wrote to both the democratic and populist candidates for Governor, asking their aid to the proposed amendment to the Constitution submitted to the people in that year.⁶⁰ This so-called Hundley Amendment provided for an optional county tax of 2½ mills:

Possible hostility for the fear that the propertyless might avail themselves of the opportunity to levy educational taxes on the rich was disarmed in advance by the requirement of a local vote for the enactment of the law; the fear that Negroes might get too much was met by the provision that each race might, if it was so desired, receive what it paid.⁶¹

In his letter, Curry said the schools in Alabama were handicapped "by a clause in the constitution limiting local taxation to an extremely low figure."⁶² It was a clause which he had defended strongly ten years before. The Amendment failed to receive a majority of the votes cast at the election, and so was lost.⁶³

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND
WILLIAM H. COUNCILL

During the time when Booker T. Washington was establishing a reputation at Tuskegee Institute, he had an important rival for the favor of the state and of philanthropic agencies in William H. Councill, president of the State Normal School at Huntsville.⁶⁴ John Temple Graves, prominent Birmingham, Alabama, publicist, referred to Councill in a speech at the University of Chicago in 1898 as follows:

The wisest, and most thoughtful, and the most eloquent negro of his time—as discreet as Washington, a deeper thinker, and a more eloquent man. But for one hour of the Atlanta Speech, Councill, of Huntsville, might stand today where Washington, of

⁶¹ Stephen B. Weeks, *Public School Education in Alabama* (U.S. Bureau of Education, 1915, Bulletin No. 12.) Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915. p. 129.

⁶² *Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1894-1895*, p. 1277.

⁶³ Weeks, *op. cit.*, v. 130.

⁶⁴ William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark*. Cleveland: George M. Revell and Co., 1887. pp. 390-393.

⁵⁷ Address before General Assembly, reported in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 2, 1889.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education for 1894-1895*, p. 1277.

Tuskegee, stands—as the recognized leader of his race.⁶⁵

Councill,⁶⁶ like Washington,⁶⁷ and Washington's successor at Tuskegee, Robert R. Moton,⁶⁸ had begun his public life as a politician. The school which he headed at Huntsville had been established in 1874 by the same kind of political "log-rolling" which, six years later, was responsible for Tuskegee Institute.⁶⁹ The interests of Tuskegee and of the Huntsville school conflicted in numerous ways, and frequently gave rise to political maneuvering between Washington and Councill. With the acceptance by the state of the conditions of the Second Morrill Act of 1890 by Alabama in 1891, there was spirited competition between Tuskegee and Huntsville for the allocation of the Negro share for a land-grant

college to either place.⁷⁰ Councill, at Huntsville, was successful.⁷¹ During the legislative session of 1896-1897, Washington and Councill both lobbied vigorously to obtain, for their schools, the state appropriation for an agricultural experiment school which was provided in the legislation of that session.⁷² Tuskegee was successful on this occasion. In the same year there was much agitation to take the land-grant from Councill's school, and bestow it upon Tuskegee.⁷³

Councill is important in interpreting Washington because his career exhibits in aggravated degree all of the opportunistic characteristics which some critics have ascribed to the more prominent man. This "discreet" man, "deep thinker," and "eloquent" orator was plainly an adroit and shrewd student of the foibles and prejudices of his white contemporaries, and bent his educational and public career to take best advantage of the susceptibilities of his masters. An accomplished orator, he used all of the shibboleths dear to the hearts of romantic white persons. It was a gospel of sweetness and light. It is difficult to recognize the protesting politician of 1874 in the man who said, in 1900: "The love and attachment between the races of the South are more than wonderful when we consider the untiring efforts of busy and meddlesome enemies—the politicians,

⁶⁵ John Temple Graves, "The Problem of the Races," in C. E. Donivan, John Temple Graves, Henry W. Grady, et al., *The Possibilities of the Negro in Symposium*. Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1904. p. 17.

⁶⁶ *Coburn Report*, p. 1234. Councill wrote a letter to the Committee, Sept. 24, 1874, stating that he had been "the regular Republican nominee for the legislature for Madison county," and that he would have been elected had it not been for the intimidation of Negro republicans at the polls.

⁶⁷ *Up From Slavery*, pp. 92-93. Washington campaigned for the city of Charleston in an election to determine the seat of government in West Virginia. He said that he was urged to make politics his life's work, but he declined. "Even then I had a strong feeling that what our people most needed was to get a foundation in education, industry, and property, and for this I felt that they could better afford to strive than for political preferment."

⁶⁸ *Finding a Way Out, an Autobiography*, pp. 10-14, recounts how Moton achieved some prominence as a speaker in Virginia, and was urged to run for the state Legislature. He was quite willing to do so, but he was not yet twenty-one years of age, and his mother refused to sign a certificate to the effect that he was.

⁶⁹ *Simmons, op. cit.*, p. 391.

⁷⁰ *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 4-13, 1891.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*; William Newton Hartshorn. *An Era of Progress*. Boston: Massachusetts Priscilla Publishing Co., 1910. p. 356.

⁷² *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 4-11, 1896, January 20-29, 1897.

⁷³ *Cf.* *Montgomery Advertiser*, Nov. 29, 1896, letter to the Editor from the Negro Baptists Convention, describing resolutions passed by that organization to take the fund from the Huntsville school and "locate it more centrally."

the newspapers, the magazines and even the pulpit seeking to scatter seeds of discord and break up our peace."⁷⁴ Councill, like Washington, clearly discerned class differentiations among white persons, and staked his appeal for support on this basis.

When the old, gray-haired veterans who followed General Lee's tattered banners to Appomattox shall have passed away, the Negro's best friends shall have gone, for the Negro got more out of slavery than they did."⁷⁵

His "Reports to the State Superintendent" are, one and all, interesting documents, artful to the extreme. He made a point of trying to have none but ex-Confederate officers on his trustee board.⁷⁶ Constant emphasis was made of the "practical" nature of the school, and of the "training in race relations" which the school existed to impart. The reports of Washington, from Tuskegee, and Councill, from the A. & M. College at Huntsville, made so much of "industrial education" that the white President of the Normal School at Montgomery, W. B. Paterson, wryly stated in his report for 1899-1900:

For several years there has been much discussion as to WHAT the negro shall study, whether industrial or the so-called higher education best adapts him for success in life. The importance of the HOW, or the manner of education, has been forgotten, and the result has been numerous failures both in the Industrial Schools and Colleges.⁷⁷

⁷⁴The *Sheffield Standard* (Sheffield, Alabama), July 21, 1900.

⁷⁵Quoted in Alfred Holt Stone, *Studies in the American Race Problems*. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1908.

⁷⁶John W. Abercrombie, *Biennial Report of the Department of Education of the State of Alabama*, p. 17. For the Scholastic Years ending September 30, 1899, 1900. Montgomery: A. Roemer, 1900.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 64.

"A SCHOOL BUILT AROUND A PROBLEM"

Up to this point, we have mentioned the personalities of J. L. M. Curry, Booker T. Washington, and W. H. Councill, so far as they impinged more particularly upon the social problem of race contacts, and not of educational problems *per se*. It is, in fact, impossible to disentangle the rôle of Tuskegee Institute and Washington as educational agencies, and as self-conscious social forces. Washington himself always indicated that Tuskegee "was built around a problem."⁷⁸ The problem included three classes of people: the Negroes, whom he hoped to educate and to aid in achieving progress; the Northern white people, whom he depended upon to finance the school; and the Southern white people, whose support was essential, first, in order to permit such an institution as he envisioned to exist in the heart of the South, and, second, in order to make a success of the demonstration in better race relations which was his ultimate goal.⁷⁹ "I saw," he said, "that in order to succeed I must in some way secure the support and sympathy of each of them."⁸⁰

It was a task easily seen to require the most consummate skill, amounting, in Washington's case, to a peculiar genius. Educationally it had the misfortune to depend so much upon his personality, and upon a refined technique of racial strategy, that whatever educational outcomes were derivative from his work could easily be swallowed up in an ocean of individual and racial deceit. It has an additional dis-

⁷⁸*My Larger Education*, pp. 21-50.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

advantage for the student of educational structures. Since the school was an instrument of a social policy, it is difficult to tell where it was primarily an educational institution, and where a social device.

One appraisal of Washington disregards the contribution he is ordinarily thought to have made to education. He was important,

not because he became a great man, or a great Negro, or rose from slavery, but because he embodied the survival elements of the Negro race in an environment hostile to its ultimate objectives.⁸¹

From this standpoint his work at Tuskegee is interpreted as that of "a social strategist," giving a common sense demonstration of what a student of human behavior might prescribe today as the technique of social adaptation in a situation immensely complicated by age-old social structures.⁸² Given an acute sense of the power of social and racial attitudes, an indomitable will to achieve ends to which these attitudes were barriers, the attainment of ultimate objectives could follow either the pathway of direct assault upon the interposed barriers, or that of careful, tedious, skillful indirection. Washington is seen as having chosen, with utter clarity of vision, this latter course.⁸³

Whether "strategy" or no, the educational work of Washington in Alabama is reflected intelligibly only by reference to the social influences with which he was associated, and frequently aligned. When he spoke of "the white people of the South," he appears

to have been talking of that social and economic class dominant in the state when Tuskegee Institute was established, and not of the turbulent, discontented folk who were later to figure so largely in the administration of public affairs.

A speech delivered at the Atlanta Exposition on September 18, 1895, is generally credited as the fortuitous circumstance which enabled Washington to project himself before the Nation as the recognized representative of his race.⁸⁴ Ex-Governor Bullock of Georgia announced in advance of the Exposition that its purpose was to prove to Northern capitalists that the "free-silver lunacy" and anti-Negro agitation were "silly hobbies," not truly representative of the South.⁸⁵ He explained further to the New York Chamber of Commerce:

. . . one of the good effects of our Exposition will be to dissipate the political usefulness of the color-line bugaboo and set our white people free to form and act upon their best judgment as to governmental policies, uncontrolled by prejudices engendered by issues that are now happily of the past.⁸⁶

The Board of Directors was described, with a highly significant sense of values, as "made up of fifty men, who are the best of our city—bank presidents, wholesale dealers, manufacturers and retired capitalists."⁸⁷ He concluded by assuring the New York business men that all was well in the South, and that "The colored labor in our section is the best, safest and most conservative in the world."⁸⁸

⁸¹ Charles S. Johnson, "The Social Philosophy of Booker T. Washington," *Opportunity Magazine*, 6:102-6, Ap., 1928.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁸⁴ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 102; Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁸⁵ The New York Tribune, August 23, 1895.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Several incidents, given wide national publicity during the month of August, 1895, may or may not shed illumination upon Washington's Atlanta speech. On August 1, at the Brookside Mines in Jefferson County, near Birmingham, there was a riot between white and Negro miners.⁸⁹ The whites were striking for higher wages; the Negroes refused to quit work. On August 4, at Princeton, Illinois, began a race riot lasting for several days, between Italian and Negro coal miners.⁹⁰ The Negroes were strikebreakers imported from the South.

Washington said afterward that he felt he "had in some way achieved" his object, which he described as "getting a hearing from the dominant class of the South."⁹¹ In composing the speech, he said, he kept in mind that his audience would be composed largely "of the wealth and culture of the white South."⁹²

An examination of the document shows Washington's mastery of the art of opposing shibboleth to shibboleth. "Social Equality" had been the stereotype by which the "dominant class" to which he now addressed himself had won the support of the poorer whites, and so overturned the Reconstruction governments. Washington met the issue with skillful phrases:

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in

the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing.⁹³

In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hands in all things essential to mutual progress.⁹⁴

He invoked the shade of the traditional, paternalistic relationship so dear to the romantic picture of the ante-bellum South.

As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching, by the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves. . . .⁹⁵

Washington said the Exposition would introduce "a new era of industrial progress" to the South.⁹⁶ The white people were advised to "cast down your bucket where you are," and not to "look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South."⁹⁷ The Negroes were described as the "most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people the world has seen,"⁹⁸ who could be depended upon to "buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories."⁹⁹ The Negro would continue to labor "without strikes or labour troubles."¹⁰⁰

In his speeches before mixed audiences, Washington employed the oratorical device of addressing the white and Negro divisions of his audience alternately. Only one brief paragraph

⁸⁹ The *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 1, 1895.

⁹⁰ The *Chicago Tribune*, August 4-8, 1895. At a Negro protest meeting in Chicago, a Negro lawyer, James Walters, provoked the wrath of those present by declaring that the fault was not that of the Italians, but of the mine owners. He was obliged to escape through a plate glass window.

⁹¹ *Up from Slavery*, p. 205.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Up From Slavery*, p. 218.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

of the Atlanta speech was so directed to the Negroes. They were advised:

We shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life.¹⁰¹

They were to remember that "there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."¹⁰² Negroes must begin at the bottom, and not at the top.¹⁰³

The effect of the speech was as dramatic as the circumstances surrounding its delivery. Clark Howell

wired the New York *World* that "the whole speech is a platform upon which blacks and whites can stand with full justice to each other."¹⁰⁴ Grover Cleveland thought that the speech justified holding the exposition.¹⁰⁵ It made Washington the arbiter of matters affecting the Negro, not only in education, but in social, economic, and political affairs as well. It also gave him an opportunity to reach more persons of wealth in the country, and so obtain more money for Tuskegee Institute.

(To be concluded in the April issue.)

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.