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## Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Origins of a Bitter Intellectual Battle



Mark Bauerlein

*Editor's Note: At the turn of the twentieth century two established black leaders, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, were engaged in a bitter debate on the best course for the advancement of the Negro race. Booker T. Washington believed in the "to get along, go along" or accommodationist approach to race relations. On the education front, Washington was of the opinion that through vocational or so-called industrial training blacks would win white respect by demonstrating a commitment to hard work. Du Bois wanted blacks to be more confrontational with white segregationists. He contended that black progress could be achieved through an educational grounding in the arts and sciences which would result in the development of a black intellectual elite. But even as the differences in their outlooks widened, Du Bois and Washington maintained a mutual respect and worked together on many important projects.*

ON JULY 27, 1894, the 26-year-old William Edward Burghardt Du Bois sent a letter to Booker T. Washington, the principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, asking whether there was a vacancy at Tuskegee for the coming term. Du Bois had just returned from two years of study in Europe and was a "Fisk and Harvard man," with a reference from Daniel Coit Gilman, president of Johns Hopkins University. Du Bois had been at Fisk with Washington's wife, so he added that Mrs. Washington "knows of me."

His training and connections were impressive, but at the time Du Bois was still an unknown figure, not yet what he was to become: a prominent public intellectual and forceful advocate of civil, political, and economic parity of blacks and whites in America. And Washington, the "Wizard of Tuskegee," was the most distinguished black educator in the country. A month passed before Washington responded with the offer of a post teaching mathematics "if terms suit." By then, Du Bois had been offered, and had accepted, another position: chair of classics at Wilberforce University in Ohio (with a salary of \$800 a year). He declined a subsequent offer from Lincoln Institute in Missouri (salary \$1,050) and turned down Tuskegee as well. An invitation from Washington was flattering, but ever the man of principle, Du Bois would not break his earlier commitment.

The episode set the pattern of contact the two men would have for the next 10 years. Their intellectual visions did not jibe, to be sure: Washington spread the gospel of work and managed the Tuskegee Machine, a national network of loyal graduates, donors, and lieutenants, akin to a political machine, while Du Bois executed his sociological inquiries,

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jumped from one research job to another, and had other expectations for his race. Yet they sometimes acted as allies, with Washington treating Du Bois as a potential follower, and Du Bois treating Washington as a discreet patron. Every few months, letters were posted and projects deliberated. It was a relationship of enticements, negotiations, tactical respect — and rising suspicion. Washington tempted Du Bois with job offers and solicited his counsel. Du Bois asked Washington for recommendations. They corresponded on legal strategies, planned conferences together, and saluted each other's work. Each felt the other out for advantage.

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*"An invitation from Washington to teach at Tuskegee was flattering, but ever the man of principle, Du Bois would not break his earlier commitment."*

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The later rupture between Du Bois and Washington has obscured this decade of guarded collegiality. By 1906 the men had become open enemies, standing for polar-opposite race policies in post-Reconstruction America. Washington advocated "go slow" accommodationism, while Du Bois favored militant protest. Once Du Bois moved north in 1910 to become editor of the magazine *Crisis* at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Washington came to believe that Du Bois resented his power. And after Washington died in November 1915, Du Bois' judgment was harsh indeed: "In stern justice, we must lay on the soul of this man a heavy responsibility for the consummation of Negro disfranchisement, the decline of the Negro college and public school, and the firmer establishment of color caste in this land."

From 1894 to 1904, however, Du Bois felt differently. He was an ambitious young scholar/teacher eager to break into the black intelligentsia, atop which reigned Washington. The Wizard of Tuskegee could use an intellectual heavyweight

such as Du Bois to spread his theory of industrial education, a curriculum stressing vocational skills, not liberal arts, and the Harvard Ph.D. craved an institution where academic inquiry might foment real social change. But Washington wanted operatives, and Du Bois prized his independence. Washington was practical and Du Bois proud. No wonder the courtship was uneasy. Trustees at Tuskegee urged Washington to dump the young professor, and militants in Boston taunted Du Bois as Washington's lackey. Only after their decade of cooperation collapsed into estrangement did the canonical Washington/Du Bois opposition emerge. To the familiar tale of their antagonism an account of their earlier collegiality makes a fitting preface.

The year after Du Bois sent his letter inquiring about a job, Washington delivered one of the great speeches in U.S. history, "The Atlanta Compromise," in Atlanta's Piedmont Park. The occasion was the Cotton States and International Exposition and Washington was on the opening-day program. In Atlanta that day, "his eyes and his whole face lit up with the fire of prophecy," a New York reporter wrote. When he was finished, *The Atlanta Constitution* marveled, "tears ran down the face of many blacks in the audience. White southern women pulled flowers from the bosoms of their dresses and rained them on the black man on stage." It was a revolutionary moment, a black man sharing a podium with whites, shaking their hands, declaring a new social policy for the South.

But for all of Washington's force and brilliance, his speech was a modest proposal. "The wisest among my race," he assured the mixed audience, "understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly." Progress for blacks comes from a steady job, a bank account, a piece of property, not from protest and voting drives. Blacks will till fields, haul freight, and cook meals, a trusty labor force with no social aspirations and few political opinions. The higher attainments of culture and citizenship shall be deferred until blacks master the lower traits of thrift and industry. Having proved their value as employees and consumers, they may join U.S. soci-

ety as equals, for "no race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized."

Moderate blacks and whites loved the Atlanta Compromise. Clark Howell, a leading white voice in the South, called it "a platform upon which blacks and whites can stand with full justice," and President Grover Cleveland said, "Your words cannot fail to delight and encourage all who wish well for your race." But black intellectuals and militants scorned Washington's program. Bishop Henry M. Turner, an advocate of emigration to Africa, thought that Washington "will have to live a long time to undo the harm he has done our race." One Negro newspaper reported, "Prof. B. T. or Bad Taste Wash. has made a speech . . . The white press style Prof. Bad Taste the new Negro, but if there is anything in him except the most servile type of the old Negro we fail to find it."

Several hundred miles north, in Wilberforce, Du Bois sided with the moderates. "Let me heartily congratulate you upon your phenomenal success in Atlanta," he wrote to Washington. Hearing of dissent in the black press, Du Bois went so far as to send a note to *The New York Age*, arguing that the Compromise "might be the basis of a real settlement between whites and blacks in the South, if the South opened up to the Negroes the doors of economic opportunity." Beneath Washington's conciliatory tone he perceived a sound strategy: Don't demand political rights until you have the economic power to back up the demand.

Du Bois had his reasons for the generous response. Three months later, he sent another letter. "My Dear Mr. Washington," it began. "This is my second year at Wilberforce, and although the field here is a good one, yet I am not wholly satisfied and am continually on the lookout for another position." He found Wilberforce intellectually stifling, filled with revivalism among the undergraduates and nepotism among the administrators. Stuck in an institution with "too much church politics in the management and too little real interest and devotion to the work of real education," Du Bois was desperate to get out. His Harvard dissertation on the slave trade was about to be published, he was engaged to Nina Gomer, a Wilberforce stu-



Booker T. Washington

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*"In 1894 Du Bois was an ambitious young scholar eager to break into the black intelligentsia, atop which reigned Booker T. Washington."*

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dent, and he had student loan payments to make. "If you hear of an opening which you think I am fitted to fill," he beseeched, "kindly let me know."

This time Washington replied swiftly, proposing two weeks later that Du Bois come to Tuskegee. But Du Bois hesitated. On April 1, he sent a surprisingly casual response: "I have been for some time seeking a leisure hour in which to answer you[r] kind letter of the 17th of January. . . . I feel

that I should like the work at Tuskegee if I could be of service to you," but "at present I do not know just how I could be of service." Du Bois had been the one to ask about a job, and now, it must have seemed to Washington, he was playing hard to get. He specialized in history and economics, Du Bois noted, and "some elementary courses in these lines would be needed at Tuskegee" — a gratuitous criticism to include in a job negotiation — but Du Bois could not commit. What had happened in the preceding weeks to turn him from job seeker to hot prospect was obvious: Another offer had come through. The University of Pennsylvania had contacted him about undertaking a yearlong study of the black population in Philadelphia. He planned to accept and postpone his Tuskegee option: "This, it might be, would [be] a good introductory year's work after which if needed I could come to Tuskegee."

No definite plans were arranged. Washington visited Wilberforce in June 1896, and Du Bois sent him an advance note offering the hospitality of a friend's home (Du Bois was living in a dormitory), but no record of their meeting exists. In the ensuing two years, each managed his own career. Still basking in the acclaim of the Atlanta Compromise speech, Washington made trips to the White House to arrange a Tuskegee visit by President William McKinley. In October 1898 he addressed 16,000 people at the Chicago Peace Jubilee, only months after being the featured speaker at the

dedication of the Robert Gould Shaw monument in Boston (William James had been merely number two on the program). He was now called "The Leader of His Race," and editors and politicians monitored his words as prime indicators of the black viewpoint.

In Philadelphia, meanwhile, plodding door to door asking wary residents about income, employment, and background as he gathered material for his study *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois found his own

prestige growing. His basic premise — that social science founded on hard data was the best approach to the "Negro problem" — began to win acceptance. *The Atlantic Monthly* published his work, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics proposed some studies that Du Bois might direct, he was elected vice president of the American Negro Academy, and he lectured to the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences.

But his contract at the University of Pennsylvania was due to expire on January 1, 1898, and the university showed no interest in keeping him. Indeed, Du Bois griped, it paid him a "pitiful stipend" and "my name never actually got into the catalogue. . . . I did no instructing save once to pilot a pack of idiots through the Negro slums." Du Bois' dissertation adviser, Albert Bushnell Hart, urged

Washington to tender another job offer. "Have you no place for the best-educated colored man available for college work?" he chided. But the Wizard kept silent.

Given Du Bois' vision of higher education and increasing militancy, we might interpret Washington's silence as ideologically driven. He could not risk the ire of local whites and Tuskegee donors who might object to the haughty sociologist. But Washington's hesitation may have stemmed not from clashes of ideas but from his recent dealings with Du Bois. He had already sent Du Bois two job offers, and both were rejected. Du Bois himself had solicited the second



W.E.B. Du Bois at the Paris Exposition, 1900

offer, only to treat it in a cavalier way. At the very time Du Bois' backers were advising Washington to offer him a position, Du Bois was negotiating with Atlanta University for a professorship in economics and history. By Christmas 1897 the Du Boises were settled there in faculty apartments. Why should Washington engage in yet another auction for the young scholar's services?

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*"I feel that I should like the work at Tuskegee if I could be of service to you, but at present I do not know just how I could be of service."*

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The recruitment dance ended, but the next two years brought the men into closer league. Du Bois organized a meeting in 1899 at Atlanta University on a topic dear to the Wizard's heart: "The Negro in Business." Du Bois and colleague John Hope championed Washington's message of economic power, advising black businessmen to carve out market niches and form a trade guild. Washington liked the idea so much that he commandeered it and inaugurated the National Negro Business League, with Du Bois' help. After the conference, Du Bois had been appointed head of a committee of the Afro-American Council to coordinate local chapters of the proposed guild. Du Bois agreed on condition that the council supply funds for postage. Washington learned of the plan and had Bookerite council member T. Thomas Fortune kill the appropriation. Du Bois abandoned the project but at Washington's request forwarded his lengthy mailing list of black businessmen. Washington used it to recruit league members. Du Bois suspected Washington's chicanery but did not protest. He may have felt relieved.

Another Tuskegee initiative had reached Du Bois' desk weeks earlier. He and Washington had shared the stage in Boston in late March and exchanged warm regards. Du Bois was energized by his work at Atlanta University; Washington looked haggard and depressed. "Mr. Washington was not at his best," Du Bois said, and supporters raised money to send him on a vacation in Europe. But the meeting renewed Washington's recruitment efforts, and three weeks before the "Negro in Business" conference, he sent Du Bois yet another job offer.

As Du Bois pondered the offer for two months in Atlanta, Washington took tea with Queen Victoria in England and met ex-president Benjamin Harrison in Paris. When Du Bois



**Knowledge Is Freedom: Ignorance Is Slavery**

"When one looks at the responses that Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois made to the whites who went south during Reconstruction (1865-1877) to educate Negroes, most often with the patience and fire of missionary zeal, we can see the difference between truly taking on the problems of this nation and using those on the lower frequencies for personal amusement of the sort that confirms and reaffirms the minstrelsy that once dominated national images of Negroes. Both Washington and Du Bois, no matter how much they might have disagreed on a number of things, were well aware that education was the best weapon against racism and that being open to education and all that it made possible was the highest form of rebellion against the perception and the limited social access of an ethnic group considered 'naturally' stupid and incompetent."

— Stanley Crouch  
*The Artificial White Man:  
 Essays on Authenticity*  
 (Basic Books, 2004)

finally replied on July 12, his letter bore all the marks of courtesy — "I assure you that I appreciate the honor" — but a new note of restraint as well. He promised to "decide during the winter as to whether I think a change best for all interests," but wanted "to hear from you more definitely as to the work you would expect & the salary." As a working sociologist, Du Bois needed institutional resources to hire data collectors, pay for clerical support, and publish findings. A move to Tuskegee would require a research plan. Du Bois vowed to "think out a plan of work that I might accomplish at Tuskegee [sic]," and he burdened Washington with doing the same: "I trust you will write me freely & frankly as to any plans you may have, that we may understand each other thoroughly."

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*"One could not be a calm, cool, detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered, and starved."*

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The phrases "freely & frankly" and "understand each other" constituted tacit acknowledgment of practical differences between Du Bois' social science and Washington's vocational training. But Du Bois' reply issued from some-

thing else as well. Two recent incidents had shocked him. First, a month before the “Negro in Business” conference, Sam Hose, a black farmhand suspected of rape and murder, was lynched in a town southwest of Atlanta, tortured, and dismembered before 2,000 cheering whites. Du Bois composed a protest statement and headed toward the offices of *The Atlanta Constitution*, but he halted when someone told him that in a store up ahead were displayed the roasted knuckles of the victim. He turned for home and sank into a professional soul-search. “One could not be a calm, cool, detached scientist,” he thought, “while Negroes were lynched, murdered, and starved.”

The second incident occurred two days after Washington sent his offer letter: Du Bois’ beloved son, Burghardt, fell ill of diphtheria. He was 18 months old, lively and bright, with olive skin and blond curls. But the sewage system in Atlanta was leaky and the water tainted. “He died at eventide,” Du Bois recalled, “when the sun lay like a brooding sorrow about the western hills.” Nina plunged into depression: “In a sense my wife died too.” As they walked to the cemetery, Burghardt’s coffin draped in posies, white voices on the sidewalk muttered, “Niggers!”

The two traumatic incidents explain the caginess in Du Bois’ July letter. Certainly Du Bois worried about Washington’s overseeing his work, but he appreciated the offer. In August 1899, at a meeting of the Afro-American Council in Chicago, some delegates denounced Washington for skipping the meeting, a sign, they said, of his soft stand on Jim Crow and lynching. Du Bois rose with several others to defend Washington — a gesture duly reported to Tuskegee. Two months later, Washington renewed his offer, adding that “our printing office will be wholly at your service and you could use it in a way that would scatter your writings all through the country.” Du Bois would teach but one class a year, salary \$1,400, with housing included. “If any portion of this proposition is not satisfactory to you,” Washington

closed, “I shall be glad to make any reasonable changes in it.”

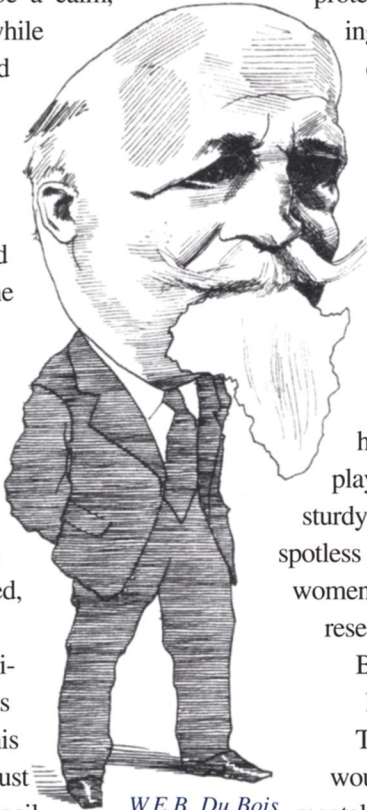
Du Bois waited until February 1900 to decide. In the meantime, the two men worked on parallel efforts to quash a new threat, a disfranchisement bill pending in the Georgia legislature. As white supremacists sought to install literacy tests at the polls, with a “grandfather clause” to protect white voters (if a forebear was qualified to vote in 1867, you were qualified to vote), Washington roused Georgia blacks to protest, mulling over “how far I ought to go in fighting these measures in other states when the colored people themselves sit down and will do nothing to help themselves.” A November interview with *The Atlanta Constitution* was headlined “Washington Urges Equal Treatment: Danger to the South in Unjust Race Discrimination.” Alongside appeared a petition calling the bill a “menace to free democratic institutions,” signed by Du Bois and 23 others.

Du Bois visited Tuskegee in February, and as he did for all notable guests, Washington displayed the campus as a thriving social experiment: sturdy brick halls built by the students themselves, spotless grounds, young men in crisp uniforms and women in chaste white blouses and skirts, diligent researchers such as George Washington Carver.

But for the fourth time, Du Bois balked. “I really question how much I am really needed at Tuskegee,” he wrote. He suspected that he would be more of “ornamental use than a fundamental necessity.” Added to that was the question of public relations: “Would not my department be regarded by the public as a sort of superfluous addition not quite in consonance with the fundamental Tuskegee idea?”

The points were salient, and no doubt Du Bois realized that Washington had considered them long before — and over-ridden them. That may be why Du Bois stated them briefly in

his letter before raising a weightier hindrance: another possible job. The position of superintendent of Negro schools in Washington, D.C., had opened up, and Du Bois had been encouraged to apply. The move would double his salary and



W.E.B. Du Bois

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*“Would not my department be regarded by the public as a sort of superfluous addition, not quite in consonance with the fundamental Tuskegee idea?”*

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take Nina far from Jim Crow Atlanta and Burghardt's gravesite. To "serve both your cause & the general cause of the Negro," Du Bois asked, "is not the Washington position — provided always I could get it — such a place?" Du Bois closed with a request: "If I should apply for the W. place your indorsement [sic] would go further probably than any one else's. Could you conscientiously give it?"

Nine days later, returning to his office and finding more notices urging him to apply for the D.C. job, he fired off another solicitation to Washington. Claiming not to have "definitely decided" against Tuskegee, he repeated his request: "If without prejudice to your position & the school's you could endorse me I shall appreciate it." Du Bois knew that Washington would be asked for recommendations, and, indeed, the D.C. commissioner of education did just that in early March. At the same time, the editor of *The Colored American* informed Washington that the field had been narrowed to Du Bois and an inside candidate, Robert Terrell, husband of the powerful Mary Church Terrell — writer, suffragist, founder of the Colored Women's League, and member of the D.C. Board of Education. Du Bois, he said, "would be the most *acceptable* man in the country — acceptable from a *scholarly* standpoint. Du Bois would command respect because of his attainments, but not popularity."

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*"When Washington's Up From Slavery became a best-seller, Du Bois reviewed it favorably citing Washington's 'singular insight.'"*

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Washington favored Du Bois but asked the commissioner to keep his recommendation private. Writing from New York, he then told Du Bois not to use the letter of recommendation he had given him, for already "I have recommended you as strongly as I could." Unfortunately, as with every hiring Washington oversaw, the matter turned political. Without mentioning Du Bois, T. Thomas Fortune wrote to Washington pushing Terrell "because he is your and my active friend." Four days later, perhaps hearing of the Du Bois recommendation, Fortune declared that he and others "are pulling together for Terrell." The same day, another Bookerite wrote to Washington, "I am sorry that you endorsed Du Bois for the Supt Negro schools here. He is not of your people. Your friends almost to a man are against him." On March 18, Washington backedpedaled, telling Fortune, "If

### Booker T. and W.E.B.

*In a standard form of iambic pentameter, poet Dudley Randall recounts this historical debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois in the following verse.*

"It seems to me," said Booker T.,  
 "It shows a mighty lot of cheek  
 To study chemistry and Greek  
 When Mister Charlie needs a hand  
 To hoe the cotton on his land,  
 And when Miss Ann looks for a cook,  
 Why stick your nose inside a book?"

"I don't agree," said W.E.B.  
 "If I should have the drive to seek  
 Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,  
 I'll do it. Charles and Miss can look  
 Another place for hand or cook.  
 Some men rejoice in skill of hand,  
 And some in cultivating land,  
 But there are others who maintain  
 The right to cultivate the brain."

"It seems to me," said Booker T.,  
 "That all you folks have missed the boat  
 Who shout about the right to vote,  
 And spend vain days and sleepless nights  
 In uproar over civil rights.  
 Just keep your mouths shut, do not grouse,  
 But work, and save, and buy a house."

"I don't agree," said W.E.B.  
 "For what can property avail  
 If dignity and justice fail?  
 Unless you help to make the laws,  
 They'll steal your house with trumped-up clause.  
 A rope's as tight, a fire as hot,  
 No matter how much cash you've got.  
 Speak soft, and try your little plan,  
 But as for me, I'll be a man."

"It seems to me," said Booker T.,

"I don't agree," said W.E.B.

I had any idea that the matter was going to assume so great importance I should have consulted you before making any move." In the end, the commissioner selected neither Du Bois nor Terrell.

Du Bois thought he had been manipulated, that Washington had caved in to local interests. True enough, but federal appointments for African Americans were always knotty affairs, and Washington had the most to lose. A bad hiring on

his recommendation would reflect poorly on the Tuskegee Machine, and his supporters were just as quick to second-guess him as were his opponents. Du Bois still had the Tuskegee offer in hand, and in April he declined, noting the rural drawbacks: "The only opening that would attract me now would be one that brought me nearer the centres of culture & learning."

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*"Even as the differences in their outlooks widened, Du Bois and Washington maintained a mutual respect and worked together."*

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But the break didn't hinder the men's cooperation on other matters. That spring, traveling to Savannah to plan the "Negro Section" for the 1900 Paris Exposition, Du Bois boarded a Southern Railway night train in Atlanta's Union Depot only to be refused a sleeping car berth. No Negroes allowed, the conductor told him. Du Bois consulted with attorneys and formed a committee to present the case to federal authorities. With each move, he asked Washington for counsel and support. Washington brought the Jim Crow policy to the attention of Tuskegee trustee and railroad magnate William Henry Baldwin Jr. Baldwin rebuffed him, but Washington helped Du Bois on the sly. In November 1902 he asked Du Bois to tally the costs of the case, promising "to bear a portion of it provided I can hand it to you personally and not have any connection with your committee."

A month later, in *Gunton's Magazine*, Washington saluted "the valuable studies of Professor W.E.B. Du Bois," and, in July, Du Bois accepted Washington's invitation to join a gathering at his camp in West Virginia, described by *The Colored American* as "a company of representative Negroes, perhaps the most intelligent, the most cultured and the wealthiest in the United States." Du Bois later canceled. When Washington's *Up From Slavery* became a bestseller, Du Bois reviewed it approvingly, citing Washington's "singular insight . . . steering as he must amid so many diverse interests and opinions." The following March, Du Bois invited Washington to attend the annual conference at Atlanta University on aspects of African-American identity, saying that "I think you will grant that I have sought in every way to minimize the breach between colleges & industrial schools & have in all possible ways tried to cooperate with Tuskegee in its work." Du Bois added a defensive note — "I have not been so successful in getting you to cooperate with

ours" — but Washington *did* participate in the meeting and said during his speech that "the work that Dr. Du Bois is doing will stand for years as a monument to his ability, wisdom, and faithfulness."

So even as the differences in their outlooks widened, Du Bois and Washington maintained a mutual respect and worked together. The alternation of cordiality and suspicion did not signal a deep ideological breach. It represented the sort of collaboration and jockeying that characterizes any pairing of egos and institutions. Du Bois directed research at Atlanta University, Washington ran the Tuskegee Machine. Du Bois stood for race pride and higher education, Washington for tactical conciliation and vocational education. As each one shaped his program, their respective talents turned them into figureheads and established a polarity that helped orient others to the "race question."

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*"The work that Dr. Du Bois is doing will stand for years as a monument to his ability, wisdom, and faithfulness."*

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Washington understood this better than his deputies, and Du Bois accepted his equivocations as dictated by circumstance. If Du Bois could have maintained his scholarly integrity and offered clear but measured criticisms of the Tuskegee agenda while still supporting Tuskegee measures, and if Washington could have backed Du Bois without offending his donors and moderates, their limited partnership might have lasted until Washington's death in 1915. When Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* in April 1903, with its critical chapter on Washington, many thought it a declaration of war. But though the criticism rankled Washington, he'd heard worse before, and he shrugged it off. Besides, Du Bois intended no threat to Tuskegee; three months later he was teaching summer school there, and in July he dined at the headmaster's home. Washington even paid his traveling expenses, telling an underling, "If he chooses to be little we must teach him a lesson by being greater and broader than he is." As long as Du Bois remained principled and independent of organized resistance to the Tuskegee Machine, their wary cooperation would continue.

On July 30, 1903, Washington entered the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church on Columbus Avenue in Boston. Two thousand people awaited him, along with 11 police officers. Boston was the home of the most vitriolic

anti-Bookerite group in the nation, led by Monroe Trotter, and everyone expected trouble. Most of the spectators were faithful supporters of Washington's National Negro Business League, but Trotter had sprinkled his confederates throughout the assembly. When the first speaker took the podium and hailed the guest of honor, hisses erupted. T. Thomas Fortune was next, and as he needled the crowd with loyalty oaths to Washington, a man in a butler's uniform rose and approached the stage, shouting at Fortune. Ushers met him in the aisle, Trotterites goaded him, league members yelled back, then police officers dragged the man from the hall. Washington did not move or speak. Fortune cleared his throat and returned to his speech, but in seconds he lapsed into a fit of sneezing. Others on the platform coughed and wheezed. Someone had thrown a cloud of cayenne pepper across the stage.

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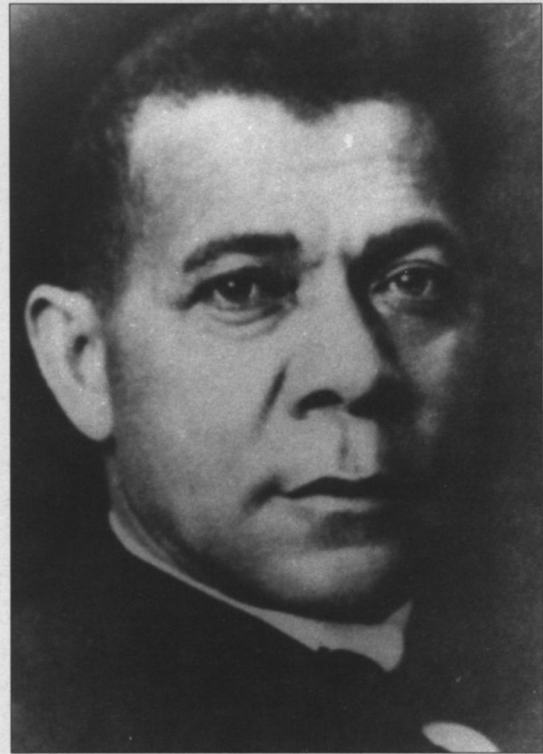
*"If Washington could have backed Du Bois without offending his donors, their limited partnership might have lasted until Washington's death in 1915."*

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As the speakers drew their handkerchiefs, the butler burst back inside and officers leapt at him. Trotter jumped from his seat and shouted, "Put me out — arrest me!" The master of ceremonies called for order, and Trotter sat down. An entertainer tried to lead the assembly in song, and a black lawyer from Boston rebuked the protesters for "making a disturbance in the house of God." The master of ceremonies rose to introduce Washington, while Fortune scolded the Trotterites. As the Wizard strode to center stage, Trotter jumped up and began yelling questions: "Can a man make a successful educator and politician at the same time? Are the rope and the torch all the race is to get under your leadership?" Few could hear him. Trotter cohorts were screaming at the stage and Bookerites were shouting them down. Scuffles broke out; two stabbings took place. Trotter, his sister, the butler, and one other accomplice were arrested. Officers cleared the melee and resumed their posts, people returned to their seats, and Washington launched a dispirited rehash of the gospel of thrift.

The incident reached the press everywhere, and Washington worried that it gave publicity to his opponents. For eight years he had stood alone as the representative of 9 million black citizens. Whites and most blacks thought that blacks spoke with one voice, *his* voice. The Tuskegee Machine

Booker T. Washington's 1895 Speech  
at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition



"Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and with 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. 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, so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours, 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."

operated on the principle that Washington's rectitude proved the race's potential, and Theodore Roosevelt and Andrew Carnegie accepted the vision. Now was not the time to let internal squabbles spill into the public sphere. Trotter had to be crushed. The AME Zion Church pressed charges, and Trotter and two others were sentenced to 30 days in jail.

It was in this heated partisan climate, with Washington's sensitivities at their peak, that Du Bois unwittingly took a

fateful step. At the very time that Bookerite forces were preparing a case against Trotter, Du Bois finished teaching his summer-school class at Tuskegee, journeyed north, and stayed as a guest in Trotter's home. Washington was appalled. Du Bois claimed he knew nothing about the controversy until he arrived, but Washington could only feel insulted.

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*"Du Bois wrote an article ridiculing the Tuskegee vision as propaganda that silently allows a new slavery to arise."*

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It was time to force Du Bois' hand. In August, Emmett Scott, an assistant of Washington's, began coaxing black intellectuals away from Du Bois, and Washington planted spies among Trotter's circle. He informed Philadelphia benefactor Robert C. Ogden that he had "evidence which is indisputable showing that Dr. Du Bois is very largely behind the mean and underhanded attacks that have been made upon me." He continued to advise Du Bois on the railway case but conceived a gathering that would force Du Bois into an us-or-them decision. He proposed a conference in New York of black leaders "to try to agree upon certain fundamental principles and to see in what way we understand or misunderstand each other." But when Du Bois suggested possible attendees and Washington vetoed them, he realized that the Wizard was prevaricating.

Du Bois lost patience. "I do not think it will be profitable for me to give further advice which will not be followed," he wrote in mid-November. "The conference is yours and you will naturally constitute it as you choose." Washington relented, accepting a few Trotterites and paying Du Bois' travel expenses. But at the meeting Du Bois was still far outnumbered, and the speeches were all pro-Tuskegee statements. A committee of three (Du Bois, Washington, and another attendee) was formed to advance black causes, but as the committee deliberated, Du Bois was outvoted 2 to 1. He concluded that the whole affair was designed to neutralize him. The time had come to join the Machine or join the opposition.

Over the course of 1904, Du Bois pulled away. He skipped July meetings of the committee and wrote an article ridiculing the Tuskegee vision as propaganda that "silently allows a new slavery to rise." He resigned from the committee in August.

Washington maintained contact, but the tone now was no different from that of messages sent to other operatives. Secretly, he advised Hampton Institute against hosting Du Bois on campus, and as he planned a meeting in St. Louis, he told Emmett Scott, "I prefer to let Du Bois draw his own crowd, and I will draw mine."

Du Bois no longer cared. When, in January 1905, he drafted a table of "Debit and Credit" in the Atlanta monthly *The Voice of the Negro*, and mentioned "\$3000 of 'hush money' used to subsidize the Negro press," their collaboration was over. Du Bois didn't cite Tuskegee by name, but everyone knew what he meant. Washington controlled the black press, bought loyalty, planted spies, ostracized critics, and co-opted reform movements and let them die. His accommodation of whites had become too obsequious, but more important, his black power had become oppressive. For 10 years Du Bois and Washington had espoused different visions but supported each other. When Washington converted this fruitful conflict of ideas into a power struggle of men, he miscalculated.

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*"For a time, they worked together, until each came gradually to believe that the other had betrayed the cause of racial uplift."*

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This, then, was the personal background of their later dispute. A decade of offerings, forbearance, and demurrals lay behind one of the great debates in U.S. history. In subsequent years, Washington and Du Bois came to define the basic terms of race relations in the country — militance versus conciliation, separatism versus assimilation, higher education versus trade-school training. All the appeals, transactions, and tensions that marked their first decade of acquaintance disappeared, and an unnuanced contrast of beliefs and policies took hold: In the popular histories, "Du Bois" signifies black protest and studious pride; "Washington," Negro humility and an ethic of thrift. The contrast shadowed race theory and race practice for 50 years, through Du Bois' death in August 1963, just hours before a quarter-million people convened at the Lincoln Memorial. But behind the division lay the peculiar chemistry of the dispositions of two men, one pragmatic and controlling, the other principled and solitary. For a time, they worked together, until each came gradually to believe that the other had betrayed the cause of racial uplift — and the personal giving of himself. JBHE