Chapter 2

Booker T. Washington and the Ethics of Dissimulation

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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.


Under white supremacy, ordinary words and actions could have deadly consequences, trapping its victims in a distinct and painful form of communicative conduct, one that lasted well into the twentieth century. African Americans had to visibly affirm whites’ normative views of blacks. In “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow,” the novelist Richard Wright recalled his education as a child and adolescent in the Mississippi Delta, among the ruins of slavery and the aborted promise of freedom. He said black parents teach their children to escape terror and torture by staying clear of whites. When those troubled encounters were unavoidable it was important that their faces and bodies not betray them:

There were many times when I had to exercise a great deal of ingenuity to keep out of trouble. It is a southern custom that all men must take off their hats when they enter an elevator. And especially did this apply to us blacks with rigid force. One day I stepped into an elevator with my arms full of packages. I was forced to ride with my hat on. Two white men stared at me coldly. Then one of them very kindly lifted my hat and placed it upon my armful of packages. Now the most accepted response for a Negro to make under such circumstances is to look at the white man out of the corner of his eye and grin. To have said: “Thank you!” would have made the white man think that you thought you were receiving from him a personal service. For such an act I have seen Negroes take a blow in the mouth. Finding the first alternative distasteful, and the second dangerous, I hit upon an acceptable course of action which fell safely between these two poles. I immediately—no sooner than my hat was lifted—pretended that my packages were about to spill, and appeared deeply distressed with keeping them in my arms. In this fashion I evaded having to acknowledge his service, and, in spite of adverse circumstances, salvaged a slender shred of personal pride.

The incident Wright described illustrates how domination burdens speech just as much as it does morality. Social norms and practices and the laws and force that held the color line in place also gave actions and utterances in public life their social meaning. We have seen that white

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supremacy was a relational economy of public esteem: interpersonal interactions and structural relations elicited, encouraged, and reinforced relational and situational affirmations of supremacy and servility, domination and deference.  

Booker T. Washington knew what whites would tolerate of him. Their beliefs were widely legible, though white supremacy was mediated by local norms. Social meaning, or the mental relation we draw between an action (text) and its particular context—shared assumptions, expectations, and understandings—is never completely fixed. We wear down, reverse, or ambiguate social meanings, though some of them are quite resilient. Neither Wright nor Washington could change the meaning of being black (text) in Mississippi (context). They could, however, undermine some of what their actions meant by making it more difficult for whites to draw a clear relation between an act and its shadow. Had Wright looked sideways and grinned, he would have affirmed whites’ expectations of him as docile and abject but paid a psychological price. Had he looked that white man in the eye, he would have affirmed his dignity but paid for it physically. Wright, thinking on his feet, opted for deception: he wrested a shred of moral self-assertion by playing the blundering worker. The ethical dividends had to be indiscernible to whites for him to survive physically unscathed, though, spiritually aching.

Washington’s critics argue that he appeased white supremacists and surrendered African Americans’ rights and dignity in exchange for menial jobs. For many, no event more aptly symbolized his accommodationist politics than his speech at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition, where he pronounced the ill-fated sentence that is forever linked with his legacy: “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.” Others may see him as lacking in principle and too willing to compromise, but I will show him as a leader sensitive to context and agency, with the character, virtues, and judgment that enabled him to both survive and challenge Jim Crow from within the South.

Washington’s own conduct shows that he relied on virtues such as dissimulation and pretense, an admiring, complying, and imploring speech in the service of justice. “With your speaking power, knowledge of the negro’s wants, excellent good sense, prudence, power of adaptation,” wrote J. L. M. Curry to Washington in 1898, “I predict most useful results upon both races.” The warrior’s courage Homer adored, the intellectual dispositions Plato encouraged, and the aristocratic virtues Aristotle extolled would have done Washington little good in the South, but some other cardinal virtues were helpful. The first among these was prudence: reflective prudence is the capacity to take a broad view of both ordinary and extraordinary constraints and opportunities and to make adroit judgments about how to best

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3 In Chapter 1 I draw on several theorists to develop this argument, including Philip Pettit’s The Robust Demands of the Good: Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43–72.


exploit them. Machiavelli portrays a prudent person as someone who acts “as skillful archers do, when their target seems too distant: knowing well the power of their bow, they aim at a much higher point, not to hit it with the arrow, but by aiming there to be able to strike their target.” A prudent archer will use the contour of the land, the direction of the wind, and the force of gravity to enhance the trajectory and force of her arrow.

To be prudent is to understand how limits can be enabling and how to use them in the service of virtue. Washington wrote that “overcoming” difficulties and “mastering those problems” develop “strength of mind and a clearness of vision that few persons who have lived a life of ease have been able to attain,” and that injustice and misfortune “strengthen or form . . . character” by bringing forth your “latent powers.” No one can totally avoid danger or risk, but, as Machiavelli, says, “prudence consists in knowing how to assess the dangers, to choose the least bad course of action as being the right one to follow.” Prudence is not concern with self-interest but something more ample: practical judgment, the capacity to see what is possible, what is essential, what cost you will have to bear for each option available to you, and what cost you are willing to ask others to bear. A prudent person sees the feasibility of her course of action and its likely consequences.

In the Jim Crow South other ancient virtues that served Washington well were courage—fortitude, endurance, or cunning self-assertion in the face of fear and domination, as opposed to meeting your oppressor head-on; and temperance—reflective and disciplined self-restraint. Washington considered a virtue a habitus in Aquinas’s sense of the term: “a stable disposition of intellect, will, or passion inclining the person to act in one kind of way rather than another.” Virtues are reflective dispositions that guide action, not deliberative reasons for acting. They are qualities of the mind and patterns of comportment that form one’s character—a steady but reflective way of being in a particular social world.

What were the qualities of mind that enabled Washington to emerge as the preeminent leader of his race and one of the foremost statesmen of his day? To answer this question, I begin with the horizon of possibilities in the 1890s South. I show that although Washington’s 1895 speech at the Atlanta Exposition became a national sensation it was deeply sensitive to the

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6 Aristotle viewed prudence as a moral virtue and thus separated it from cunning or cleverness (NE II44a6–b33). But Washington’s practice of prudence is closer to Machiavelli’s more amoral understanding of the virtue.

7 Machiavelli, The Prince, 19.


10 Ibid.


13 For Machiavelli, the concept of virtù does the reflective work. Mark Philp, Political Conduct, 41.
political, economic, and social fault lines that had divided southern whites since 1890. Washington sought to extract job and educational opportunities for black southerners from that extremely burdened context. I then explicate the normative core of the speech in light of conditional reasons and rhetorical restraints. The dangers of giving a speech to white southerners in 1895 confirmed Washington’s view of necessity as the seedbed of virtue. It was the crucible that cultivated some of his most important and lasting virtues: rhetorical elasticity, dissembling, and pretext, which allowed him to construct a public face contrary to his political purposes and covert acts. His heroic hypocrisy did not spring from base duplicity but from a desire to realize the good under terrible conditions. I also examine three speeches he gave in the North to show how and why he modulated his voice and claims when speaking outside the South: A private meeting at the Women’s New England Club in Boston on January 27, 1890, the unveiling of the Robert Gould Shaw monument in Boston on May 31, 1897; and the National Peace Jubilee in Chicago on October 16, 1898. Fear of persecution, a sense of obligation to his university’s wellbeing, and duty to his race, hung over the stage in Atlanta. In the lecture halls of the North, however, donor interests and institutional duties motivated the content and tone of his speeches. The norms and ideals governing social existence in the South transformed his insincerity and hypocrisy into honorable virtues.

2.1 The Road to Atlanta
Marc Bloch’s quip that “men resemble their times more than they do their fathers” can be read as a warning for historians of political theory, especially those studying American and African American thought. Few in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American thought subscribed to canonical political theory. Rather than relying on esteemed philosophers of the past, they looked to their contemporaries, both on their left and on their right.

Washington faced three groups of whites in the South: Bourbon Democrats, the reactionary wing of the party dominated by a planter class bent on keeping their monopoly on black serfdom; Populists, agrarian radicals advocating economic democracy; and a rising bourgeois class advocating a New South.

Bourbon Democrats were committed to solidifying white supremacy and restoring the old plantocracy. They wanted both to disenfranchise African Americans and to defeat their Populists and Republican challengers. In the 1890s, they grew increasingly violent and repressive. To lock in their monopoly on sharecropping, they sought to prevent African Americans from attaining education and alternative economic opportunities. To the Bourbon Democrats, there was no compromise to be had on the question of race.

The Bourbon Democrats’ most virulent spokesman and agitator was Ben “Pitchfork” Tillman (1847–1918), a wealthy landowner, who had viciously suppressed African American rights as part of a rebel group called the Red Shirts. The governor of South Carolina from 1890–94 and

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U.S. state senator from 1895 until his death, Tillman oversaw one of the most brutal periods in the state’s already awful history. On November 4, 1895, in the New York World, Washington wrote, “I can’t believe that you and your fellow members are engaged in constructing laws that will keep 650,000 of my weak, dependent and unfortunate race in ignorance, poverty and crime.” In an interview with the Chicago Inter Ocean, two years later, Washington said, “I would like to see the same political rights accorded to all citizens in holding office as well as the polls.”

Some still wonder why Washington did not hitch his wagon to the Populist revolution. The 1890s saw one of the worst economic depressions in American history. In 1890, farmers worldwide saw prices of their products plummet to alarmingly low rates. European countries started imposing tariffs to ease agrarian fear. The same year, the U.S. enacted its own protective tariffs. European investors responded by starting to repatriate capital from the U.S., worsening the already dire situation. Southern states were hit especially hard, with many of their newest industries collapsing and the price of cotton tumbling to ever new lows. In Georgia, textile factories in Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, and Macon abruptly shut down. On May 4, 1893, panic struck the stock market, and unprecedented unemployment and strikes in the South continued in 1894. It became increasingly clear to those living in the countryside that progress had passed them by.

The economic upheaval of the 1890s transformed the American political landscape and marked the death of the Republican Party in the South. The general elections in 1892 gave the Democrats complete control of Congress and the presidency for the first time since the beginning of the Civil War, with Democrats taking seventy percent of the seats in the House of Representatives in the Fifty-second Congress. The result followed violent conflict in the South (and the West) between Democrats and the People’s Party (or Populists). In South Carolina and Georgia, the poll tax all but eliminated black voter turnout; in Tennessee and Arkansas, secret ballot laws did the same; and Mississippi’s new constitution eviscerated the black electorate. Between 1888 and 1892, all but three states in the South saw an extreme decline in the number of African Americans who voted: Mississippi and Florida, for example, saw reductions of over fifty percent. In 1890, the new state constitution in Mississippi cut black voter enrollment from 147,000 to 8,600. Around the turn of the century, other states enacted similarly repressive laws,
effectively disenfranchising almost all blacks and most poor whites. Though Republicans always struggled to compete in the South, especially since the end of the war, they now entered a period of existential crisis. For example, in the 1888 general election they garnered nearly a quarter of the South’s counties for Benjamin Harrison, but in 1892 they won only sixteen percent of Southern counties. The death of the Republicans in the South came hand in hand with the demise of black electoral politics. During Reconstruction and well into the 1880s, African Americans, who held significant political power in the Black Belt, had kept the Republicans afloat, but by 1892, in the face of a Populist uprising, a significant number of African Americans were supporting Democrats.

Washington shunned agrarian radicals like Tom Watson (1856–1922). Populism was primarily a movement of tenant farmers and small and large landowners, along with some of the industrial proletariat. The movement challenged the unchecked power of corporations, trusts, monopolies, banks, and railroads. Watson, its most eloquent spokesman and one of Georgia’s largest landowners, described the cause as born of the “upward tendency of the middle and lower classes” who were, therefore, “sworn foes of monopoly—not monopoly in the narrow sense of the word—but monopoly of power, of place, or privilege, of wealth, of progress.” Though its constituency was largely rural, Populism was in many ways a sophisticated movement. Populists were not backward peasants trying to reverse modernity. Along with contempt for the new financial capitalism and industrialization of the Gilded Age, they argued for a richer associational life for rural Americans, increased access to education for their children, less crushing taxes on their land, and a more benevolent society.

To realize their vision of a new world, Populists needed the support of those African Americans who could still vote. Watson, a lawyer and schoolteacher who was elected to Congress in 1890, voiced what seemed like an appealing alliance, telling an audience during his 1892 reelection campaign, “There is no reason why the black man should not understand that the law that hurts me, as a farmer, hurts him, as a farmer; that the same law that hurts me, as a cropper, hurts you, as a cropper.” “There must be a new policy inaugurated,” he wrote that same year, “whose purpose is to allay the passions and prejudices of race conflicts and which makes its appeal to the sober sense and honest judgment of the citizen regardless of color.”

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22 South Carolina (1895), Louisiana (1898), North Carolina (1900), Alabama (1901), Virginia (1902), Texas (1902), and Georgia (1908).

23 Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 278.


25 Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), 32; John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt; Richard Hofstadter, Age of Reform, 12-22.


27 Quoted in Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 272.


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“To the success of this policy two things are indispensible,” he insisted, “[1] a common necessity acting upon both races, and [2] a common benefit being assured to both—without injury or humiliation to either.” African Americans and whites should align because their “every material interests are identical,” and just as “mutually inflamed prejudices now drive them apart . . . self-interest of both races will drive them to act in concert.” In 1892, H. Seb Doyle, an African American preacher was almost lynched by Democrats for stumping for the Populists. But Watson intervened and saved Doyle from the mob. The act, which outraged southern Democrats, made Watson a folk hero to northern Populists. With his criticisms of lynching and disenfranchisement, he appeared to be a champion for interracial economic democracy. In the eyes of many, Watson was leading a revolution.

Though curtailed by poll taxes, the African American vote was not yet eviscerated in Georgia, and Watson needed those votes. In the end, he sought a wager. But what were the terms of his proposed alliance between blacks and whites? Just what did he mean by “without injury or humiliation to either”? As far as government intervention was concerned, Watson believed that “outsiders must let us alone,” insisting that any “Federal interference with our elections postpone the settlement and render our task more difficult.” In terms of the private sphere, he wrote, “The question of social equality does not enter into the calculation at all. No statute ever drew the latch of the humblest home—or ever will. Each citizen regulates his own visiting list—and always will.” To Watson and his contemporaries, the phrase “social equality” referred to private social relations, including interracial sex or marriage. It carried an implicit threat of undermining the constitutional right to association and privacy. No law should require people to open the door to those they did not want to come in. Watson spoke only of the private sphere, not about access to a business or public place. Knowing that this circumscribed definition of “social equality” was prevalent in Watson’s day, we can see that he was affirming the status quo. At the time, many African Americans understood the limits of this phrase and avoided using it.

Populists were not radical egalitarians. If you scratched one hard enough you would have found a Klan member. They used terrorism to prevent African Americans from voting for Democrats or Republicans: “White Populists carried Winchester rifles to protect their black supporters, even while applying Ku Klux Klan methods against their black opponents.” At the

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29 Ibid., 800.
31 Thomas E. Watson, “The Negro Question in the South.”
32 Ibid. Here, Watson is referring to Henry Cabot Lodge’s Federal Election Bill (1890) that would have authorized the federal government to use court supervisors to ensure African Americans in the South were able to vote. The bill was put forth by Republicans who had no intrinsic interest in helping blacks and only sought to breathe some life into the party in the South, and was filibustered by Democrats in the Senate. Its enemies quickly dubbed it the “Force Bill”—a Republican attempt to “force” black electoral rule on white majorities.
33 Ibid., 801.
same time, Populists could be reformers, but in a limited sense. “We are in favor of white supremacy,” wrote Marion Butler, “but we are not in favor of cheating and fraud to get it.”

“It is best for your race and my race that we dwell apart in our private affairs,” Watson assured a cheering crowd in Sparta, Georgia. “[It] is best for you to go to your churches, and I will go to mine; it is best that you send your children to your colored school, and I'll send my children to mine; you invite your colored friends to your home, and I'll invite my friends to mine.” “I want no mixing of races,” he promised his audience on July 4, 1893, and said it “is best that both should preserve the race integrity by staying apart.”

Populists were as committed to white supremacy as were their Democratic enemies. There were, to be sure, African American Populists, such as John B. Rayner and Melvin Wade, who tried to extract some minimal economic and educational opportunities from the movement, but they, too, soon realized they would be riding at the back of that train.

Watson’s most widely quoted editorial in the South was “The Ungrateful Negro,” an attack on Washington’s public rejection of Social Darwinist arguments that African Americans are intellectually inferior and his numerous assertions that they are equal to whites.

What does civilization owe to the Negros?
Nothing!

Nothing!!

NOTHING!!

Other leaders of the Populist movement—Harrison Ashby; S. O. Daws; Leonidas Polk; Thomas L. Nugent; Annea Yabrough; and Edward R. Cocke, who, in 1890, led the Virginia Farmer’s Alliance effort to repeal the Fifteenth Amendment—were also committed to white supremacy. If Watson, the revolution’s most enlightened philosopher, held these views, what did its rank-and-file members believe? Many of them regarded black tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and small landowners as the source of their plight. In 1891, when the Colored Farmers’ Alliance launched a strike of black farm workers in the South, it was the white Farmers’ Alliances that led violent attacks on black farm laborers and organizers.

Meanwhile, Washington, in his subtle way, warned African Americans to stay away from Populism and to embrace the vision of the New South, as he had done. He aligned himself with

35 Caucasian, August 25, 1892.
37 People’s Party Paper, July 15, 1893.
38 Emmett Jay Scott, Letter to the Editor of the Montgomery Advertiser, September 6, 1905, BTWP, 8: 253. The Advertiser had republished Watson’s article.
39 Tom Watson Magazine, June 1905
Henry W. Grady (1850–1889), the chief spokesman for the New South’s bourgeois promise. In this he was prescient: the following year, the Democratic Party and William Jennings Bryan co-opted Populism, and by 1898 the movement had disappeared from the American scene.

Even so, his decision to support Grady and his movement profoundly influenced Washington’s historical reputation of being a capitalist and compromiser. As is often the case, the reality behind the image is more complicated.

Henry Grady was a man of means. The son of a Georgia merchant, he studied law at the University of Virginia after graduating from the University of Georgia, and then turned to journalism. On the eve of Reconstruction’s collapse he joined the staff of the Atlanta Constitution and soon became its part owner, using the paper to promote a vision of a commercial, industrial, and modern South. New South advocates, like Grady, sought northern capital investment in southern industrial, commercial, financial, and agricultural enterprises. Their goal was a more diverse economy and greater urbanization in the South.

Despite their progressive outlook on many issues, the New South advocates were committed to white supremacy, but their reformist impulse moved them towards legitimizing—what they called civilizing—white supremacy by making it rest on law rather than on force or fraud. This was the vision that underlay all three of Atlanta’s expositions: the International Cotton Exposition of 1881, the Piedmont Exposition of 1887, and the Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, at which Washington delivered what became known as his “Atlanta Compromise” speech.

The New South movement was born in Delmonico’s Restaurant in New York City on December 21, 1886, at the annual dinner of The New England Society in the City of New York. This social and charitable organization invited Grady to speak, the first time in its eighty-one year history that a southerner addressed its membership, which was mostly made up of industrial, business, and financial elites. When the Boston Sun asked Grady what he planned on saying, his response was vintage Grady: “I have thought of a thousand things to say, five hundred of which if I say they will murder me when I get back home, and five hundred of which will get me murdered at the banquet.”41 Grady had reason to be nervous. General William Tecumseh Sherman was in attendance and would be speaking just before him. Sherman took the stage and began retelling war memories, including his burning Atlanta to the ground. Unruffled, Grady strode to the stage, looked out at the packed hall, and said: “I want to say to General Sherman, who is considered an able man in our parts, though some people think he is a kind of careless man about fire, that from the ashes he left us in 1864 we have raised a brave and beautiful city; that somehow or other we have caught the sunshine in the bricks and mortar of our homes, and have builded therein not one ignoble prejudice or memory.”42

41 Harold E. Davis, Henry Grady’s New South: Atlanta, a Brave and Beautiful City (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 176.

42 Henry Grady, “An Oration Delivered to the New England Society” (1886). All subsequent quotes from Grady are from this speech unless otherwise cited.
Then Grady, in an attempt to heal the wounds left by the war, surprised everyone by bestowing historical equivalence to the figure of the southern Cavalier and that of the New England Puritan. Grady asserted that “the Cavalier as well as the Puritan” founded the nation, even though there was no mention of such a fact in contemporary history books. The Virginia Cavalier, he said, challenged the French, secured the territory, and transformed the wilderness into a home. Then Grady went on to metaphorically repurpose Lincoln in the service of the South.

Neither Puritan nor Cavalier long survived as such. The virtues and good traditions of both happily still live for the inspiration of their sons and the saving of the old fashion. But both Puritan and Cavalier were lost in the storm of the first Revolution, and the American citizen, supplanting both and stronger than either, took possession of the Republic . . . Great types, like valuable plants, are slow to flower and fruit. But from the union of these colonists, Puritans and Cavaliers, from the straightening of their purposes and the crossing of their blood, slow perfecting through a century came he who now stands as the first typical American, the first who comprehended within himself all the strength and gentleness, all the majesty and grace, of this Republic—Abraham Lincoln, he was the sum of Puritan and Cavalier, for in his ardent nature were fused virtues of both, and in the depths of his great soul the faults of both were lost. He was greater than Puritan, greater than Cavalier, in that he was American.

Grady’s new origin story returned the Great Emancipator to his abolitionist offspring as a lost son of the Confederate soldier. Transfixed and transformed, the audience cheered.

Grady went on, turning to old wounds, the sort Sherman was picking at, asking his audience to imagine Confederate soldiers marching “home in defeat and not in victory”: “Let me picture to you the footsore Confederate soldier, as, buttoning up in his faded gray jacket the parole which was to bear testimony to his children of his fidelity and faith, he turned his face southward from Appomattox in April, 1865. Think of him as ragged, half-starved, heavy-hearted, enfeebled by want and wounds.” When the Confederate returned home he found “his house in ruins, his farm devastated, his slaves free, his stock killed, his barns empty, his trade destroyed, his money worthless, his social system, feudal in its magnificence, swept away, his people without law or legal status, his comrades slain, and the burdens of others heavy on his shoulders.” Despite all this, the defeated Confederate “stepped from the trenches into the furrow; horses that had charged federal guns marched before the plow, and fields that ran red with human blood in April were green with the harvest in June,” all because he said, “‘I’m going to work.’” “Crushed by defeat [and] without money, credit, employment, material, or training,” within three months the Confederate soldier had raised a New South on the ruins of war, a South, Grady said, that would soon rival the commercial and industrial success of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.
Lincoln was not enough. Grady would have Franklin as well. “We have established thrift in city and country,” Grady asserted, and we “have fallen in love with work.” He transformed the image of the former Confederate from a cavalier slaveholder, representing unfree labor and markets and in love with his own power, honor, and dominion, into an embodiment of Puritan virtues: thrift, temperance, and industriousness. The manufacturers, tycoons, and bankers at Delmonico’s greeted Grady’s metaphorical magic ecstatically.

Grady buried sectional prejudice that night, but offered no compromise on white supremacy. He said both regions should protest injustices done to African Americans but that “liberty and enfranchisement” can carry the Negro only so far and that the “rest must be left to conscience and common sense. It must be left to those among whom his lot is cast, with whom he is indissolubly connected, and whose prosperity depends upon their possessing sympathy and confidence.” In Washington’s Atlanta speech, we hear echoes of Grady: African Americans should cast their lot with those who encircle them, appeal to mutual prosperity, ask for sympathy instead of justice, and, above all, acknowledge the limits of the law.

Grady was as liberal as a white southerner could be, meaning that his moral imagination, like that of most southerners, could not encompass the idea of social equality between African Americans and whites. “I declare that the truth above all others,” he told twenty-five thousand farmers in Texas, “is that the white race must dominate forever.”43 The same day Washington delivered his address at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, James Creelman described Grady, who had died six years earlier, in the New York World as the “genius” who had inspired the “marvelous revelation of the New South.” Grady, he wrote, still “moves and controls this new thing which has come to life,”44 the “thing” being blacks and whites remaining separate and unequal.

2.2 Atlanta Exposition Address

On September 18, 1895, at the exposition in Atlanta, Booker T. Washington hurled himself into history by delivering a speech of approximately sixteen hundred words, every one of which he knew could cost him his life. An integrated stage in the South was simultaneously a triumph and a lynching in waiting. In Up from Slavery, Washington recalled the anxiety and nearly overwhelming “sense of responsibility” that overtook him while writing and delivering his speech.

I remember that I had been a slave . . . It was only a few years before that time that any white man in the audience might have claimed me as his slave; and it was easily possible that some of my former owners might be present . . . I knew, too, that this was the first time in the entire history of the Negro that a member of my

43 Quoted in Charles Postel, The Populist Vision, 175.
race had been asked to speak from the same platform with white Southern men and women . . . an audience composed of the wealth and culture of the white South, the representatives of my former masters. I knew, too, that while the greater part of my audience would be composed of Southern people, yet there would be present a large number of Northern whites, as well as a great many men and women of my own race . . . They knew that by one sentence I could have blasted, in a large degree, the success of the Exposition.45

The first half of the 1890s had been marked by a swift rise in lynchings, a social ritual that aimed to strip African Americans of their personhood and agency through terror. Georgia ranked second in lynchings, with an average of one per month between 1890 and 1900.46 But Washington did not bring lynching up in his speech, perhaps fearing that it would incite those in the audience who regarded all African Americans, including Washington, as articles of property rather than persons. Six years after the exposition, in Up from Slavery, Washington recorded what his thought process had been during the shaping of his speech and how the life-threatening arena in which he would deliver it affected his approach.

Washington’s challenge was to devise a speech in which conscience fit circumstance. The ability to introduce controversial issues slyly and to artfully dodge some explosive subjects were essential virtues for a black leader in the Jim Crow South. Washington faced circumstances that required bravery, but of a prudent sort. To find the right approach, Washington needed to channel Odysseus’ cunning intellect and Nestor’s sly tongue, not Achilles’ rage or rancor.47 Being courageous in the South was, for African Americans, a very tricky business. Washington’s outward presentation of amiability and trustworthiness was indispensable to his cause, because they gave his darker virtue their veiled force.48

The Atlanta Exposition was far from a small county fair. It attracted thirteen thousand visitors a day, and, by November, over a million people had passed through it.49 It was held to advertise the economic promise of the South in order to attract capital investment from the North. The organizers, aware that bankers fear social turmoil, invited Washington to speak as

45 Washington, Up from Slavery, BTWP, 1: 326–327.
46 Georgia had 531 and Mississippi had 581 lynchings between 1882 and 1968.
48 As noted in the Introduction, Washington believed that African Americans had to feign social virtues such as amiability in the face of oppression. Here, one can’t but think of how different Washington’s conception of virtue is from Hume, Smith, and Jane Austen.
49 Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 322.
proof that the South had made progress on race despite the labor strikes and racial violence that had been sparked by the recent economic depression. The tide had begun to turn the previous year with the collapse of the populist Farmers’ Alliance, the flaming out in the general election of the political ambitions of such major Populists as Alabama’s Reuben Kolb and Georgia’s Tom Watson, and the Populist’s weak showing in Texas, which had been a stronghold of the uprising. Grover Cleveland declared that “all danger of the Populists becoming a serious factor in politics in the far Southern States seem to have gone by.” By 1895, the Atlanta Exposition could confidently declare the South open for business.

Washington’s terror increased as the day of the speech approached. On September 16, he read his speech to colleagues at Tuskegee, and their encouraging “criticisms and comments” gave him some relief. Yet, he recalled, “I felt a good deal as I suppose a man feels when he is on his way to the gallows.” The following day, the newspaper advertised the event in “flaring headlines,” deepening his trepidation and keeping him awake that night. On September 18, stressed, anxious, and unrested, he poured over his words and then prayed before leaving for the exposition. On the day of the event, on the three-hour procession to the fair grounds, the Georgia heat and his “nervous anxiety” made him almost “collapse.”

A scientist covering the fair for the Smithsonian Institution described what happened when Washington entered the stage: “But, at last, a door behind the platform opened and the guests as they came in were welcomed with enthusiasm. But when amongst them a colored man appeared, there was an instant secession of the applause, and a sudden chill fell upon the whole assemblage. One after another asked angrily, ‘What’s that nigger doing on stage?’ The ‘nigger,’ however, went quietly and modestly to a seat and was soon forgotten.” When Georgia’s former Republican Governor, Rufus Bullock, introduced Washington, the audience cheered. But when he rose from his seat, silence fell. It was quickly broken by vigorous cheering from the African Americans in the audience and some “faint cheers” from whites. Looking composed and confident, Washington made his way to the front of the stage and began his epoch-making speech with these words:

A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen the signal, “Water, water; we die of thirst!”

52 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 328.
55 Ibid., 328–29.
The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, “Cast down your bucket where you are”. . . The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land, or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: “Cast down your bucket where you are”—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.\(^58\)

In his speech, Washington was making a realist appeal to African Americans. After all, among enemies and without the prospect of exit, he believed that African Americans in the South were better off choosing expedience over revolt, even if doing so meant smiling in the face of terror. Washington had used the above allegory in the previous year to advise black southerners to cast their lot in the South rather than plea for “relief” from “far away,” meaning the North.\(^59\) Frederick Douglass’s newspaper, North Star, had once guided slaves to liberation, but northern whites had now washed their hands of race. Washington’s words summoned up the spirit of Henry Grady, who had said at the dinner at Delmonico’s that the African American “must be left to those among whom his lot is cast, with whom he is indissolubly connected, and whose prosperity depends upon their possessing his intelligent sympathy and confidence.” \(^60\) Washington urged African Americans in the South to take the pragmatic path, believing that it was of dire importance to cultivate peaceful relations with the southern whites who surrounded them.

Washington was pitching his speech both to bourgeois Grady-ites and northern capitalists, telling them “that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man’s chance in the commercial world, and in nothing is this Exposition more eloquent than in in emphasizing this chance.” \(^61\) By begging his people to cast their lot in southern agriculture, industry, commerce, and in both the “domestic service and in the professions,” Washington reassured the southern and northern economic elites that if they, in return, cast their economic lot among his people they would get in return a loyal and profitable black workforce. \(^62\) He painted a picture of a world in which African Americans would advance beyond menial jobs, to the mutual benefit of both

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\(^58\) Ibid., 331. The official transcript of the speech is included in *Up from Slavery*.


\(^61\) Washington, *Up from Slavery*, *BTWP*, 1: 331

\(^62\) Ibid., 332. Emphasis added.
races: “You will find they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories.” He shrewdly avoided revealing his true economic vision, in which independent middle-class farmers and artisans would own their land and means of production, African Americans would be professionals with their own practices, and a black bourgeoisie would manage the industrial, financial, and commercial sectors of a modern southern economy. Instead, he argued for expanding economic opportunities for black people by promising prosperity for white people, a skillful appeal to their selfish interests and avarice.

One of the feats of Washington’s speech was the way he judiciously approached the very touchy issue of reparative justice. He pointed out that white elites in the South and in the North had a special obligation to take steps to repair the injustices of slavery and to accept responsibility for abandoning Reconstruction by providing African Americans with meaningful work and public education, the material and social foundations of political freedom.

Democrats, he told the audience, had recently started defunding education to ensnare future generations of African Americans in sharecropping and tenant farming, making this the perfect moment for New South advocates and northern investors to provide avenues of exit from serf-like labor contracts for those who had been forced to bring “forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the South.” 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,” Washington made the case for investing in the eight million African Americans in the region, whose “fidelity” had already been tested, as opposed to immigrant anarchists, who encouraged “strikes and labor wars.”

As we have proven 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.

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63 Ibid., Emphasis added.
64 In Chapter 5, I discuss Washington’s agrarian political economy and the specific sorts of labor that enable independence of action and thought. It is also worth bearing in the mind that the Great Migration does not occur until after World War I.
65 Washington, Up from Slavery, BTWP, 1: 332
66 Ibid.
Washington, an unfailing assessor of public opinion and popular prejudice, was bending the nativist turn in American, and particularly Republican, politics to his end.\(^67\) With a shrewd choice of words and in a restrained tone, he aligned himself with capitalists and against radicals. At the same time, he was evoking the moral debt for social justice that wealthy whites owed to African Americans, their fellow citizens, which they did not owe to strangers or immigrants.\(^68\) Slavery had incurred that debt, and it should be repaid in jobs and schools—“education of head, hand, and heart” for the race.\(^69\)

Washington was guaranteeing abundance and prosperity for white investors if they improved black lives while at the same time warning them that if they failed to do so, decline and conflict would ensue. There “is no defense or security for any except in the highest intelligence and development of all.”\(^70\) If wealthy whites delivered jobs and schools for African Americans their investment “will pay a thousand per cent interest.”\(^71\)

Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upwards, or they will pull against you the load downwards. We shall constitute one-third and much more of the ignorance and crime of the South or one-third its intelligence and progress; we shall contribute one-third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic.\(^72\)

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\(^67\) Massachusetts Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge proposed his notorious literacy test in 1896. In a speech before the U. S. Senate, Lodge said, “the bill is intended to amend the existing law so as to restrict still further immigration to the United States..... By this bill it is proposed to make a new class of excluded immigrants and add to those which have just been names the totally ignorant.... It is found the literacy will bear most heavily upon the Italians, Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks, and Asians, and very lightly, or not at all, upon English-speaking emigrants of Germans, Scandinavians, and French.” The bill was intended to bar Jewish, Catholic, and Chinese immigrants. Henry Cabot Lodge, “Speech to the Senate on Literacy Tests” (1896), *American Political Thought: Readings and Materials*, ed. Keith E. Whittington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 282. It was Grover Cleveland, the first Democrat to be elected president after the Civil War, who vetoed the bill. He argued that immigration should be open so long as it does not pose a threat to national security: “A radical departure from our national policy relating to immigration is here presented. Heretofore we have welcomed all who came to us from other lands except those whose moral or psychological condition or history threatened danger to our national welfare and safety.” He then maintained the time had not yet “come for the further restriction of immigration on the ground that an excess of population overcrows our land.” Besides, he said: “Violence and disorder do not originate with illiterate laborers. They are, rather, the victims of the educated agitator.” Grover Cleveland, “Literacy Test Veto” (1897), *American Political Thought*, Keith E. Whittington, 384–85.

\(^68\) This argument has some contemporary currency. See David Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 20–37.

\(^69\) Washington, *Up from Slavery*, BTWP, 1: 332

\(^70\) Ibid.

\(^71\) Ibid.

\(^72\) Ibid., 332–33.
In Washington’s able hand, the image of a ship lost at sea was not merely a parable of vulnerability and despair. It also conveyed virtues earned in the crucible of politics. In May 1900, Washington told an audience that his race was like a “ship at sea... being tossed during anxious days and nights by wind and waves, and its very life seems threatened by the elements of nature,” but, he added, this “is the time for all on board, and especially those charged with the duty of managing the vessel, to keep a cool head, a clear conscience and a steady hand.”

To steer the “imperiled craft into a harbor of safety” they would have to do more than curse the elements—they would need the political virtues of “patience, wisdom, skill... and perseverance.” Those with the virtues of cunning and prudence would be able to harvest from the untamable sea what they needed to survive as they eventually steered their way to shore. What they could not do under any circumstances was try to master the sea. To do so was to invite the fate of Aeschines—to sink the ship of state and thus fail at their duties as stateswomen and men.

“To my mind,” wrote Allen Turnage to Washington, “you have found the channel, and the only one that will float the Negro’s ship.” By the decade’s end, Washington’s realism had taken hold.

It was Washington’s next metaphor that sealed the reception of his speech as the Atlanta Compromise. Washington then moved on to the topic of the difference between social relationships between the races and economic ones. He used the image of the hand to illustrate the compromise he was proposing: “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.” In exchange for mutual economic and civil progress, African Americans would shelve the question of social equality, which at that time, as we have seen, meant interacting as equals in private relationships, including romantic ones. Few African Americans in the South dared to challenge the status quo on interracial sex and marriage.

Washington harkened back to the sentimentalized “patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful” slave of the past, using much the same language that Grady used when he spoke in New York. “What I said about the colored race in my speech in New York was said in sincerity,” Grady wrote to Washington in 1887, “and from the depths of a heart grateful to them for their honorable conduct during the war. There need be no hostility either of action or sentiment between the white and colored people in the south. Their interests are identical, and they should be friends in the best sense of the word.” In New York, Grady had made the following argument:

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73 An Address at the Metropolitan A. M. E. Church, May 22, 1900, *BTWP*, 5: 527.
74 Ibid., 538 and 540.
77 Ibid.
We remember with what fidelity for four years he [the slave] guarded our defenseless women and children, whose husbands and fathers were fighting against his freedom. To his eternal credit be it said that whenever he struck a blow for his own liberty, he fought in open battle, and when at last he raised his black and humble hands that the shackles might be struck off, those hands were innocent of wrong against his helpless charges, and worthy to be taken in loving grasp by every man who honors loyalty and devotion.\(^7^9\)

Washington had Grady’s letter, and, like any southerner, he knew his speech by heart. Washington had reasoned that these New South sentiments would play well at an economic exposition in Atlanta, the financial center of the South, and that the virtues of honor, loyalty, and gratitude could be marshaled in the service of racial justice. Thus his cunning use of Grady as a counter to Democrats and Populists. Washington redeployed Grady’s image of a trusted and loyal slave refusing to stain his hands with blood and his fingers with guilt.\(^8^0\) His former owner, now a wounded soldier, ought to reward the fidelity and faith of his former bondsman by affectionately grasping his hands and aiding his rise up from slavery.

The image of a loyal slave strikes our modern eyes as an apology for inequity and confirms our image of Washington as an Uncle Tom. What is missing in our understanding is that Washington used this image of the loyal slave as a tactic to try to prevent lynchings, and to do so without sending the audience in front of him, full of potential lynchers, into a frenzy. It was a maneuver that even the frank and fearless Ida B. Wells used to protest against the southern and many northern newspapers that were defending extralegal executions by claiming that black men preyed on white women. In 1895, she wrote in one of her anti-lynching editorials:

During all the years of slavery, no such charge was ever made, not even during the dark says of rebellion, when the white man, following the fortunes of war went to do battle for the maintenance of slavery. While the master was away fighting to forge fetters upon the slave, he left his wife and children with no protectors save the Negroes themselves. And yet during those years of trust and peril, no Negro proved recreant to his trust and no white man returned to a home that had been despoiled.\(^8^1\)

It is now commonplace to portray Wells as an uncompromising radical and contrast her defiance with Washington’s accomodationist rhetoric. In fact, Wells and Washington made effective use


\(^8^0\) Isaiah 59:3

of the same paternalist image. Looking into the eyes of thousands of whites he placed emphasis on constructive goals: duties of gratitude. In his extended and indirect sentence, Washington slipped in special duties of citizenship to discourage investment in white foreigners based solely on race. And, importantly, he concluded by insisting that whites interlace their commercial and civil life with blacks.

The two sentences form an interconnected argument. Washington, drawing on Grady’s image, used the first sentence to reiterate his argument for reparative justice: African Americans are prepared to interlace their “industrial, commercial, civil and religious life with [whites] in a way that shall make the interests of both races one.” He then extended this argument into his notorious compromise:

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.

“The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly,” he added. In 1908, Kelly Miller, a civil rights activist and friend of Washington and Du Bois, explained the meaning of social equality. “‘Social’ and ‘equality’ are two excellent words; but ‘social equality’ must not be pronounced in good society, like two harmless chemical elements uniting to make a dangerous compound.” Du Bois wrote in The Crisis, that an “unreal meaning” is “dragged from these words, namely: Social Equality is the right to demand private companionship with another.” Because the term had an entirely different meaning than it does today, doing Washington’s speech hermeneutic justice restricts us from importing into the speech our normative understanding of the term.

Why the image of a hand? The hand as a metaphor conjures up such forms of labor as farming, craftsmanship, and handiwork, activities which Washington extolled and to which he assigned high moral status. According to Washington’s contemporary, Thorstein Veblen, the

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85 In Chapter 5, I discuss Washington’s political economy. He shared the normative commitments of Kropotkin, Tolstoy, and Gandhi. All three authors read *Up from Slavery* and corresponded with him, as well as activists and authors from India, Japan, and elsewhere. Almost all of them read Washington as addressing what was then a global question, one Weber visited Tuskegee to find an answer to, that is, the problem of transforming peasants into modern independent citizens. Washington’s efforts in the South with former slaves were read as model to be emulated in Europe, Asian, and Russia. American utopians like Elbert Hubbard wrote on Washington was a model of American utopianism in the tradition of Robert Owen in Scotland and in America and John Ruskin and William Morris in England. But I show that Washington’s readings in economics and teaching the subject relied on very partial commitments to American economists like James Laurence Laughlin, Richard T. Ely, Henry George, and Thorstein Veblen. But his agrarian republicanism made him suspicious of the creeping socialism in much of George’s work.
person who works with his or her hands is “a creative agent standing on his own bottom” and is also “an ultimate, irreducible factor in the community’s make-up.” This person is self-reliant and resolute as well as being cooperative and responsive, qualities that are essential for creating a new social world such as Washington envisioned, a world in which both races will have to reach for, grasp, and hold a mutual vision, to mold the New South out of the raw materials of the old one.

For many, the workshop was a model for laboring in harmony because it required physical coordination which entailed social cooperation; the “fraternal hand” forces its “stronger digits” to exercise restraint towards its weaker ones. The fingers on a hand are intrinsically equal but they differ in length, width, flexibility, and strength, which, according to Richard Sennett, make coordination among them require practice and patience. Typing or piano playing entails coordination and cooperation between separate fingers and success at either depends on neutralizing the inequalities that exist between fingers and requires some digits to aid others in one direction and conversely in the other direction. It obliges, we might say, empathetic touch. Coordination among separate fingers needs give and take. Sennett offers the example of playing a piano. The weakest “digits must strengthen, and the thumb, the strongest finger in each hand, has to learn to work with them by holding back power.” For the hand to achieve harmony it will have to reconcile the inequalities between separate fingers. We are not speaking here of natural inequities but rather conditional disparities that arise out of patterns of practice.

At the end of his speech, Washington called, somewhat more directly, for justice, appealing to both southerners and northerners to think “above and beyond material benefits” by dedicating themselves to achieving a “higher good, that, let us pray God, will come, in a blotting out of sectional difference and racial animosities and suspicions, in a determination to administer absolute justice, coupled with material prosperity, [that] will bring into our beloved South a new heaven and a new earth.”

2.3 Emergence of a Leader

Washington’s Atlanta Address was a national sensation. “That man’s speech is the beginning of a moral revolution in America,” declared Clark Howell, the influential editor of the Atlanta Constitution and follower of Grady. Grover Cleveland thanked Washington “with much enthusiasm for making the address.” The New York World quoted reactions to the address: it

88 Ibid., 162.
89 Washington, Up from Slavery, BTWP, 1: 333-34.
91 Letter from Grover Cleveland to BTW, October 6, 1895, BTWP, 4:50.
was “great”; Washington was “a most worthy representative” of his race;\(^2\) the speech was “calm, dispassionate, and logical”; and Washington “had bewitched” his audience.\(^3\) However, the same newspapers made factual errors, describing the short and plump Washington as “tall, bony, and straight as a Sioux chief. . . .” He held his dusky hand high above his head, with the fingers stretched wide apart, and said to the white people of the South on behalf 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 social progress.’”\(^4\) This misquote, substituting “social progress” for “mutual progress,” seriously distorted Washington’s message by eliding Washington’s placing social concerns in an economic key.

In a letter to the New York World’s editor, Washington attempted to set the record straight, insisting that all he had advocated in the speech was that each African American “cast his lot materially, civilly and morally with the South . . . cultivate the closest friendship with the Southern white man,” and “in a dignified and sensible manner tell the white man of his wrongs to the negro.”\(^5\) As we shall see, Washington would pay a price for his realism.

African Americans were thrilled with Washington’s prudent balance of principle and practicality. “Let me heartily congratulate you upon your phenomenal success at Atlanta—it was a word fitly spoken,” wrote the young scholar W. E. B. Du Bois.\(^6\) “It looks as if you are our Douglass and I am glad of it,” declared T. Thomas Fortune, the civil rights activist and editor.\(^7\) “Your address was an inspiration,” Edward W. Blyden wrote to Washington, but, went on to say that while he appreciated the “desire for material and intellectual improvement” and for security and justice, which Washington’s work “tends to stimulate,” he did not understand the “hunger for social equality with the dominant race, because equality depends upon many things. It is a matter of taste which it is not in our power to regulate.”\(^8\) Blyden understood the demand for social equality as impinging on the right to association and privacy. (Such an argument was later made to sustain racial segregation.)

However, the speech was not universally admired. Some were disappointed that Washington did not speak more candidly and bravely on the question of lynching, disenfranchisement, and segregation. Ellen Collins, a white reformer from New York, told Washington he had “struck the right chord” but she wondered whether he was “too generous” to southerners.\(^9\) “Perhaps you might have been a little more independent,” she wrote a few days later, “in view of the long, long

\(^{92}\) Quoted in New York World, September 19, 1895.
\(^{93}\) Ibid.
\(^{94}\) Ibid.
\(^{95}\) Ibid.
\(^{96}\) Washington, Letter to the Editor of the New York World, September 20, 1895, BTWP, 4: 16.
\(^{98}\) Letter from T. Thomas Fortune to Booker T. Washington, September 26, 1895, BTWP, 4: 31.
\(^{99}\) Letter from Edward Wilmot Blyden to Booker T. Washington, September 24, 1895, BTWP, 4: 27

Letter from Ellen Collins to Booker T. Washington, September 24, 1895, BTWP, 4: 25
suffering of your people a little irritation would have been pardonable.”

Francis Grimke also worried that Washington conceded too much. “You can easily see that I had rather a difficult task,” he wrote back to Grimke. “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.”

Every new batch of mail brought similar criticism.

Social equality was not civil equality. The speech actually contained the distinction. As noted, Washington said African Americans would *interlace* their “industrial, commercial, civil and religious life with [whites] 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.” In a paragraph imploring whites to provide African Americans economic opportunities, Washington contrasted commercial and civil cooperation with *social equality*. At the time, many distinguished public from private life with the terms civil and social. In response to Ednah Dow Cheney, a white suffrage leader, Washington explained the idiomatic meaning of social equality in 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.

In 1920, in an unpublished article, Du Bois wrote that Washington’s metaphor of a hand with fingers apart was slippery enough to be “capable of serious differences of interpretation.” “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.” In retrospect, he recognized that the speech told southerners what they “wanted to hear, but said it
with rare tact.” Du Bois was alarmed by the way the South had placed its own “interpretation on the speech,” hearing in it the willingness “to surrender political and civil rights” in exchange for jobs.

Biographers have combed Washington’s work for the first appearance of the hand metaphor, and have found only one other incidence. On April 24, 1885, he wrote an open letter congratulating the Montgomery Advertiser for protesting racial segregation of railroads and registering his own objection to the policy. He said his protest was motivated from a “purely business standpoint,” as a matter of “dollars and cents,” rather than from a desire for “social equality.” Stressing that African Americans were charged the same price for tickets as whites, but were denied the same public good, he implicitly threatened a lawsuit: “A lawyer is engaged to take a case for me. For the same money he seats me in his office, talks to me just as pleasantly and works for me just as hard before the courts as for a white client. Why should the railroads be an exception to these rules?”

Hinting at the possibility of boycotts, he wrote that African American men were unlikely to subject themselves, their wives, and their daughters to degrading treatment on railroads. Racial segregation was an “unjust practice toward the negro,” he concluded. Discrimination could be morally and legally permissible, but only so long as it was “made on the ground of dress and behavior” rather than on the category of race. Here, again, Washington’s strong ethical objections are couched in terms of economics, “a purely business standpoint.” “Regardless of the opinions of wild theorists,” he continued, “the negro and the white man are to remain in the South side by side. Under God I believe we can do so without these jars in our business relations. We can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand for maintaining the right.”

If Washington’s most famous sentence expressed his true normative commitments then we should expect him to have used the hand metaphor time and again after Atlanta, but he never did. In Up from Slavery, he included it as part of the official transcript of the speech, a condition of his contract, but, on the whole, he abandoned the ambiguous image. He probably did not give as much thought to the image of a hand as he gave to that of a ship. He was redirecting Grady’s suggestive symbol of affectionate and thankful white hands grasping loyal and unstained black hands in a compact to rebuild the South. But Washington overplayed his own hand.

On May 18, 1896, a year after Washington’s Atlanta address, the United States Supreme Court, in a seven-to-one decision in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson, upheld the constitutionality of segregation.

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Booker T. Washington, Letter to the Editor of the Montgomery Advertiser, April 24, 1885, BTWP, 2: 270.
108 Ibid., 271.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 272.
of racial segregation—the doctrine that came to be known as “separate but equal.” In 1903, Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, reinterpreted Washington’s separate but equal fingers as normatively endorsing racial segregation. But, as we saw, Du Bois later admitted that Washington did not endorse racial segregation. Had he done so, Du Bois would have never said that Washington’s Atlanta speech “was a word _fitly_ spoken,” a word carefully chosen to effect the right emotion for the given occasion.\(^{112}\)

Washington vehemently opposed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. In an article published on June 16, 1896, he outlined his three primary objections, the first being that the law was fundamentally unjust because “Nature has given both [races] their color.”\(^{113}\) “If the Supreme Court can say that it is lawful to compel all persons with black skins to ride in one car, and all with white skins to ride in another, why cannot the courts go further and decide that all men with bald heads must ride in one car and all with red hair in another. Nature is responsible for all these conditions.”\(^{114}\) The wrongness of the policy arose from its basing public accommodation on a morally arbitrary fact such as race. His second point granted that even if the idea of separate and equal was consistent with justice the fact was that the accommodations African Americans received were “not equal.” (Washington, like many in the black nationalist tradition, stressed unequal treatment rather than segregation.)\(^{115}\) Thirdly, he concluded that the decision rendered whites immoral and the nation unjust: “No race can wrong another race simply because it has the power to do so, without being permanently injured in morals, and its ideas of justice.”\(^{116}\) Here, Washington reminded whites that injuring African Americans harm their own characters. Assuming the absence of empathy, he appealed to their moral self-interest.

### 2.4 Shadow and Act

Although Washington spoke more honestly to northern audiences than he did to southern ones, even with them he was neither completely candid nor openly defiant. Among the constraints on

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112 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear. (Proverbs 25: 11–12).

113 Washington, Letter to the Editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, 272.


116 Washington, “Who is Permanently Hurt?”
him was the emergence in the 1890s of print journalism as a dominant force in American public life. The decade saw a ten-fold increase in newspapers, the birth of mass-market magazines, and an upsurge in sales of low-cost and paperback books, due to a combination of rising literacy rates, the availability of cheap paper, an increase in advertising, and the 1879 Postal Act. For the first time publishers could reach a national audience. On one hand, this new medium made it possible for Washington to rise to prominence throughout the country, but, on the other hand, its wide spread meant that his words spoken to northern audiences would reach even the most remote corners of the South and thus unmask him.

The press was not the only constraint of Washington. In order to avoid damage to his reputation as a spokesperson trusted by African Americans and many whites Washington dared not breach southern norms of civility and manners. And, as president of Tuskegee Institute, any missteps on his part would reflect badly on the institution he helped found.

One of the obligations of his position at Tuskegee was raising money, which required flattering, or at least not alienating, donors. As Andrew Carnegie would tell an audience at Tuskegee Institute in 1906, “Money may be the root of all evil in some sense, but it is also the root of all Universities, Colleges, Churches, and libraries scattered thru the land.” Whenever Washington boarded a train for the North, his primary goal was to raise money for African American education in the South. African Americans and liberal whites in the North hoped to hear him boldly criticize the South, but he needed to moderate his words to not put off potential donors, whose interests lay more in finding solutions to practical problems than in rabble-rousing.

Three speeches he delivered in the North illustrate how he managed these conflicting demands. The first, and the one in which he spoke most frankly, was delivered in Boston on January 27, 1890, to a private audience limited to members of the Women’s New England Club. That the event was closed most likely influenced his boldness; other speeches from the same year are more measured.

Washington began with describing the actual conditions of black life in the American South, bolstering his portrait with labor, educational, literacy, and religious statistics. The evidence he summoned made it unmistakably clear that most African Americans in the rural South were destitute, illiterate, denied access to public education for their children, and living on the edge of

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117 The 1879 Postal Act created four classes of domestic mail. It also lowered the cost of mailing periodicals as second-class mail and, in essence, helped fuel the exposition of magazines. David Paul Nord, Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and their Readers (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2001), 175–284.

118 Carnegie Address at Tuskegee University on April 5, 1906. Quoted in Louis R. Harlan, The Wizard of Tuskegee, 139.

119 The club’s secretary wrote to Washington that the “rules of the Club forbid reporting & we endeavor to have this particular rule thoroughly enforced. I think therefore that you will be able to speak freely; but, of course, the members of the Club are likely to repeat to outsiders anything they hear. They will refrain from this, however, if you request them to, I presume.” Letter from L. M. Peabody to Booker T. Washington, December 17, 1889, Cont. 1, Washington Papers, Library of Congress.
He then made explicit a fact that, as we shall see, he left implicit seven years later at the dedication of the Robert Shaw Gould memorial in Boston: that unions in the North excluded African Americans. “Let a negro mechanic enter a northern factory as a laborer,” he said, “and if the negro remains, the factory will break up.”

Washington spoke freely of the realities of political oppression: “Now as to the wrongs growing out of prejudice. You see in the newspapers that the negro 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.” He added, “Southern white people in private conversation do not attempt to hide the fact that they regularly and systematically resort to means to nullify the colored vote—that they are resolved in every case where the colored man vote is large enough to have a controlling influence in an election, to see that the colored vote is not counted.” The North, he said, was partly to blame for this state of affairs; by failing to see the promise of emancipation through to its full realization it had abandoned its civic and moral obligation to black citizens.

Washington lifted his mask that night, scolding the audience for being deceived by Henry Grady and other apologists for white supremacy. Reading Washington’s 1895 Atlanta speech now, one could easily conclude, as so many have, that he admired Grady and saw him as a collaborator for justice, but in truth Washington despised Grady and his southern bourgeoisie, hated the Bourbons, and dreaded the agrarian radicals. Here is what he said to the Women’s New England Club about Grady and his New South:

[The] Negro is completely at the mercy of the white man in the state courts. The eloquent Mr. Grady disposes of this whole subject in this well sounded sentence: “And in every court,” says he “the negro criminal strikes the colored juror from the panel that the white man may judge his case.” It would have been the simple truth, if Mr. Grady had said that in the whole of Georgia & Alabama, and other Southern states not a negro juror is allowed to sit in the jury box in state courts. And while on that subject Mr. Grady might have added even at the risk of spoiling his rhetoric, the information 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. These are but a few examples of his eloquence.

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121 Ibid., 30.
122 Ibid., 28.
123 Ibid., 27.
124 Ibid., 29.
versus the facts. If time would admit an analysis of Mr. Grady’s speech I would reveal other equally untrue statements.\textsuperscript{125}

Maybe it was the fact that Grady had died on December 23 that Washington tried to censor his pen once, only to write another damming sentence. In Atlanta, Washington aligned himself with Grady for the purposes of expediency.

The tragedy of black politics in the Jim Crow South was that Grady’s approach was the least reprehensible of the options available to Washington if he were going to find a way to align with white southerners. Even if Washington did not directly stand up to Grady, he did make some attempts to make his differences with him public. In 1887, soon after he received Grady’s letter stating that southern blacks were “worthy to be taken in loving grasp by every man who honors loyalty and devotion,” Washington asked T. Thomas Fortune—his good friend and radical journalist in New York—to publish it in order to hold Grady to his word. Fortune wrote back to Washington, “I thank you very much for sending me the letter. I shall make it the basis of an editorial review of the Southern problem, and Mr. Grady in particular. Yes, it commits him, and you are correct in saying we should clinch the matter.”\textsuperscript{126} The following year, Fortune agreed to write an introduction to Washington’s book, \textit{Black Belt Diamonds}. That May he asked Washington to read it because the editor worried that the comparison he had drawn between Washington and Grady seemed “calculated to provoke antagonism among Southern white men.”\textsuperscript{127} What Fortune had written was that the South had produced only two men of national reputation since the war: Grady and Washington. Grady “represented the white South” and the “corner-stone” of his faith was “that ‘the supremacy of the white race of the South must be maintained forever, and the domination of the Negro race resisted at all points and at all hazards, because the white race is the superior race.’”\textsuperscript{128} In June, Fortune thanked Washington for letting the comparison stand:

I am delighted at your estimate of the Introduction. I was conscious that it had plenty of masculinity, and from the business point I thought it would do good in the South by provoking the white papers to take notice of your broad humanity and Americanism as compared with Grady’s brutality and narrow Americanism. \textit{It is no concern of mine that he suffers by comparison with you.} It is for us to give our men their proper place \textit{in books}. I am not afraid to do it. Let the struck fellow

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\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 29.
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yell if he wants to.\textsuperscript{129}

The next example of Washington juggling donor interests and neo-abolitionist enthusiasm in the North was his speech at the unveiling of the monument to Robert Gould Shaw and Massachusetts 54\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, the first group of African Americans to fight in the Civil War. This event was public, and Washington’s words would be read in newspapers through the country.\textsuperscript{130} Finding the right way to commemorate the black regiment was not easy for Washington or for the philosopher William James, the only other speaker who was not a government official. James wrote to Washington that he was rather worried about the event, and Washington admitted that he, too, has seen it as quite a “trial,” one that has caused him some “nervous strain.”\textsuperscript{131} James, who thought an occasion like this should be like “a good ensemble,” that its parts should be in harmony, asked Washington to share his speech so that he, James, could pen a harmonious piece.\textsuperscript{132} He worried his emphasis on “civic virtues above military courage” might simply repeat what Washington’s says.\textsuperscript{133}

James wrote to Washington, in advance of the event, that he felt compelled by the organizers to direct his remarks to “the donors” who financed the monument. To satisfy this request he decided to recount the regiment’s history, but not yield to Republican nostalgia.\textsuperscript{134} “My words are as ‘abolitionist’ in tone as anyone can desire. I feel also as if it were no longer necessary to keep flourishing the old conventional sentimentalisms about the war,” James wrote, “and I have tried to shape the thing towards a sort of mugwump conclusion—mugwump in the sense that daily civic virtues which save countries from getting into civil war are more precious to the world than the martial ones that save them after they get in.”\textsuperscript{135} He refused to prostrate at the altar of the past. The occasion, he wrote, called for diplomacy—because “with tact a bitter pill may be sugar coated.”\textsuperscript{136} Both men had to find delicate words to deliver a stern warning that racism threatens the very principles the troops fought for. “My idea had been that your discourse would be largely one on political morality and possibly on the future relations of the two races in our midst,” James wrote.\textsuperscript{137} Even so, Washington was the man in the more delicate position. Still, the day before they were to speak, James wrote to Washington, “It is you whom we all


\textsuperscript{130} Colonel Shaw had commanded the famous 54\textsuperscript{th} Massachusetts Infantry Regiment.

\textsuperscript{131} Letter from Booker T. Washington to William James, April 14, 1897, \textit{BTWP}, 4: 270.


\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
count on to save the country!”  

Two years after the Atlanta speech, the pressure on Washington was tremendous. Since the end of the war, northerners had been placing commemoration of the past above commitment to the future, seeking to liberate themselves from the solemn duty they owed those whom the 54th Regiment had fought to emancipate. Washington cleverly used the sentiment of the event to remind the white members of the audience of the debt they had been avoiding: “To you who fought so valiantly in the ranks, the scarred and scattered remnant of the 54th regiment, who with empty sleeve and wanting leg, have honored this occasion with your presence, to you, your commander is not dead. Though Boston erected no monument and history recorded no story, in you and the loyal race which you represent, Robert Gould Shaw would have a monument which time could not wear away.” He extolled Shaw to draw moral attention to the sacrifices of African Americans, not by invoking devoted slaves and tender tears, but by calling forth the image of black soldiers whose “baptism in blood and fire” provided “an example of the highest patriotism.” Northerners, he told the audience, were substituting a psychological balm for practical politics.

The occasion afforded Washington an opportunity to criticize both the North and the South for failing to treat African Americans fairly, especially in domains of education and labor. He said the war brought slavery to an end but the experience of bondage continued. Washington maintained that slavery had profoundly shaped American institutions, ideals, and norms. “That which was 300 years being woven into the warp and woof of our democratic institutions could not be effaced by a single battle, as magnificent as was that battle; that which for three centuries had bound master and slave, yea, North and South, to a body of death, could not be blotted out by four years or war, could not be atoned for by shot and sword, nor by blood and tears.” He implored northerners not to substitute military triumph for moral achievement. A monument could not blot out the stain of slavery.

Washington addressed the fact that African Americans remained fettered. The war emancipated them “from physical slavery” but a much “higher and deeper sense” of freedom still lay out of sight. To truly honor the events at Fort Wagner, the average white person must stop “withholding from his black brother any opportunity which he himself would possess . . . Until that time comes this monument stands for effort, not victory complete.” The goal now, Washington said, should be to “make a dependent man an independent man,” and the best way to achieve it was to provide African Americans with public education and economic opportunities. In speaking this way, Washington was guardedly hurling an accusation of moral hypocrisy at northern whites who, while railing against sharecropping in the South, were excluding African Americans from labor unions from Cambridge to Chicago; who, while protesting the lack of

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139 This and all subsequent references to the speech are from: A Speech at the Unveiling of the Robert Gould Shaw Monument, May 31, 1897, BTWP, 4: 286–88.

140 Ibid.
schools in the South, were segregating their own schools; and who were fooling themselves into thinking that racial progress was having former slaves make their dinners and shine their shoes. Liberal northerners had been highlighting the sins of southerners—which were many—while blinding themselves to their own moral lies and social evils.

But Washington also needed northerners to write him a check. “It is all very well to appeal to the head when you want to convince,” Caroline H. Pemberton wrote to Washington, “but to draw money out of pockets,” she added, “you must aim at the heart.” Given that northern whites were reluctant to recognize their moral obligations to African Americans in the North and South, Washington had approach potential donors delicately. He said, an “occasion like this is too great, too sacred for mere individual eulogy” and then asked northerners to pay homage to the past by confronting the problem of racial inequality in the present. The current fight, he said, should continue “not with rifle and bayonet, but on the field of peace, in the battle of industry, in the struggle for good government, in the lifting up of the lowest to the fullest opportunities.” Although he could not allow himself to say so outright, songs of victory would ring hollow until that fight was won.

The third example of Washington’s way of handling his role as both a fund raiser and as a spokesman for equality, was the speech he gave in Chicago in October 1898 at the National Peace Jubilee, which was held to celebrate Spain’s defeat in the Spanish-American War. In that short war, which lasted only from April to August, the U.S. gained its first colonies: Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam. Among the attendees were President McKinley and members of his cabinet. The celebration of military victory afforded the whites in the audience reconciliation and alignment nationwide.

What was really at stake in Chicago was racial justice, the topic of Washington’s speech. To attempt to heal fratricidal wounds, Americans had been sentimentalizing the Civil War instead of working toward justice and citizenship. The next two decades proved Washington to have been right about racial equality being mortally at risk. In 1913, Woodrow Wilson, still gloating from racially segregating the federal government, presided over fifty-three thousand veterans, every one of them white, reconciling at Gettysburg, the most hollowed ground in American history, where the Union earned its greatest victory and Lincoln spoke his immortal words. On that day it became, and in many ways remains a shrine to the Confederacy and a desecration of the memory of Lincoln, Sumner, and Douglass. The old adage that northerners won the war

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141 Letter from Caroline H. Pemberton to Booker T. Washington, March 30, 1897, BTWP, 4: 268. Pemberton might be the most forgotten feminist and socialist in American history. Her reform writings and novels on race are rare among white liberal reformers of the day in describing African Americans as complex moral and political actors. Her two novels are exceptional in this regard: Your Little Brother James (New York: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1896) and Stephen the Black (New York: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1899). And in 1900 she penned one of the most scathing attacks on lynching in America: “The Barbarism of Civilization,” Arena Quarterly (January, 1900).


143 Ibid., 8–10.
but southerners won the peace is true, that is, the region replaced slavery with Jim Crow laws, keeping much of the oppression of African Americans in place.

All those displays of conciliation and erasure must have exhausted Washington’s seemingly boundless patience, because when he, the former slave, stood before the northern audience in Chicago his words were blunt and daring. He began by recounting the pivotal role of blacks in the struggle for American freedom, from the Revolutionary War to the Battle of New Orleans, the Civil War, and the recently concluded Spanish-American War. “When a few months ago, the safety and honor of the Republic were threatened by a foreign foe, when the wail and anguish of the oppressed from a distant isle reached his ears,” Washington said, “we find the Negro forgetting his wrongs, forgetting the laws and customs that discriminate against him in his own country, and again we find our black citizens choosing the better part.” Then Washington redirected the focus away from racial reconciliation among whites and towards racial justice:

All this is well, it is magnificent. But there remains one other victory for Americans to win—a victory as far-reaching and important as any that has occupied our army and navy. We have succeeded in every conflict, except the effort to conquer ourselves in blotting out racial prejudice . . . Until we conquer ourselves, I make no empty statement when I say that we shall have, especially in the Southern part of our country, a cancer gnawing at the heart of the Republic, that shall one day prove as dangerous as an attack from an army without or within.

His speech was a plea to whites to not surrender the fight for true emancipation. He even went so far as to suggest that white supremacists in the South were malignant enemies of the body politic, a point that infuriated the South. It is clear that he knew the nation was headed in that direction.

Even though local newspapers in Chicago covered Washington’s speech, southern newspapers picked it up. Editorials in southern newspapers called Washington a hypocrite, a traitor, and a coward for attacking southerners when he was speaking in the relative safety of the North. His personal secretary, Emmett J. Scott, wrote to him that “many are watching with concern and interest to see how you will meet this adverse comment,”144 and that it would be “unseemly to enter into a series of denials.”145 In response to the South’s condemnation of his speech, he published an open letter in the Mississippi newspaper, the *Birmingham Age Herald*, on November 10. The *Age Herald* was somewhat partial to him, was circulated widely, and, most important, was read regularly in Tuskegee and neighboring towns. He insisted that his statements in Chicago were consistent with those he made in Atlanta in 1895. “In Chicago I

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145 Ibid.

Jagmohan, Chapter 2, *Dark Virtues*
made the same plea that I did in a portion of my address at the opening of the Atlanta Exposition, for the blotting out of race prejudice in ‘commercial and civic relations.’ What is termed social recognition is a question I never discuss.”

“I thought it [Peace Jubilee] an opportune time to ask for blotting out of racial prejudice as far as possible in ‘business and civil relations.’” The increasingly national press made the constraints southern public opinion placed on black leaders living in the region national restraints. After Chicago, Washington seldom spoke so candidly about white supremacy. His public speeches often stayed within the guardrails of Atlanta. He did speak more frankly behind closed doors.

### 2.5 Conclusion: Persecution and Evasion

To get by and to get on, the subjugated tends to stand with hat in hand, eyes downcast, and placing every word on trial. Washington, to maintain his university, appealed for northern philanthropic support, inspired African Americans to attend, and allayed southern whites’ fears of black progress, which required a mixture of duty, hope, and fear in equal parts. Soon, his sentences, like his spine, curved under the weight of his compromise. If a text—a speech, article, or book—is a political act, as many of us believe, and domination induces reticence or slipperiness, as we know it does, then why do we assume that calculated silence and studied duplicity are solely the stuff of face-to-face interactions, everyday speech? What holds for speaking must also hold for writing. Washington was not free of domination or dependency when he sat at his desk to write. There, he crafted a durable mask made of written arguments, metaphors, and images, not wood, bronze, or brass.

In his 1911 autobiography, *My Larger Education*, Washington wrote with unusual candor. He recalled the pitfalls that await a black leader in the South. Read carefully, his remarks can sharpen our judgment of his words. He began by implying that surface appearances may conceal more than they reveal. Washington then described three groups that could assist or encumber African American improvement: First were African Americans, who had completely lost “their place in the politics” and, discouraged and disheartened, feared they were being “drawn back into slavery.” Washington thought the views of northern whites and those of southern whites were “deeply tinged with racial and sectional feelings.” The second group, then, comprised of whites in the North, who were divided as to how best to support African Americans in the South but united in their aversion to future conflict with the region. Third were southern whites and...

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147 Ibid., 508–09.


149 Ibid., 11.

most of them opposed any form of African American progress.\textsuperscript{151} But African American advancement required winning the "sympathy and support" of New South whites.\textsuperscript{152}

Though social and class interests divided whites in the South, they were nonetheless united in their belief that the color line should hold.\textsuperscript{153} As we saw, none of the three classes questioned the assumption of black racial inferiority. Washington, weighing the balance of interest and power, decided that neither moral appeals nor denunciations would stem the tide of political disenfranchisement.\textsuperscript{154} He instead, tried to exploit their divisions in the interest of African Americans: to extract greater job opportunities and funding for public education from New South supporters who needed to advertise the South as having a moderately educated, or at least literate, population ready to work in their factories, mills, and shipping centers.

The crucial point, then, is that the post-Reconstruction South moderated Washington’s public voice. Retreat of northerners and the institutional structures of federalism and democratic localism, taken together, placed black southerners at the electoral mercy of southern whites, who controlled every locale and lever of government, including, police, taxation, and distribution. As early as 1884 Washington had argued that African American “elevation” required the support of southern whites because they “control government and own the property.”\textsuperscript{155} Only in keeping in mind the fault lines that fractured southern whites internally as well as kept them apart do we see the enormous challenge Washington confronted in Atlanta and the rhetorical virtues necessary to survive that trial.

Washington later admitted that he soon found himself “at the angle where these opposing forces met.”\textsuperscript{156} And, at the same time, he “was likely to be opposed or criticised at some point by each of these parties. On the other hand,” he said, “I saw just as clearly that in order to succeed I must in some way secure the support and sympathy of each of them.”\textsuperscript{157} But they “looked with such different eyes and from such widely different points of view” on the question of African American uplift.\textsuperscript{158} Listen to how he brings his discussion to a conclusion.

In order to gain consideration from these three classes for what I was trying to do

I have had to enter sympathetically into the three different points of view

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{154} In Chapter 4, I show that he responded by mobilizing a two-front struggle: (1) coalitional politics, appealing to more moderate whites to rise above narrow self-interests, and (2) a legal strategy of bringing cases against Jim Crow laws. Both strategies were carried out in secret.
\textsuperscript{156} Washington, \textit{My Larger Education}, 12.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 13.

Jagmohan, Chapter 2, \textit{Dark Virtues}
entertained by those three classes; I have had to consider in detail how the work that I was trying to do was going to affect the interests of all three. To do this, as at the same time continue to deal frankly and honestly with each class, has been indeed a difficult and at times a puzzling task . . . but, looking back on it all after a quarter of a century, I can see that is has been worth what it cost.  

It is important that we don’t confuse the rhetoric in his text with the rhetoric of his text. To speak or act in the name of a people is always to wear a mask, to assume a persona, as Cicero and Hobbes have taught us. So in order to avoid shocking or offending his readers, from allies to enemies, he had to dissimulate about his own use of deception. His most candid public remarks were still caged and therefore whitewashed as much as they revealed.

In 1911, as the preeminent black leader, Washington could not concede his own use of evasive speech. His anxious efforts to convince his readers of his truth-telling discloses that he worried about eroding the faith whites had placed in him. Why else use the word frank or frankness nineteen times, honest or honesty eleven times, and sincere or sincerity ten times to describe himself? These terms rarely appear in his earlier work. “The temptation which presented itself to me in my dealings with these three classes of peoples was to show each group the side of the subject that it would be most willing to look at, and, at the same time,” he wrote, “to keep silent about those matters in regard to which they were likely to differ with me.” He swore, forty times, that he never “yielded to this temptation” because he dreaded being “found out” and thus losing his capacity to do “anything of lasting value for [his] own people.” Washington regularly concealed from public view his true commitments. “He had no faith in white people, not the slightest, and he was most popular among them,” Du Bois recalled in the twilight of his life, “because if he was talking with a white man he sat there and found out what the white man wanted him to say, and then as soon as possible he said it.” Deep social structures grounded Du Bois’s ability to speak clearly and frankly. Washington had little faith in white people because they had once owned him. And he was reminded, daily, of what happens when you cross a white person in the rural South. Freedom did not unchain his tongue or unshackle his eyes.

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159 Ibid., 27.
163 Ibid.