Booker T. Washington and his dictatorial Tuskegee Machine were challenged in 1901 by William Monroe Trotter, who founded the Boston Guardian in that year. However, Trotter and the other Negro Radicals were almost completely unsuccessful in placing their case before the nation until they were able to persuade W. E. B. Du Bois to become their leader. The Boston Riot of July, 1903, was the incident which finally brought Du Bois into active affiliation with the Radicals. The present paper will treat the background of this leadership struggle as well as the Boston Riot itself.

The Boston Guardian accused Booker T. Washington of fathering a system of caste education,1 and Trotter charged that the Negro professional class had lost status because of the Tuskegeean's Southern surrender.2 The Guardian editor asked:3

To what end will your vaulting ambition hurl itself? Does not the fear of future hate and execration, does not the sacred rights and hopes of a suffering race, in no wise move you? The colored people see and understand you; they know that you have marked their very freedom for destruction, and yet, they endure you almost without mur-

Trotter also termed Washington a political boss who masked his machine by pretending to be an educator.4 He resented the Tuskegeean's connections with President Roosevelt, because the apostle of industrial education, according to the editor, opposed Negro participation in politics. Trotter also criticized the Tuskegeean for trusting the President, who had acted equivocally on the lily-white question.5 Furthermore, the Guardian editor accused Washington of being instrumental in the appointment of a lily-white Republican to replace a lily-white Democrat as Collector of Internal Revenue in Alabama, and the journalist implied that a cash reward was expected for that political chore.6

Besides editing the Guardian, Trotter was the “spearhead of sentiment” of the Boston Radicals,7 a group of Negroes who had graduated from various New England colleges. By the early part of 1903, the lines of battle were becoming more sharply drawn, and Trotter demanded that a man support the Washingtonians or the Radicals. He was particularly desirous of wooing Du Bois into the Radical camp, since the latter's academic achievements impressed educated Negroes.

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1Boston Guardian, September 6, 1902. September 20, 1902.
2Boston Guardian, November 1, 1902.
3Boston Guardian, September 6, 1902. September 20, 1902.
4Boston Guardian, November 1, 1902. November 6, 1902.
6Boston Guardian, November 15, 1902.
7Worthy, op. cit., p. 53.
According to Kelly Miller, Trotter was sensitive to the charges of the Washingtonians that his position was visionary, and the Guardian editor was determined to set up an organizational structure to attract wider support for social action projects. Miller contended that Trotter was aware of his own oratorical shortcomings and began to cast about for a man of showy faculties who could stand before the people as leader of his cause. He wove a subtle net about W. E. B. Du Bois, the brilliant writer and scholar, and gradually weaned him from his erstwhile friendship for Mr. Washington, so as to exploit his prominence and splendid powers in behalf of the hostile forces.

Actually, it need not be hypothesized that Trotter hatched a cunning plot to secure Du Bois’ assistance or that Du Bois had become his unwitting tool. By 1902, Du Bois, while not “in absolute opposition” to Washington,10 had moved closer ideologically to the Boston journalist. The Atlanta professor’s redefinitions essentially resulted from his increasing disenchantment with the Tuskegeean’s methods and platforms. Du Bois could only have responded with wrath to a typical Washingtonian statement of that year:11 “One thousand bushels of potatoes produced by the hands of an educated Negro are worth more in solving our problems than dozens of orations or tons of newspaper articles.” Nevertheless, the Atlanta University sociology professor refused to be actively and publicly anti-Washingtonian, not only because he did not disagree with the Tuskegeean’s Negro nationalism and self-help themes, but also because he believed that as a social scientist, he should be removed from the tumult of a leadership struggle. According to Maude Trotter Stewart, her brother was very frustrated when he discovered that Du Bois was “just not strong in wanting to fight.”12

Du Bois, worried about the growing cleavage between the advocates of college education and industrial training, hoped “to minimize the breach”13 by inviting Booker Washington to attend the Atlanta University Conference on the Negro Artisan in 1902. Washington accepted, but his speech must have been offensive to the sociology professor, since he emphasized the superfluity of college education which left men unprepared for the “fundamental . . . wealth producing occupations.”14

There is further evidence of Du Bois’ uneasiness about the Tuskegeean. About this time, Du Bois considered the possibility of an explicit division of labor between Atlanta University (for empirical research) and Hampton Institute (for practical applications). He suggested that the General Education Board (and undoubtedly Booker T. Washington) be approached to support the plan, but he was hesitant and wondered if he would have independence and “freedom” under such an arrangement.15 He was also contacted by Booker Washington’s friends, who

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3Boston Guardian, November 1, 1902.
6W. E. B. Du Bois, untitled manuscript, circa. 1902: Du Bois Papers. (I wish to thank Dr. Francis Broderick of Phillips-Exeter School, who shared his transcriptions of the Du Bois Papers. Dr. Broderick was able to examine some of Du Bois’ material before the Negro leader closed the files to scholars.)
tried to persuade him to transfer to Hampton and become the editor of a new Negro periodical. Nothing came of this overture since Du Bois demanded the right to establish editorial policy and served notice that he would not be controlled by the "Tuskegee philosophy." Other backers of Washington sought to convince the Atlanta professor that he had a bright future at Tuskegee Institute, and he had a few unsatisfactory meetings on the subject with the school's founder, whom he found to be taciturn and probably "suspicious."

In September of 1902, Du Bois attacked ideas to which Booker T. Washington obviously subscribed, but the Tuskegeean was not directly named. The Atlanta professor was sharply critical of those who discouraged a liberal arts education for Negroes. He considered that the exclusive preoccupation with industrial education was futile, and he reaffirmed that the only effective foundation was higher education, since "progress in human affairs is more often a pull than a push, a surging forward of the exceptional man, and the lifting of his duller brethren." Trotter was so delighted with Du Bois' article, that he used it as the basis of an editorial in the Guardian, which was entitled, "Two Negro Writers, But How Different." He made a stinging comparison between a selfish, unoriginal, and thoroughly unenlightened Washington; and a brilliant and resourceful Du Bois, whose contribution Trotter adjudged "beyond all praise, with one or two exceptions it is without a doubt the very best thing that has been said by a Negro on the question of Negro education in America." Continuing in his extravagance, and seeming all the more profuse because of his contrasting treatment of Booker T. Washington, Trotter heralded the essay as a fresh breeze for American Negroes, and "a sufficient vindication for Negro higher training that one of its votaries could produce such a work of art."

We do not know Du Bois' reaction to this fulsome editorial, but it would have been understandable if he was overjoyed by such a reception, especially in view of the mounting atmosphere of distrust and condemnation between him and the Washingtonians. Perhaps such red-carpeting by the Boston Radicals enabled him to make his break with Booker T. Washington more easily. Within a few months, in January of 1903, Trotter wrote a front page article announcing that Du Bois would shortly speak in Boston at a program sponsored by the Boston Literary Association. The following week, Trotter reported that Du Bois had been given an "ovation" and that "the presence of this educated Negro must have won over everyone present to the positive advocacy of the higher education for the race, though Prof. Du Bois said nothing of that subject."

During the spring of 1903, Du Bois published Souls of Black Folk, a book which James Weldon Johnson described as having had "a greater effect upon and within the Negro race in America than any other single book published in this country since Uncle Tom's Cabin." There is no doubt that the chapter, "Of Mr. Booker Washington and Others," created an intellectual and emotional flutter.

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"Ibid., pp. 78-79.

Boston Guardian, September 6, 1902.
"James Weldon Johnson, Along This Way (New York, 1933), p. 203.
ter for many, and Johnson credited this analysis of racial leadership with effecting "a coalescence of the more radical elements and [it] made them articulate, thereby creating a split of the race into two contending camps . . ." 21 Mathews, one of Booker T. Washington's biographers, agreed that this essay was a crucial factor in furnishing "the anti-Washington movement, for the first time, with a coherent argument." 22 William Ferris, a contemporary Negro observer, contended that Du Bois' volume became the "political bible" of the educated segment of the race and that Du Bois was almost immortalized as the "long-looked-for political Messiah." 23 Actually, the evidence seems to indicate that although the Radicals thrived on Du Bois' book, the Atlanta professor—several months before the Boston Riot—still did not take an active leadership role in the promotion of a formal organization and continued "to occupy middle ground." 24

Whatever Du Bois' desires, Souls of Black Folk completely alienated him from the Tuskegeesans, and a perusal of the contents of the chapter, "Of Mr. Booker Washington and Others," will disclose the reasons quickly. Essentially, he said nothing that he had not stated before. This time, however, he explicitly indicted Washington. It seemed to Du Bois that Booker Washington arose primarily as a compromiser between the North and South, and that his ideology "practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro[es]." 25 Du Bois observed that within the last years, his race had become disfranchised and suffered egregious losses in civil status, as well as in the support of its institutions of higher education. While the Atlanta professor admitted that these deprivations were not the direct consequences of the Tuskegeeans' teachings, he did hold Washington accountable for their acceleration, because the Negro leader had made an economic bargain with the South, wherein these needs were made unimportant, at least temporarily. Du Bois argued that the race could not forge ahead without the attainment of these very objectives which had been surrendered. He did not deny the importance of pacifying the South, but he refused to pay Washington's price which he interpreted as degradation and virtual slavery. Du Bois acknowledged that the Tuskegee had lobbied to prevent the Negroes' disfranchisement, but he charged that the leader had also condoned the ever-tightening Southern caste system. He proposed several "supplementary truths" to Washington's "dangerous half-truth" that the Negroes bore the major responsibility for remedying their problems: Slavery and race prejudice were important causes of the low status of the race; an adequate Negro educational system depended on the training of teachers by the colleges; and self-help required more effective encouragement by affluent whites. The Atlanta University professor advised disaffection from "part of the work of [the Negroes'] greatest leader." 26

After Souls of Black Folk, the Tuskegee-dominated press embarked upon a campaign to vilify and intimidate the author. For example, the Washington Colored American vigorously urged the President of Atlanta University to silence the

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26 Ibid., pp. 50-59.
sociology professor. The *Outlook*, a white weekly friendly to Booker Washington, portrayed Du Bois as a whining, impractical racial renegade who was "half ashamed of being a negro [sic]."

In July of 1903, Du Bois took another step closer to Trotter, when he made it clear that the Tuskegeean was actually a political boss. He went further than he had in his critique of the preceding spring and unfairly increased Washington's responsibility for the attitudes of the whites in regard to Negroes:

He has so manipulated the forces of a strained political and social situation as to bring about among the factors the greatest consensus of opinion in this country since the Missouri Compromise. Since the last thing Washington wanted to be called was a political colossus, the *Colored American* answered this "covert sneer," and arraigned the Atlanta professor for ignorance of Southern conditions and for an inability to appreciate that the Tuskegeean had served his people, according to the newspaper, without yielding "any manhood rights."

Du Bois was still reluctant to take the active leadership role of marshalling the Radicals in the nation. He did not accompany Trotter to the annual Afro-American Council meetings in Louisville in the summer of 1903. At the sessions, Washington was execrated as a villain who sold his soul, and a free-for-all ensued after the Council passed a resolution endorsing Theodore Roosevelt. Trotter accurately charged that Washington owned the convention, and the *Guardian* editor went down in defeat after he unsuccessfully attempted to substitute an anti-Roosevelt resolution accusing the President of not trying to influence Congress to help the Negroes, and of selecting white Democrats for many political posts, while sending Negro Republicans home empty-handed. The Radicals tried to generate interest for a prompt reconvening of the Council, and Booker Washington commissioned Emmett J. Scott, his private secretary, to persuade Negro newspaper editors to pay no attention to such pleas.

Disappointed and embittered, the Radicals returned to their homes. A rising tide of resistance was evident, especially after Boston Negroes learned that Washington would appear in their city on July 30th at the African Methodist Episcopal Church for a Business League rally. For several months, the Tuskegeean had prudently declined speaking engagements in Boston, the Radical capital, because he wished to avoid the kind of disturbance which finally occurred. Washington's circumspection in this matter only caused Trotter to announce belligerently that the educator would not make a public appearance in Boston because of his cowardice.

The group at the church on that night of July 30th was a large one, because the

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*Washington Colored American, March 21, 1903.*

*Outlook*, 74:214, 1903. The editorial was reprinted by at least one Negro paper and reprinted by many more. See *Portland (Oregon) New Age*, June 13, 1903.


*Washington, Colored American, July 18, 1903. See also Washington, Colored American, August 1, 1903.*
Washingtonians, overzealous in their acceptance of the Radicals' challenge, had made strenuous efforts to publicize the program and had printed a long list of their prominent supporters. (The Guardian reported that a shockingly large number of the men whose names were used had no knowledge of the fact.) Many people came to the church because they heard that "something" was going to happen. W. H. Lewis and T. Thomas Fortune, Washingtonians, addressed the assemblage, and whenever they spoke of their leader, hissing sounds reverberated throughout the room. After the Tuskegeeann was introduced, he was unable to say more than a few words because of the furor, and finally twenty-five policemen were called. When the Negro chieftain proceeded, he unwisely chose to unwind an old anecdote about a mule, and the Trotter men began to fume again. Trotter arose and asked Washington several loaded questions on education and voting.

In view of the fact that you are understood to be unwilling to insist upon the Negro having his every right (both civil and political) would it not be a calamity at this juncture to make you our leader? . . . Is the rope and the torch all the race is to get under your leadership?

The audience by this time was completely out of control. Men were yelling and hissing; simultaneously, some enterprising partisans brought forth "red pepper and stink bombs." Trotter was arrested as the provocateur and became a martyr. His followers conducted sympathy services in Washington, New York, and Chicago.

Du Bois did not have any connection with the fateful skirmish, and he did not arrive in Boston (where he stayed at the Trotter home) until after the disturbance. (Significantly, he had not corresponded with Trotter for some six months prior to the July affair.) His first reaction after hearing about the uprising was a feeling of exasperation—and then anger—at Trotter's impetuosity. To say the least, he considered that the Boston editor had made it awkward for him to remain as a houseguest. However, after he made his own investigation of the situation and had an opportunity to engage in several lengthy discussions with Trotter and others, he concluded that the riot had actually been precipitated by a Washington man. He fumed while Trotter was stewing in jail and he wrote a letter (which the Guardian printed) expressing his trust in the editor, whom he regarded as a victim of "petty persecution and dishonest attack." Perhaps it was this published letter which caused some "prominent and influential man" (who turned out to be George Foster Peabody, a supporter of Booker T. Washington) to broadcast the rumor that Du Bois was linked "with Trotter and [the] conspiracy." Actually, the letter may not have been that significant, since Du Bois had already been identified with the Boston Radicals because of his writings and Trotter's public embrace. However, the note did disturb some trustees of Atlanta University, and it was discussed at a meeting of the institution's Executive Committee. President Bumstead main-

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*a*Boston Guardian, August 1, 1903, located in Worthy, op. cit., p. 63.


*c*Ferris, op. cit., p. 371.

*d*Worthy, op. cit., p. 64.

*e*Boston Guardian, August 1, 1903.

*f*Worthy, op. cit., p. 66.

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*g*W. E. B. Du Bois, Crisis 41:134, 1934. See also Dusk of Dawn, pp. 87-88.


tained complete confidence in Du Bois, and the group took no punitive measures against the professor.47

Nevertheless, both the President and the Chaplain of Atlanta University were anxious about the rumor, and comprehending this fact, Du Bois wrote a note to Peabody, affirming that he had absolutely no responsibility for the riot. In frankness, he informed Peabody that he rejected some of Trotter’s policies and prejudices, but he respected his honesty. He asserted that his friend was “far nearer the right” than Booker T. Washington, who was “leading the way backward.”48 This second Du Bois letter was not very pleasing to President Bumstead, who had hoped that Du Bois would have been more conciliatory and simply acknowledged his innocence in the Boston episode. He was unprepared for the professor’s comparison between Washington and Trotter, and he was concerned about the reaction of Mr. Peabody and his friends. When the Executive and Finance Committee of Atlanta University examined a copy of Du Bois’ note, about one-half of the members at the meeting condemned it.49 Bumstead still remained loyal to his friend, but he seemed more conscious than ever that while it was important for a man to be true to himself, it was also imperative that one be “judicious” in handling opponents.46

Booker Washington philosophically described the Boston Riot as inevitable,46 and his friends sought to discredit the Radicals as emotionally unstable, offering the excesses during the affair as proof. The Boston white papers such as the Herald and the Transcript reported the episode and held Trotter responsible. Emmett J. Scott and Washington efficiently dispatched these comments to various Negro newspapers for reprinting.47 Since the clippings in the white and in most of the Negro papers were friendly to Washington, Scott was undoubtedly correct in saying that the Radicals had lost ground.48 Washington went further and wrote to his friends that he was convinced that Trotter and Company had “completely killed themselves” among all elements—Negro and white—in Boston.49 Since Du Bois’ name was omitted from the list of culprits, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Tuskegeean knew that the Atlanta professor was not involved in the fracas and had not fully entered the Trotter orbit. According to Washington’s version, Trotter had been removed from the church “in handcuffs, yelling like a baby.” Actually, the Boston editor enjoyed his martyrdom and spurned an opportunity to avoid incarceration and accept probation. Though locked up, he continued to write for the Guardian, and Ferris stated that he became a more prominent leader in the state of Massachusetts as a result of the jail experience. Kelly Miller expressed the same thought, but added that the jail term made the fanatical editor even more bitter.50

49Booker T. Washington to Whitfield McKinlay, August 3, 1903, found in the Carter Woodson Papers, Library of Congress.
50Kelly Miller, Race Adjustment (New York, 1908, pp. 13-14.
Two weeks after the riot, Washington wrote to President Roosevelt and told him that after a calm analysis (in a "purely unselfish . . . disinterested" light) he felt only pity for the Radicals. In his supposedly unbiased opinion, the Radicals were simply jealous of his good fortune. These men were parasites who had never come up the hard way through "natural and gradual processes." Their present life was therefore "artificial" and they believed that Washington should place the race in a similar "artificial" milieu. (Years later, Washington recalled the night of July 30th and indicted the "intellectuals," who thought that "the world owes them a living." He unbelievably contended that some of these educated men profited so much from protesting, that they would be unhappy if the Negro problem were solved.)

It is difficult to assess how much of Washington's implacable stand toward the opposition was caused by his own jealousy of their college degrees and of their cultural advantages which he did not enjoy until much later in life. How much of his resentment of their demands for independent thinking was due to his psychological uneasiness in dealing with these intelligent (and often brilliant) men, and what proportion of his unyielding attitudes was the result of his guilt feelings, caused by his frustrating silences before the white philanthropists? One also wonders if Washington's antipathy for the Radicals may have stemmed, in part, from the historic social distance between free Negroes and those who, like himself, experienced the slave status. Most of his opponents had forebears who were free for many decades before the Civil War. They had a sense of reverence, perhaps even snobbishness, about their lineage. In Du Bois' own writings about his family, for example, there is an obvious sense of pride in "our free birth."

At any rate, the Washingtonians were determined to have their full measure of revenge, and they continued in their efforts to penalize all of the principals of the Boston Riot. Emmett J. Scott pursued George Washington Forbes, the co-founder of the Guardian and tried to pull strings to have him dismissed from his Boston library job. Another attempt was made in 1903 to hurt the Guardian. Many weeks before the July 30th disturbance, William Pickens, a suspected Washingtonian, delivered an address in Boston on Haitian history, and Trotter said unkind things about him in the newspaper. In the fury after the riot, Washington's attorney visited Pickens and recommended the institution of a libel suit against Trotter. In October, Du Bois dispatched a letter to a friend of Pickens, in an effort to quash the Tuskegee-financed suit. By this time, the case was before the Grand Jury, and Du Bois was advised that an apology by Trotter would pacify Pickens. Du Bois' concern for his friend mounted, since the Guardian had already published such an apology. Although Pickens eventually withdrew the suit, the Atlanta pro-

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fessor knew who was the force behind Pickens.\textsuperscript{a}

In the wake of the Boston Riot, Trotter's imprisonment, and the legal activities against the Boston Guardian, Du Bois increased his emotional commitments to the Radicals. He had painfully observed the power and absolute authority of Booker T. Washington and was filled with disgust and anger. Now he was finally able to overcome his reluctance to assume command of the social movement which was dedicated to the Negros' prompt realization of the way of life defined in the American creed. A few months after the Boston Riot, he was to lead the Radical forces in a fruitless attempt to negotiate an honorable peace with the Tuskegeeans;\textsuperscript{b} and in 1905, he founded the Niagra Movement, which waged an all-out war upon Booker T. Washington and his gradualist approach to race relations.

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