ABSTRACT


By Aaron Noel Pride

In the early twentieth century, William Monroe Trotter used his newspaper to wage an unrelenting crusade against Booker T. Washington and the doctrine of accommodation. Most historians and scholars have focused on integration versus segregation as the foundation of Trotter’s animus toward Washington. This paper examines the religious dimension of the conflict between Trotter and Washington. Their antagonistic relationship developed in the context of their competing views of Christianity in American society. Trotter’s insurgency was connected to the first dissenting voices against submission in the black church. This militant religion toppled Washington’s political machine. After the collapse of Tuskegee, Trotter directed the political forces of militant Christianity toward assailing Jim Crow and the white church.

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Acknowledgements

This research project has been the product of three years of work, countless drafts, and innumerable revisions. My initial interest in Monroe Trotter stemmed from an essay I wrote as an undergraduate at Miami University in a course on the 1920s taught by Kevin Armitage. He suggested I continue investigating Trotter’s life and achievements after I examined the scholarly work on him. After graduation, I continued my education at Miami University at the graduate level.

In this capacity, I was fortunate to be a graduate assistant for both Kevin Armitage and Allan Winkler. Dr. Winkler was my advisor on this thesis-writing project. He provided invaluable advice and guidance in the completion of this paper. Dr. Kevin Armitage and Dr. Andrew Cayton also served as readers on my committee. They provided encouragement and constructive criticism for this project. I am grateful for the support and counsel of my entire committee. I also appreciate the opportunity Miami University has given me to fulfill my potential as a scholar and as a teacher.

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The United States was unsettled in the decades following the tumult of Reconstruction. Uncertainty prevailed as the freedmen optimistically sought liberty and opportunity in a new America. Resentment and hatred festered in the heart of the former Confederacy. As the South found its own way to deal with the former slaves, Jim Crow peonage bound them to poverty, while segregation marked them as subordinate. Political and civil rights fell victim to the wrath of the South. Violence and terrorism routinely interrupted the daily lives of African Americans. Black leaders responded to these developments in a variety of different ways. William Monroe Trotter was one of many black leaders who challenged the Jim Crow regime in the 20th century.

As the Progressive Era got underway, Americans dedicated tremendous energy to reform. Booker T. Washington assumed the reigns of black leadership in the late 19th century and became the preeminent race spokesman. He envisioned African Americans having a subservient role in American society. For Washington, African Americans’ prospects for success depended on their ability to be gentle, forgiving Christian capitalists. But not all African Americans applauded accommodation. Monroe Trotter bitterly opposed the program of the acclaimed master of Tuskegee. He wanted more for his people. Trotter promoted a militant protest-oriented Christianity undaunted by the specter of Jim Crow. He rebuked Woodrow Wilson, 28th President of the United States, for his segregation of Washington, D.C. Unshakable faith in the providence of an integrated world devoid of racial segregation drove Trotter to dismiss the policies of Washington and to condemn the actions of Wilson. Trotter used his talent for stirring controversy to forge an alliance between secular intellectuals and radical clergy. This political force sounded the death knell of Tuskegee and helped mount a campaign against Jim Crow.

William Monroe Trotter was born on April 7, 1872 in Chillicothe, Ohio to James Monroe Trotter and Virginia Isaacs Trotter. Monroe was the eldest child of the Trotter family. His other
two siblings were two younger sisters, Maude and Bessie. The elder Trotter instilled in his son a sense of pride and dignity for himself and his race. James Trotter served in the fifty-fifth voluntary regiment during the Civil War. In the military, he displayed exceptional valor in his duty. He attained the rank of first sergeant, sergeant major, and then second lieutenant. Monroe Trotter grew up in the Hyde Park suburb of Boston and attended Hyde Park High School, graduating as valedictorian and class president. He then enrolled at Harvard University in 1891 and was the first African American to achieve the distinction of being elected to Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year.¹

Intellectual currents of the Gilded Age at the end of the 19th century had a profound impact on Trotter during his formative years. Temperance and prohibition were appealing causes at the turn of the century. At Harvard, Trotter joined the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Wendell Phillips Club and the Prohibition Club. He also organized the Total Abstinence League and served as president. Reverence for Phillips and a strong inclination toward Christianity were important ideals in the early life of Monroe Trotter. In addition to his studies, Trotter attended church regularly.²

The First Baptist Church of Hyde Park, a predominantly white house of worship, welcomed a precocious Trotter every Sunday. His piety and dedication to scripture made the vocation of the ministry appealing. Congregation members thought the young man had potential in the pulpit. His mother strongly urged him to consider an ecclesiastic position, but James Trotter disliked his son's religious disposition. His father’s obstinacy toward a life in the

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² Fox, Guardian, 17.
ministry and the prospect of leading a segregated church forced Trotter to abandon any intention of becoming a clergymen.³

Dismissing aspirations in the ministry, Trotter embraced Christianity without hesitation. He affirmed his faith in a letter to a friend:

I have finally given myself wholly to Christ to be led entirely by God. To abide in Christ is the secret of power and peace, to honor the Son even as I honor the Father. I have laid all, my life, my business, my career, in the hands of Jesus and am to live and move in Him. I now go to work because He wants me to. I chop the wood or empty the ashes because He wants me to. Everything I do in Him.⁴

Committing himself to the service of Christ gave Trotter a new purpose in life. It also gave him solace in the wake of his father’s death from tuberculosis in February of 1892. Christianity drove his activism. Segregation in his eyes was un-American and unchristian. Any leader or politician endorsing segregation faced his wrath. Although he chose the life of a social reformer over that of an evangelist, Christianity left a lasting mark on his personality and his collective worldview.⁵

Trotter graduated magna cum laude in 1895 and acquired his Master’s degree a year later. During his collegiate years, he met Geraldine Louise Pindell, a woman from a similar background. To her suitors, Geraldine was affectionately known as “Deenie.” The Pindell family had a reputation for militancy. Deenie’s uncle, William Pindell, fought to integrate schools in Boston in the 1850s. Geraldine Pindell and William Monroe Trotter wed on June 27, 1899. Later in their marriage, Deenie proved herself an indispensable helpmate. She helped edit her

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⁴ W.M. Trotter to John A. Fairlie, August 18, 1892, RS 15/18/21 box five, folder: 1887-1898, General-N-Z, mostly personal and family letters, John A. Fairlie Papers, University of Illinois Archives, Urbana, Illinois, 8; Fox, Guardian, 15.
⁵ Fox, Guardian, 16.
husband’s newspaper and led several events commemorating the accomplishments of abolitionists in Boston.  

Laboring under the yoke of segregation, Trotter’s possibilities of success in corporate America were slim. Business opportunities were rare. An elite pedigree, a Harvard education and a Phi Beta Kappa key were impotent in confronting Jim Crow. Anguishing over his employment experience, Trotter wrote classmate John A. Fairlie, “I was practically offered a place to teach in Washington, D.C., salary $1000.00 a year to start with, but I desired a business career, and besides the place is too far South and the school a separate one. So I did not take it.” Unable to land an adequate occupation for his credentials, Trotter accepted a job as a clerk for an industrial fair. Business prospects did improve as Trotter finally acquired a job at a real state firm, but segregation blocked his path to riches in the world of commerce.

Early in his life, Trotter ignored politics and questions of race. His opinion on these matters changed with his sobering experience in business and the emergence of Booker T. Washington, who exhorted both African Americans and European Americans to accept the separation of the races for the good of society. In his most famous address, Washington admonished African Americans to ignore questions of social equality and cultivate friendly relations with Southern society. He declared, “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. Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service and in the professions.”

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6 Fox, Guardian, 19-23, 211-212.
7 W.M. Trotter to John A. Fairlie, September 8, 1895, 10; Fox, Guardian, 24.
His rise from the ruins of slavery shaped his approach to politics. Washington never experienced the leisure of liberal education. He spent his youth toiling in the coalmines of West Virginia. His educational goals led him to the Hampton Industrial School. From these humble beginnings, Washington developed a strong sense of self-reliance and accountability. His passion for vocational training led to the creation of the Tuskegee Institute, where he served as principle. His prolific fundraising activities and skillful politicking earned him the moniker of the “wizard of Tuskegee.” In politics, he preached responsibility rather than contempt for white men. His insistence on passive resistance to white domination infuriated men like Monroe Trotter. He perceived Washington’s approval of segregation as an unholy act.  

Washington became the dominant political figure in black America with his address at the opening of the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta on September 18, 1895. His “Atlanta Compromise” outlined the fundamental principles of his political and social platform. He conceded the failure of black Americans in assuming political control of the South during Reconstruction: “Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill.” Washington also endorsed racial segregation. “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.” He dismissed the notion that African Americans should forcefully demand political citizenship and social equality: “The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly.”

11 “Atlanta Compromise,” 224.
12 Ibid., 224.
Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft and Hull House founder Jane Addams applauded the accommodation doctrine espoused by Washington. His social and political philosophy propelled him to unprecedented heights in prestige and influence. Washington was a friend of many wealthy northern philanthropists, including Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. He built an empire through political connections and fiscal resources. He financed several African American newspapers, such as *The Colored Citizen* in Boston. He used his control of the press to suppress any dissent against his policies. Black scholar, W.E.B. Du Bois coined the phrase “Tuskegee Machine” to describe the political resources and informal connections of Booker T. Washington.\(^{13}\)

In black America, many advocates and race leaders agreed with the gradual process of acquiring equality and citizenship. Booker T. Washington’s political stance was the dominant ideology of the early twentieth century. His political acceptance of the necessity of African American subjugation gave him access to financial and political capital. His connections helped many African Americans acquire positions in the federal government. A growing contingent of African American intellectuals, however, openly opposed many ideas associated with Washington’s remedy for racial progress.

Booker T. Washington and Monroe Trotter soon had a falling out. Both exhorted Africans Americans to be exemplars of Christian character. Thrift, moral fortitude, and obedience comprised Washington’s message. Patience in the realm of politics and moral and industrial worth marked the position of the wizard of Tuskegee. Conversely, Trotter believed Christian unity demanded an end to segregation in the United States. Sacrificing material wealth

for the cause of equality and justice informed Trotter’s Christianity. The differing views of Christianity between these two men contributed to their increasingly hostile relationship.

The religious element was crucial in their adversarial connection. An article authored by Washington entitled “The Colored Ministry: Its Defects and Needs” appeared in the *Christian Union* in 1890. It was an unrelenting appraisal of the failures of the black pulpit. Washington asserted that “three-fourths of the Baptist ministers and two-thirds of the Methodists are unfit either mentally or morally, or both, to preach the Gospel to any one or to attempt to lead any one.”¹⁴ He correctly diagnosed some of the problems afflicting the ministry in regards to poor institutional standards and the lack of basic theological qualifications. Yet his commentary had a condescending tone.

Predictably, the first voices of dissent against Tuskegee came from the educated black clergy. Alexander Crummell, a prominent African American Episcopalian minister, Liberian missionary and Black Nationalist founded the American Negro Academy in 1897.¹⁵ He disagreed with the platform of submission and josted with Negrophobes of the South. Dr. J.L. Tucker, a white clergyman from Jackson, Mississippi produced a vitriolic assault on African Americans in the form of a paper presented at the Protestant Episcopal Church Congress. It was entitled, “On the Relations of the Church to the Colored Race.” Later this paper was reproduced as a pamphlet. Crummell read this pamphlet and found it to be “one of the most unjust and injurious statements that [he] had ever met with.”¹⁶ He authored an unequivocal rebuttal to Tucker’s pamphlet with his own essay. One of the many issues of disagreement between

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¹⁶ Ibid., 236-237.
Crummell and Tucker was the role of the church in solving the Negro problem. The ideological debate between Tucker and Crummell continued into the twentieth century.

The famed dialect poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Harvard-educated academic W.E.B. Du Bois, and Howard University sociologist and social critic Kelly Miller were members of the American Negro Academy. The Academy attempted to lead an insurrection against Tuskegee. Crummell implicitly refuted Washington’s assertions in the inaugural address of the American Negro Academy:

> It is not that the Negro does not need the hoe, the plane, the plough, and the anvil. It is the positive affirmation that the Negro needs the light of cultivation; needs it to be thrown in upon all his toil, upon his whole life and its environments. What he needs is civilization. He needs the increase of his higher wants, of his mental and spiritual needs.

Washington responded to this diatribe in the press. Crummell could not turn the public against Tuskegee or sustain the allegiance of the Academy. Crummell died in 1898 and his American Negro Academy faded from prominence, but his rebellion portended difficulties for Washington.

Washington ridiculed initiation into the ministry. He suggested African Americans sought refuge from strenuous fieldwork in the pulpit. He recounted in folk vernacular the conversion of a typical field hand being called to preach, exclaiming, “O Lord, de work is so hard, de cotton is so grassy, and de sun am so hot, I bleave dis darkey am called to preach.” Washington’s disparaging remarks contributed to the growing animus between him and Trotter. His criticisms of the preaching profession and the religious culture of the old South also undermined the legitimacy of the black church as the principle moral authority of the race.

Booker T. Washington worked hard to assume the vacuum in race leadership. He presented himself as the quintessential arbiter of right and wrong. At Tuskegee, administrators,

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17 Ibid., 269.
18 Ibid., 269.
teachers, and students addressed Washington as doctor or professor. Washington, while not a minister, he took on some responsibilities of the ministry. He delivered sermons at the Tuskegee Chapel and claimed to read the Bible daily. He wanted to acquire the mantle of ethical jurist.\textsuperscript{20}

Washington’s tirades against the suspect character of the black masses and the debasing influence of the black clergy had unforeseen consequences. As early as 1900, proponents of segregation usurped Washington’s assertions to justify the Jim Crow system. Baptist minister John Roach Straton argued black Americans’ propensity for crime and immorality demonstrated their unfitness for participation in American society. Racial separation served to protect the Negro and promote his mental and moral development, according to Straton. Southerners parroting these same arguments continued in the twentieth century and served to widen the rift between Washington and Trotter.\textsuperscript{21}

Rag to riches nostalgia and capitalist ambition were the foundations of the platform of Booker T. Washington. Proving their worth to American civilization through moral fitness and entrepreneurial zeal, he believed, guaranteed African Americans access to full citizenship. “We shall make the task easier for you by acquiring property, habits of thrift, economy, intelligence and character, by each making himself of individual worth in his own community,” Washington promised.\textsuperscript{22} He envisioned material accumulation paving the way toward spiritual restoration and moral rejuvenation: “This coupled with our material prosperity, will bring into our beloved South a new heaven and a new earth.”\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} Moses, \textit{Black Messiahs}, 93.
\textsuperscript{23} Washington, “Atlanta Exposition Address,” 805.
Chapter 1: Challenging the Covenant of Tuskegee; the Militant Apostasy of William Monroe Trotter and the Boston *Guardian*

Dissatisfied with the placid apolitical stance of Booker T. Washington, Monroe Trotter decided to enter the world of race politics. He perceived it as a necessary choice. There were four principle reasons the Harvard graduate began a career in agitation. First, the spread of Southern values and the worsening condition of race relations, coupled with the excessively conciliatory attitude of Booker T. Washington, was important. Second, Trotter endured the denial of the opportunity to enter the ministry and his misfortune in fiscal affairs because of segregation bothered him. Third, from his father, the younger Trotter inherited an indomitable fortitude and a strong affinity for the plight of African Americans. Fourth, from his teenage years, Trotter had an intense devotion to Christianity and this association fueled his enmity toward segregation. His Christian conscience had a powerful effect on his activism.  

The religious dimension of his activism was important. But practical considerations led Trotter to consider newspaper work as a way of challenging the status quo. George Forbes, an assistant librarian at the West End branch of the Boston Public Library disagreed with the policies of Booker T. Washington. Drawing on his own experience as a newspaper editor, he suggested a periodical be established to oppose the black leader. In 1901, Trotter and Forbes founded the *Guardian*. The newspaper became the voice of uncompromising northern militancy. “We Northern Negroes are not going to sit supinely by and let the whites put their feet on our necks,” Trotter declared.  

The *Guardian* was published every Saturday. The newspaper carried national news about African Americans and covered local news in Boston. A plethora of caricatures and cartoons appeared regularly in the pages of the *Guardian*. Many of these

24 Fox, *Guardian*, 27.
depictions were exaggerations of Booker T. Washington as Pope Washington, the black boss, and a race traitor.  

Trotter felt that his life of comfort in Boston was worthless unless racism and segregation ended: “The conviction grew upon me that pursuit of business, money, civic or literary position was like building a house upon the sands, if race prejudice and persecution and public discrimination for mere color was to spread up from the South and result in a fixed caste of color.” Trotter’s ideas from their inception set him apart from the gradualism of Washington. Trotter explicitly stated his argument for agitation: “I plunged in to contend for full equality in all things governmental, political, civil and judicial, as far as race, creed, or color was concerned. I opposed all compromise, whether advocated by Professor Booker T. Washington or President William Howard Taft.” Trotter felt segregation was incompatible with the democratic process and the Christian spirit.  

Imprinted on the editorial page of the Guardian were the words “For Every Right With All Thy Might.” This phrase was the motto of the paper. It embodied the fundamental principles of the editor’s personality. Adoration for Christ and an unflinching resolve for agitating for political and electoral rights for African Americans were the foundations of his consciousness. The first half of this phrase referred to the collective political and constitutional rights of African Americans. Trotter wrote in the Guardian describing the meaning of the phrase “every right.” One of several questions Trotter hoped to some time ask Booker T. Washington stated the following:

26 Fox, Guardian, 29-30; Boston Guardian, August 1, 1903, 1.
28 Boston Guardian, July 26, 1902, 4; Bennett, Pioneers in Protest, 225.
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?\textsuperscript{29}

Clearly, Trotter thought the term “every right” encompassed all the privileges associated with political citizenship and civil society. “For every right” in Trotter’s view underscored his commitment to agitating for full unmitigated political and civil rights for African Americans.

The second half of the motto of the \textit{Guardian} had a strong resemblance to Biblical scripture. As a devout Christian, Trotter undoubtedly had a familiarity with the Bible. Trotter considered scriptural knowledge a necessity of life. He wrote, “I also read God’s word more than I used to. We must know it to be useful.”\textsuperscript{30} “With all thy might” seemed to be a phrase borrowed from a Biblical verse in Deuteronomy. The passage was the fifth verse of the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy: “And thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”\textsuperscript{31} “For every right with all thy might” represented divinely inspired militancy. This was the foundation of Trotter’s activism. He found a reforming spirit in Christian theology. As with many social reformers of the Progressive era, it galvanized him.

Trotter’s vision of Booker T. Washington as a demonic purveyor of segregation evolved in the pages of the \textit{Guardian}. A reporter for the \textit{Guardian} described graphically and critically Washington’s countenance and demeanor at a speech in Boston in 1902:

His features were harsh in the extreme. His vastleonine jaws into which vast mastiff-like rows of teeth were set clinched together like a vice. His forehead shot up to a great cone; his chin was massive and square; his eyes were dull and absolutely characterless, and with a glance that would leave you uneasy and restless during the night if you had failed to report to the police such a man around before you went to bed.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29} Fox, \textit{Guardian}, 50.
\textsuperscript{30} W.M. Trotter to John A. Fairlie, August 18, 1892, 12.
\textsuperscript{32} Fox, \textit{Guardian}, 39.
Reports like this portrayed Washington as a carnal figure from Biblical revelation. This depiction epitomized Trotter’s view of the founder of the Tuskegee Institute. Deception and cunning defined Washington’s personality. His swarthy methods belied his suspect moral character, according to Trotter. As a devout Baptist, Trotter saw ridding the world of segregation and its defenders as a sacred mission.

In the Guardian, satanic appellations were common. A reader of the Guardian complained that the newspaper had not adequately covered a speech by Washington. In response to this criticism, Trotter published an editorial, “Giving the devil his due.” The editorial was a summary of Washington’s speech and statistics from a conference in New York discussing the value of education for African Americans. At this meeting, Washington submitted questions to 136 leading Southern men on topics related to education. The questions were as follows:

Has education made the Negro a more useful citizen?
Answer-yes, 121; no, 4; unanswered, 11.

Has it made him more economical and more inclined to acquire wealth?
Answer-yes, 98; no, 14; unanswered, 24.

Does it make him a more valuable workman, especially where skill and thought are required?
Answer-yes, 132; no, 2; unanswered, 2.

Has education improved the morals of the black race?
Answer-yes, 97; no, 20; unanswered, 19.

Is it, as a rule, the ignorant or the educated who commit crime?
Answer-ignorant, 115; educated, 3; unanswered, 18.

Does crime grow less as education increases among the colored people?
Answer-yes, 102; no, 19; unanswered, 15.

Is the moral growth of the Negro equal to his mental growth?
Answer-yes, 55; no, 46; unanswered, 35.33

These answers challenged the apostle of industrial training. Trotter ridiculed the wizard of Tuskegee retorting, “Has not Mr. Washington been put on the defensive even as to his line of industrial education?” Characterizing Washington as a demon revealed the depth of Monroe Trotter’s aversion to segregation and accommodation.

A more fundamental disagreement between Trotter and Washington arose over the importance of secular values in society. Strict adherence to the attainment of wealth dominated Washington’s oratory: “The type of minister who heretofore has spent his time in traveling one community to another, without a home of his own, without a bank account, without financial credit, will more and more lose his influence as a leader.” In an address before the National Negro Baptist Convention, Washington denounced impoverished churches saying, “A poverty-stricken church usually means a weak minister.” Secular goals permeated his speeches and lectures.

 Seeking greater influence in the professional ranks, Washington formed the National Negro Business League in 1900. He demanded members of his business league avoid political agitation. “The business league is composed of men who will not enter other Negro organizations, political or social, men who are conservative and not inclined to make much of political or social ambitions for the race.” Washington built his political empire through wealth accumulation and monetary favors. His philosophy encouraged African Americans to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, without regard to religious influences.

Monroe Trotter was the polar opposite of Booker T. Washington. Trotter despised moneyed men and the pursuit of wealth. Monopoly and extravagance enraged the intrepid

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34 Boston Guardian, March 5, 1904, 4.
35 Boston Guardian, August 13, 1904, 1.
36 Washington, Selected Speeches, 156.
37 Fox, Guardian, 42.
38 Boston Guardian, August 13, 1904, 1.
Boston journalist. Reporting a Supreme Court ruling against a railroad conglomerate, Trotter gleefully wrote, “It was truly the decree of upright men and just judges, who love their country more than money and who fear nothing except to do or [sic] suffer injustice.” Civil and moral law had to prohibit the influence of monetary gain. Sacrifice rather than opulence defined the social Christianity of Monroe Trotter.

Slave religion dominated plantation life before emancipation. It was an escapist philosophy. Enslaved individuals accepted the ills of the human universe in return for spiritual salvation. Yet Monroe Trotter and Booker T. Washington both pushed the black masses to embrace a pragmatic religion. This outlook was concerned with the state of human affairs. This faith appealed to the reforming spirit of the Progressive era because it sought to improve humanity and make society better. Even so, Trotter and Washington had fundamentally different visions of faith. Economic pragmatism was the cornerstone of Washington’s doctrine, while Christian equality sustained Trotter’s platform. These philosophical differences reflected the conflict between the two major ideological trends of turn of the century America. The Social Gospel and the Gospel of Wealth doctrines dominated American society in the Progressive era.

For practitioners of the gospel of wealth, God’s hand dispensed the dollar bill. Nineteenth century America lionized “captains of industry” like J.P. Morgan and Cornelius Vanderbilt. Their rise from the doldrums of society to the zenith of abundance and affluence were affirmations of the egalitarian promise of American civilization. The public adored these business tycoons. Horatio Alger’s mesmerizing novels of climbing the social latter of American society enthralled audiences. Born in 1856, Booker T. Washington was immersed in this environment. The gospel of wealth was the intellectual bedrock of his civilizing mission in the

black community. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute imitated the structure of a corporation. Character, Christianity, and capitalism were the ingredients necessary for transforming the black race into American citizens.41

The *fin de siècle* financial calamities of economic depression in the 1890s extinguished the public’s reverence for the titans of commerce. The social gospel was in vogue as a new century of American life dawned. Suspicion and contempt for the captains of industry abounded. No longer were these businessmen merely benevolent forces working in concert with society’s aims. They were “robber barons,” unceasingly undermining the groundwork of society and bending the law to serve their selfish interests. Ordinary people needed to communicate with the government to restrain the greed of the robber barons. Progressive reformers formed a vanguard of civic-minded activists to alert the public to the abuses of corrupt capitalists. Journalists and politicians like Lincoln Steffens and Robert La Follette led the movement toward government reform and social justice. These “muckrakers” exposed the ethical shortcomings of the business elite, who routinely flouted every canon of moral decency in pursuit of the almighty dollar. In the press, the muckrakers used hyperbolic description and gritty candor to inform the public. Monroe Trotter belonged to this class of American reformers. He used his newspaper to launch his assault on Tuskegee and fight for social equality. His feud with Booker T. Washington over religiosity was part of their divergent ideological orientations.42

Washington sought to change the spiritual orientation of African Americans. He retreated away from the emotional and spiritual fervor of otherworldly religion. Otherworldly faith was a relic of the plantation life of the slave.

From the nature of things, all through slavery it was life in the future world that was emphasised in religious teaching rather than life in this world. In his religious meetings in ante-bellum days the Negro was prevented from discussing many points of practical religion which related to this world; and the white minister, who was his spiritual guide, found it more convenient to talk about heaven than earth, so very naturally that to-day in his religious meeting it is the Negro’s feelings, which are worked upon mostly, and it is description of the glories of heaven that occupy most of the time of his sermon.

For Washington, naive spirituality was an obstacle to practical achievement. Building wealth and stability in American society was his concern. In his mind, labor and prudence were the tools for unearthing the benefits of capitalism and strengthening black entrepreneurship.

Washington promoted a pragmatic approach to race relations. Black Americans needed to develop character to gain equality in white civilization. Washington idolized western civilization and culture. He viewed slavery as a step toward assimilation into American society.

I know that only a few centuries ago in this country we went into slavery pagans: we came out Christians; we went into slavery pieces of property: we came out American citizens; we went into slavery without a language: we came out speaking the proud Anglo-Saxon tongue; we went into slavery with the slave chains clanking about our wrists: we came out with the American ballot in our hands.”

Washington sought to move African Americans into a closer association with American values.

Monroe Trotter admonished African Americans to assail the moral deficiencies of American civilization. Trotter thought the experience of black Americans in the slave institution imbued them with a keen moral compass. Black Americans witnessed firsthand the atrocities of

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43 Fullinwider, *The Mind and Mood of Black America*, 27.
44 Ibid., 27.
46 Washington, *Selected Speeches*, 64.
the slave trade. They had the right to pass judgment on the ethical stature of the United States. Trotter likened the suffering of black slaves to Jesus Christ and the Uncle Tom figure of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The *Guardian* reported, “The character of Uncle Tom [was] the truest personification of Christ in Anglo-Saxon literature.”47 Both Christ and Uncle Tom lived meager lives and endured persecution. Their refusal to indulge in excess elevated their moral integrity. Unlike Washington’s mantra of character building through monetary gain, Trotter’s moral sensibilities resonated with abandoning material wealth and the decadent lifestyle. His views were diametrically opposed to Washington. The black populace needed to confront white society’s moral lapse in race justice in Trotter’s mind.

It was only natural for Monroe Trotter to upbraid the headmaster of Tuskegee as a false prophet. His money and influence allowed him to manipulate the public, but Trotter saw this as a significant foil. He wrote, “Does he begin to understand what his special charm as an orator has been all these years of extraordinary popularity? Can he now, dare he, put his hand on the secret of his marvelous success as a money getter?”48 Trotter further insulted Washington for his duplicity as race leader:

> No man can serve God and Mammon at the same time. If it is God then it is not Mammon, and if Mammon then it is not God. It is the same with the two races in this country. No orator can please the Negro and the white people of the country at the same time on the race question.49

Comparing Washington to Mammon harkened back to a biblical allusion in a passage in the book of Matthew. Mammon in this context meant avarice. The wizard of Tuskegee gained fiscal reward as the voice of black America, but acquired an addiction to power and money. The editor of the *Guardian* thought Washington’s reliance on monetary funds diminished his

47 *Boston Guardian*, November 9, 1907, 5.
48 *Boston Guardian*, March 5, 1904, 4.
49 Ibid., 4.
commitment to the betterment of African Americans. For Trotter, wealth served to compete with dedication to Christian values. While Washington amassed fame and fortune, Monroe Trotter abandoned the material comforts of the world.

For Trotter, Washington was a charlatan peddling a theology of industrialism. “Washington was not satisfied with attacking the schooling, the political and social aspiration of his race, but now directs the deadly virus of his malignity against our religious aspiration also,” trumpeted the *Guardian*. The *Guardian* editor saw deceit and guile behind the veil of Tuskegee: “He has obtained money by his crocodile tears here in the North and opened a little Jim Crow Theological school at Tuskegee” and proclaimed, “I teach the Negro an industrialized religion, too.” Worst of all in Trotter’s estimation was Washington’s manipulation of the ministry: “Wherever he sees opposition to his methods springing up in a community he tries to save the day by inviting some prominent divine in that community to go lecture at that Tuskegee theological sideshow. Thus he finds it necessary to use the very ones he attacks as advertising mediums for his scheme.” Revealing his profound adoration of the ministry, Trotter wrote, “The colored ministers from the very nature of things can have but small and insignificant compensation for service . . . though his compensation is paltry . . . the minister wields a mighty influence with the race.” In many ways, the life of Monroe Trotter mirrored his description of the colored ministry.

Trotter abandoned the pursuit of riches and cast his lot with the downtrodden. The haggard crusader had experienced true democracy at Harvard, but felt many of his brethren never enjoyed these benefits in American society. “I realized that the democracy which I had enjoyed at dear old Harvard was not secure for Americans of color, just because of their pigmentation. It

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50 Boston *Guardian*, September 13, 1902, 4.
51 Ibid., 4.
would mean that, however native and to the manner born, every colored American would be really a civil outcast, forever an alien, in the public life.”

Everything and everyone in the life of the *Guardian* editor bore the load of his war against segregation and disenfranchisement. He sold all his properties and mortgaged his house to save the *Guardian* from bankruptcy. The editor spent his entire life lampooning Booker T. Washington for being a puppet of white philanthropists. Trotter increasingly saw himself as an advocate for his people rather than a business entrepreneur. In a letter to friends soliciting aid, Trotter stated, “the *Guardian* is really a philanthropic enterprise.” In his mind, he was not a mere journalist, but a champion of the people and a Christian crusader: “My vocation has been to wage a crusade against lynching, disenfranchisement, peonage, public segregation, injustice, denial of service in public places for color, in war time and in peace.” At times, Trotter’s insistence on serving the community hurt the business side of his newspaper. He never had a knack for being an effective organizer and never accepted compromise. His family and newspaper survived in penury. At one time, he had been a better businessman, but his immersion in church affairs undermined his efforts. His impoverished existence gave him a sense of moral superiority over Booker T. Washington.

Nurturing society through Christian morality emboldened social reformers. Progressive journalists like Monroe Trotter admonished the public to move American civilization past race prejudice and discrimination. Environment was a pivotal factor in the development of productive citizens. Conversely, habitual exposure to the sinister elements of the human experience ruined

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52 Harrison, “Trotter-fighter,” 240.
55 W.M. Trotter to John A. Fairlie, August 18, 1892, 7.
potentially valuable members of the community. Jim Crow undermined Christian ethics in the United States.

Black intellectuals of the 19th century emphasized the historical accomplishments of black Americans. They argued against the immutable condition of the race by asserting the importance of the social environment, the historical accomplishments of black Americans and noting the unchristian character of Southern society. The concepts were prominent in the activism of Monroe Trotter. These ideas meshed with the social theories of the progressive era and refuted the assertions of racist demagogues, who claimed race was a permanent condition.56

Trotter acknowledged the importance of the social environment in America. He wrote, “In the natural world, each kind reproduces after its kind . . . Like begets like. Such is the law of nature in the natural world.” Moreover, Trotter related the failings of the physical world to challenges to moral solidarity: “Like begets like in the moral world also, each seed, good or bad reproduces in this world likenesses after its kind. Men do not expect to receive love and confidence where hate and fear are planted.”57 The rise of Jim Crow eroded the moral fiber of the United States in Trotter’s eyes:

For love and confidence, spring only out of love and confidence, and hate and fear can yield in return only hate and fear. The South can change the constitution of the nation where the Negro is concerned. It cannot change the constitution of nature where he is concerned. All powerful to change the laws of the land, it is powerless to change the laws of human nature in the slightest particular.58

Segregation as social network ensured the flowering of racial tension. Trotter predicted dire consequences for the South if it neglected the race issue: “If God is God and the devil is the devil,

56 Fullinwider, The Mind and Mood of Black America, 5.
57 Boston Guardian, March 5, 1904, 4.
58 Ibid., 4.
what men plant that shall they surely gather. As the South is sowing the storm, the whirlwind it must some day reap.”


Harry C. Smith, publisher of the Cleveland Gazette, and T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the New York Age, founded the Afro-American League as a protest organization in 1890. The organization met yearly and discussed issues of civil and political rights for African Americans. The rise of Washington changed the political agenda of the Afro-American League. It assumed a new name and a new political direction. As the Afro-American Council, leading African American clergy and journalists embraced the philosophy of Tuskegee in the 1890s. Fortune guided the Afro-American Council in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He accepted Washington’s position on race relations. Anti-lynching activist, Ida B. Wells attempted to move the council toward political agitation, but the hold of Washington on the group prevailed. Silence on political participation and the spread of lynching became the basic tenets of the political orientation of the Afro-American Council.

59 Ibid., 4.
Unmatched in his antipathy toward segregation, Monroe Trotter attempted to subvert Washington’s influence on the Afro-American Council. Trotter felt that African Americans needed a national organization to agitate for political rights. He wanted to transform the Afro-American Council into such an organization. Witnessing this organization being proselytized into the doctrine of accommodation disappointed Trotter.

In his own newspaper, Trotter decried the ineptitude of the Afro-American Council in criticizing the policies of Theodore Roosevelt’s administration. In particular, he castigated the lack of African American appointments to federal offices in the South: “The silence of the Afro-American Council at its national meeting at St. Paul on President Roosevelt’s policy of appointments to office in the South is one of the most culpable derelictions of that body.” Trotter continued, “This policy has been a flagrant fault of the new administration and the race looked to this organization as practically the only national organization it had which was formed to guard its political interests [and] to voice its protests against this ignoring of the Negro in appointments.” Trotter went on to criticize the American political system for its treatment of African Americans: “The right to hold office is a part of the right to vote and the suffrage without it is weak indeed. The Southerners have robbed the Negro of his right to vote. They have done this in open violation of the constitution. The Negro has a right to expect that the national government in the hands of the Republicans, of that party to which the Negro has been loyal at every cost will take positive steps to enforce the constitution and restore to the Negro his rights.” The need for a national campaign for political rights and crusading against Jim Crow energized Trotter.

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62 Boston Guardian, July 26, 1902, 4.
63 Ibid., 4.
In 1903, the Council was firmly under the control of Washington and Fortune. Trotter and his Boston colleagues planned a coup at the Louisville convention of the organization. Trotter wanted to give the Council a more radical platform. He sought a resolution condemning Roosevelt’s record of black appointments in the South. His plans for the association met with the full force of the Tuskegee Machine, which expelled the Trotterites from the Louisville convention and ostracized them in the press. Washington addressed the delegates to exuberant applause. The Louisville conference proved to be a setback for Trotter, but in the coming months, he reaped a terrible revenge on his foe.\(^\text{64}\)

Trotter was continually angered and frustrated by the inability of his efforts to damage the public perception of Washington as the sole voice of the race. He wanted to destroy Washington’s stranglehold on black politics. Trotter needed to discover a way to inform the public of his objections to Washington. The perfect opportunity for a public demonstration against Washington and his ideology arrived when the National Negro Business League invited Washington to Boston to speak at the Columbus Avenue African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. This action was a political maneuver by Washington. The wizard of Tuskegee wanted to quell any voices disagreeing with his philosophy, but he woefully underestimated the cunning and resolve of the opposition in Boston.\(^\text{65}\)

Driven by revulsion for segregation, Trotter went to exceptional means to destroy the public image of Booker T. Washington. Refusing to shy away from the public eye, Trotter staged a bold confrontation with Washington on the night of July 30, 1903. When Washington came to Boston to address an audience at the Columbus Avenue A.M.E. Zion Church, Trotter and his colleagues planned to present several questions to Washington. These questions focused on

\(^{64}\) Fox, Guardian, 48; Harlan, Washington 1901-1915, 43.
\(^{65}\) Fox, Guardian, 49.
Washington’s statements about segregation and his leadership style. One question read, “Don’t you know you would help the race more by exposing the new form of slavery just outside the gates of Tuskegee than by preaching submission?”

Granville Martin, an African American butler, George Forbes, Trotter, and several Boston radicals hoped to grill Washington about his racial philosophy. They were attempting to discredit the famed orator by using his own words against him. The event began with an opening prayer by Reverend James H. McMullen. William H. Lewis, a former radical who came under the influence of Washington after the latter secured him a lucrative position in the federal government, offered the first remarks. The crowd from the start was hostile toward Washington’s views. The assembly hissed and heckled the herald of Tuskegee. At this juncture, Lewis told the crowd, “If there are any geese in the audience, they are privileged to retire.” He warned that the continued disruption would result in arrest. These remarks did not quell the raucous crowd. Lewis proceeded to introduce T. Thomas Fortune.

Fortune offered laudatory comments about Washington and remarked on the debacle in Louisville. He stated, “I took the Boston delegates to the Louisville convention . . . and virtually spanked them across my knee.” Granville Martin and George Forbes objected to these remarks. Forbes took the comments as a personal insult and demanded an apology. Fortune reiterated that he was not referring to Forbes. Martin attempted to make his way to the podium to present his questions. Fortune refused to allow Martin the floor. William Lewis instructed the police in attendance to escort Martin out of the church. Police officers detained Martin and removed him from the church.

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66 Ibid., 50.
67 Ibid., 51.
68 Harlan, Washington 1901-1915, 45; Fox, Guardian, 51.
Fortune attempted to resume his speech, but someone threw cayenne peppers on the stage, causing him and others to begin sneezing and coughing. After some difficulty, Fortune completed his speech. A momentary calm pervaded the church as Harry Burleigh sang and Charles Everett Brown, a Boston lawyer supportive of Tuskegee spoke. Then, Lewis attempted to introduce Booker T. Washington, but a melee broke out in the church. From the rear of the church an anonymous patron howled, “We don’t want to hear you Booker Washington.” Martin reappeared in the church, but the police immediately apprehended him. At this point, Trotter attempted to read his questions for Washington on a chair, but in the anarchy, no one could hear him. Dr. Samuel Courtney, an associate of Booker T. Washington, yelled, “Throw Trotter out the window!” Trotter and his sister, Maude, were arrested and hauled off to jail. Maude was suspected of stabbing a police officer with a hatpin, but the charge was later dismissed. Monroe Trotter was indicted for disturbing the peace.  

During the chaos, Bernard Charles, an anti-Washington protester, and a police officer were stabbed. There is no evidence suggesting Trotter and his colleagues planned these violent incidents. Nevertheless, the national press immediately began describing the events of the night of July 30, 1903 as the “Boston Riot.” Varying accounts of the incident appeared in countless newspapers across the country. Most commentators attributed the violence and political demonstration to Trotter. 

After being bailed out of jail, Trotter explained his actions in the *Boston Globe*. “The cause of the riot at the colored Methodist church was due to the absurd ruling of the chairman, W.H. Lewis, when he said that any one who hissed or manifested objection to the speaker of the evening, or who demanded the right to ask him to explain some of his previous statements

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70 Fox, *Guardian*, 52.
favoring disfranchisement, and discriminating in Jim Crow cars, would be subject to arrest.”71
Publicly challenging the accommodation platform threatened the social and political legitimacy of Booker T. Washington’s leadership of the race. The “Boston Riot” stunned the public because for the first time Anglo-Americans were aware of some disfavor with Booker T. Washington in the African American community. In the aftermath of the media frenzy over the Boston riot, Washington and his colleagues were apoplectic.

In the Guardian, Trotter reported the incident with the headline “Booker Washington speaks under a cordon of police; his hirelings protect him from the consequences of facing his own previous statements—attempt to deny free speech foiled.”72 Trotter published the questions for Washington. One read, “Again you say, black men must distinguish between the freedom that is forced and the freedom that is the result of struggle and self-sacrifice. Do you mean that the Negro should expect less from his freedom than the white man from his?”73 People could read the questions even if they were never asked in person.

Ever since that fateful day in 1892, Monroe Trotter had moved unwaveringly with divine inspiration. His career and business slowly succumbed to the demands of agitation. Now the nation scorned his name. The Boston Riot soiled his reputation and threatened his freedom. Yet these events vindicated his faith. “The cause for which I am contending is for me a sacred one, and therefore I am desirous of having it known that it is a man of good repute who was willing to be arrested for this cause,” Trotter declared.74 He believed so passionately in the righteousness of

72 Boston Guardian, August 1, 1903, 1.
73 Ibid., 1; Fox, Guardian, 50.
his cause that he willfully accepted the consequences of breaking the law. Religious militancy and political agitation was a singular entity in Trotter’s mind.

Washington employed all of his substantial resources to prosecute Martin and Trotter. At this time, Trotter’s wife Geraldine assumed the responsibilities of editing the Guardian. Trotter sent letters to friends enlisting their support for his defense and sought funds for his newspaper from jail. During Trotter’s incarceration, W.E.B. Du Bois was a houseguest of the Trotters. Du Bois did not publicly denounce Washington until Trotter persuaded him to do so. Trotter was found guilty of disorderly conduct, but he appealed the verdict. At the second trial, he was once again found guilty and served thirty days in jail. But his misfortune paled against that afflicting Booker T. Washington, for now the opposition was beginning to jell.75

Washington saw the uprising in Boston as a personal challenge to his authority. He undertook a covert campaign of espionage against Monroe Trotter and his allies. Emmett J. Scott, Washington’s personal secretary, anonymously wrote a press release datelined Boston. The report claimed, “Trotter had become insane in his opposition to Washington” and that “the plan to break up the meeting was deliberately precipitated, and was of the coarsest, most vulgar sort, such as is employed everywhere by the hoodlum.” Remarking on the men backing Trotter, the press release stated that these men “have more brains, if no more character than he.” Washington’s loyal subjects blacklisted and harassed the friends of the Guardian. They sent spies to radical meetings and brought frivolous lawsuits against the newspaper.76

In the muckraking tradition, Trotter proved to be a skillful investigative reporter. The Boston editor published several reports detailing the ownership shares of the New York Age belonging to Washington. Under the headline, “Trotter smoked him out,” the article stated, “The

75 Fox, Guardian, 56.
76 Harlan, Washington 1901-1915, 47.
Boston Guardian, though not always convincing, yet entertaining takes the New York Age to task and proceeds to show the public who owns the controlling interest in the N.Y. Age.77 This report referenced the admission of the former editor of the New York Age, T. Thomas Fortune that during his tenure with the newspaper, Booker T. Washington owned the majority of the paper’s stock. Fortune abandoned Tuskegee in protest to Washington’s support of the Republican Party and Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt suggested African Americans undertake industrial education to avoid being lynched. The public was not aware of the influence Washington wielded in the press. Trotter sought to bring this sort of political power to the public eye and counter the smear campaign of Tuskegee.78

A final attempt toward reconciliation between Washington and the radicals took place in 1904. Washington called a conference to ease tensions between the warring factions. The conference voted to establish a “committee of Safety with twelve members.” This body was created to “unify and bring into cooperation the action of the various organizations.”79 Du Bois undertook the task of making a list of delegates for the committee, but Washington consistently favored leaders hospitable to his cause rather than radicals like Monroe Trotter. Washington’s friend Andrew Carnegie was the major sponsor of the conference. Du Bois soon resigned his position and severed ties with Washington over his insistence on membership on the committee of safety. The radical factions still wanted to create an organizational base for their activities and establish a national network of opposition against social inequality and political disenfranchisement. This sentiment led to a conference in New York in 1905.

Trotter played a major role in rallying the militant forces. He lured W.E.B. Du Bois to the radical cause and tapped the militant religious undercurrent moving against Tuskegee. His efforts

77 Boston Guardian, January 18, 1908, 4.
78 Mark R. Schneider, Boston Confronts Jim Crow 1890-1920 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 70.
79 Harlan, Washington 1901-1915, 73.
ultimately ended the reign of Booker T. Washington as the unquestioned voice of the race. Unable to contain the public criticism of the *Guardian*, the position of Tuskegee slowly crumbled. As Washington’s influence waned, Trotter shifted his attention to national politics. The tidal wave of militancy unleashed by the Boston Riot took aim at the acolytes of Jim Crow.
Chapter 2: Assailing the minions of Jim Crow; Confronting Presidents, Politicians and the Clergy

After battling the Tuskegee regime, Trotter turned to the larger political world. One illustration in the *Guardian* particularly reflected Trotter’s attitude toward the South and the politics of the day. It also illustrated the religious dimension of the *Guardian* editor’s objections to Jim Crow. This caricature depicted a cross with the faces of notable politicians of the South like James K. Vardaman of Mississippi and Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina. It also showed Baptist minister Thomas Dixon Jr. and Tom Watson, an apostle of white supremacy, on the cross. A donkey head symbolizing the Democratic Party punctuated the vertical column of the cross. Republican President, Theodore Roosevelt’s visage appeared in the center of the cross. A Latin inscription hovered above the cross, “Dii Penates” meaning household gods. This description was an invocation of the agents and institutions of race prejudice and discrimination. At the bottom of this illustration were the words “The Modern Cyrenian’s Cross or the Black Man’s Burden.”

The Cyrenian cross was a reference to a Biblical account of an exhausted Jesus unable to bear the load of the cross. Simon of Cyrène was forced to carry the cross to the site of crucifixion. In this context, the image juxtaposed the suffering of Christ with the experience of African Americans living in the Jim Crow era. It also satirized the abandonment of African American civil and political rights by the Republican Party. The burden of African Americans was Jim Crow segregation. Monroe Trotter resolved to fight inequality and disenfranchisement emanating from Jim Crow. He fought several United States Presidents, political demagogues, and

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ecclesiastical authorities supporting the Jim Crow system. The first president Trotter took on in the *Guardian* was Theodore Roosevelt.\(^{81}\)

![Figure 1: Cyrenian Cross, Boston *Guardian* July 27, 1907, 4.](image)

In 1904, Trotter supported the Republican presidential candidate, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt captured the presidency for a second consecutive term in 1904, but racial antagonism cast a dark shadow over the administration. Early in 1904, Roosevelt found himself in an untenable position with Southern opinion. In Indianola, Mississippi, Minnie Cox, an African American woman held the position of postmistress at the local post office. This development infuriated the white populace of Indianola. Whites demanded the President dismiss Cox and appoint an appropriate replacement.

Initially, Roosevelt refused to cave to Southern pressure. Monroe Trotter applauded his actions, but his praise was short lived. T. R. succumbed to the vociferous demands of the Southern community and replaced Cox with a white man after the post office remained closed for months because of the public outrage. Roosevelt did make a minor concession to Cox. He obliged her request that her successor be a white man who supported her during this unfortunate

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\(^{81}\) Boston *Guardian*, July 27, 1907, 4.
affair. Roosevelt had previously transgressed Southern custom in 1901 by inviting Booker T. Washington to the White House for dinner. A political firestorm ensued. His reluctance in the Indianola incident was perhaps a reflection of past experience. His gesture to Washington and his record of minor black appointments in the federal government softened criticism from the black press.  

An editorial appearing in the *Guardian* expressed disappointment with the President. Trotter wrote, “We feel humiliated and sadly disappointed in President Roosevelt. We know he sometimes goes against us, but we gave him the credit of standing by his guns when once he decided upon a manly policy. We feel constrained to take back much we said for him.”  

The editor of the *Guardian* began disagreeing with Roosevelt’s policies because of his reluctance to confront race prejudice and discrimination. The dismissal of Minnie Cox frayed the bond between the Republican Party and African Americans.

Trotter took on Southern politicians as well as T.R. They lambasted African Americans for criminal behavior and sexual depravity. Lynch mobs maimed black citizens. State legislatures worked vigorously to disenfranchise the black citizenry. Abandoning the cause of black liberation exposed the moral flaws of American society. Ignoring the routine brutality African Americans endured in the South only insured this barbarity’s existence in the next generation. For the editor of the *Guardian*, the moral conundrum of racial caste sustained a failed model of society. Jim Crow existed in opposition to the pillars of Christianity. It infused white men with a self-destructive vice, while branding the black race as deviant.

Trotter could be incisive in his critiques. He had vivid targets. James K. Vardaman, governor of Mississippi, argued African Americans lacked mental acuity and were incapable of

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83 Boston *Guardian*, January 30, 1904, 4.
living in a free society: “As a race the negro is deteriorating morally every day. Time has demonstrated that he is more criminal as a free man than as a slave, that he is increasing in criminality with frightful rapidity, being one-third more criminal in 1890 than he was in 1880.” Vardaman buttressed these assertions with what he claimed was accurate statistical data: “The minimum illiteracy among the negroes is found in New England where it is 21.7 percent. The maximum was found in the black belt-Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina-where it is 07.5 percent.” Reliance on infallible scientific facts and numerical representation informed the public in the early twentieth century.84

Responding to these assertions, Trotter declared, “I feel that all such statements about Negroses coming from white southerners ought to be ignored by the nation. No credence should be given by northern newspapers to the charges of a man as uneducated and uninformed, as narrow, and as provincial, as unchristian and brutal, as is Gov Vardaman.” Continuing to counter the harangue of Vardaman, Trotter commented on ethical maturity: “Had slavery given its victims moral perfection, there would still have been crime among them when emancipated. For new conditions, new opportunities, new needs and new temptations arise to test a character that would be weak because developed by harsh and forced restraint.”85

Like others in the Progressive era, Trotter relied on the scientific method to demonstrate the validity of his arguments. To that end, he published illiteracy statistics in the Guardian disputing the percentages attributed to Vardaman. Significantly, the charts produced in the Guardian were better organized and more precise than the information provided by the governor of Mississippi. The Guardian tables included population and illiteracy statistics for 1880 and 1900. For example, it represented data for Virginia in this fashion: “Virginia . . . 315,660

84 Ibid., 8.
85 Ibid., 8.
The first two quantities represented the total number of illiterate African Americans in 1880, then 1900. The second group of numbers represented the illiteracy percentages of African Americans in 1880, compared to 1900. The data refuted Vardaman’s claims.

For Trotter and many of the Progressive generation, religion provided the only veritable exemplar of a just society. Christian unity enhanced the democratic spirit of American society. A clarion call flowed from the pages of the *Guardian* to the clergy of the day. An article printed in the newspaper pleaded with religious organizations to condemn the treatment of African Americans in the United States. “An appeal to white clergy” introduced a report on a declaration made by the Boston Baptist Minister’s Association. The organization’s statement read:

> Whereas our condition as a race is growing more critical on account of the injustice heaped upon us in this country and our brethren are disfranchised and lynchings are on the increase and as yet we have not been able to get redress [so] we have appealed to the powers that be . . . this 11th day of April, 1904 in the St. Paul’s Baptist church, Boston, [we] do earnestly appeal to the white ministers of New England regardless of denomination, asking them to preach sermons against the wrongs that are being perpetrated upon us and also ask them to petition congress to investigate the law passed by the south disfranchising, lynching, shooting, and burning at the stake a part of her citizens which is contrary to the Constitution of these United States.  

The *Guardian* published numerous reports on race relations in the church. It reported on Unitarians and Congregationalists of Connecticut denouncing segregation. The paper chronicled the hardships endured by the Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians on the subject of segregation. An article appeared in the *Guardian* noting a rabbinical authority rebuking lynch mobs. Rabbi Charles Fleischer stated, “Every member of lynching mob is a

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86 Ibid., 8.
87 Boston *Guardian*, April 16, 1904, 1, 4.
88 Boston *Guardian*, November 15, 1913, 1.
89 Boston *Guardian*, October 8, 1904, 4; February 6, 1904, 1; October 15, 1904, 1.
murderer.”

The rabbi continued, stating, “Certainly there is an ethical choice between the negro who commits a crime and the mob which lynches him for it.” Trotter expected the conscience of Christianity to oppose prejudice and violence. If Christianity failed to restrain race chauvinism, Trotter felt black Americans were doomed.

Trotter offered a powerful critique of a sermon as he took on a racist pastor. In “Tale of a Sermon White,” he attacked a sermon given by Presbyterian minister Robert A. Ellwood. Ellwood encouraged white men to lynch an accused offender. Trotter unleashed his fury on the minister writing, “If ever a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ proves himself no minister of that gospel, but a veritable son of perdition this so called minister proved himself such.”

Ellwood fanned the flames of violence and encouraged lawlessly vengeance. Editor Trotter wrote, “This angel of Satan . . . Mr. Ellwood did more than incite his fellow Anglo-Saxons to trample on the precious heritage of the common law, he incited them to do the same with the supreme law of the country as embodied in the constitution of that country.”

Ellwood betrayed his duty as a Christian by preaching murder and dismissing the law. He authored a damming sermon about George White, a black man accused of killing a white woman. Consequently, a white mob burned White at the stake for his transgression against white femininity. These actions represented a demonic celebration ridiculing the Constitution of the United States. “The mob and the state of Delaware and the Rev. R.A. Ellwood together danced that day their infernal dance on the be-deviled parchment of that instrument until the devils in hell must have yelled with delight at the sight,” Trotter declared.

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90 Boston Guardian, March 19, 1904, 1.
91 Ibid., 1.
92 Boston Guardian, February 27, 1904, 4.
93 Ibid., 4.
94 Boston Guardian, February 27, 1904, 4.
Because of the increasing violence directed at African Americans, many religious organizations faced increasing pressure to denounce the lynching practice. So incendiary were the comments of Ellwood that the regional governing body of the Presbyterian Church sanctioned him. Trotter found the trial and punishment of Ellwood inadequate for the crime. He wrote:

But the most curious part of Mr. Ellwood’s connection with the burning to death at the stake of White by the mob is yet to come. Mr. Ellwood has been solemnly tried by the New Castle Presbytery on charges growing out of this connection and found guilty, first, of unministerial and unchristian conduct in that he violated the constitution of the Presbyterian Church by preaching an unsound and unwise sermon.95

Trotter expected the church to be a bulwark against segregation. He implicitly admitted the Presbyterian Church possesses an awareness of moral right and wrong. His editorial was an attempt to agitate the sensibilities of fair-minded churchgoers. The editorial detailing this incident concluded with a caustic appraisal of American justice and the Christian spirit. Trotter remarked:

Mr. Ellwood was “affectionately counseled to be more judicious in his utterances in the future,” only his and nothing more. Mr. Ellwood sums up pungently the action of his brethren thus: “Finding of Presbytery guilty; punishment none; benediction, go thy way, in peace.” So ended the tale of a truly bad and unchristian sermon with a truly characteristic American ending whenever and wherever the Negro is concerned.96

“Tale of a Sermon Black” followed this tragic episode. Another equally poignant editorial, dealt with the experience of an African American pastor in the South. On January 30, 1904, an alleged black assailant in Roanoke, Virginia horribly injured a white woman and her two children. Reverend R.R. Jones suggested that the perpetrator of this heinous act was the husband of the injured woman, not an anonymous Negro. Reaction to this sermon was swift and

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95 Ibid., 4.
96 Ibid., 4.
harsh. “As soon as Mr. Jones’ words were noised through the town, a mob of 1200 Negro-hating white men gathered and marched in search of the preacher, terrorizing during this search the colored people of Roanoke.”

Trotter described this circumstance as a failure of the Christian spirit in the state of Virginia. He noted the complicity of the media and the civil agencies in refusing to restrain the blood lust of the mob. Trotter stated, “The law and the courts and the civilization of Virginia did nothing to protect them. Public opinion, the pulpit, [and] the press did nothing to protect them.” Furthermore, Trotter argued that Reverend Jones had been made a fugitive slave by the actions of the white authorities. Trotter wrote:

And so Mr. Jones got out of town, left his family, left his home, left his church and fled forth a fugitive because for him there was no law, no right, no government, no authority, no civilization and Christianity in Roanoke, which had [n]either the inclination or the ability to protect him from the violence of that Virginian mob.

This commentary illustrated the fundamental principles of Monroe Trotter’s activism. It demonstrated that the editor of the Guardian did not cite biblical text solely for the purpose of insulting Booker T. Washington. He expected Christianity and civil government to rise above the shackles of petty racial animosity. Unmitigated violence and lawless rage were unmanly and unchristian, according to Trotter.

The editorial “Tale of Sermon Black” also reflected the influence of black nationalistic thought of the 19th century on the activism of Monroe Trotter. He had a close connection to African American nationalists and emphasized his intellectual bond with abolitionism. Men like Martin Delaney and Alexander Crummell thought of progress as being intimately related to the

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97 Ibid., 4.
98 Ibid., 4.
99 Ibid., 4.
100 Ibid., 4.
presence of Christian ideas in cultured civilization. Trotter appreciated the work of Crummell and the American Negro Academy. A tribute to Crummell appeared in the Guardian.101 Crummell’s Academy first assembled on March 5, 1897, commemorating the one hundred twenty-seventh anniversary of the Boston Massacre, where Crispus Attacks died a martyr for the American Revolution.102 The celebration of the martyrdom of Crispus Attucks became a favorite cause of Monroe Trotter.103 The implacable equal rights fighter was an intellectual heir of Alexander Crummell.

Trotter’s connection to Crummell was not merely spiritual and intellectual. In Washington, D.C., Alexander Crummell enlisted the support of several notable black professionals to promote a bill advocating the construction of a mechanical and industrial school at Harper’s ferry in 1880. Monroe Trotter’s father, James Trotter was the recorder of deeds in Washington, D.C. at this time. His name appeared on the bill as one of the “incorporators” of the school.104 The elder Trotter perhaps recounted some tales of Crummell to his son. The family discussed race politics over the dinner table.105

Alexander Crummell also held the pastorate of Saint Luke’s Church in Washington, D.C. He was an influential Episcopal clergyman. Yet most African Americans were Baptist or Methodist by denomination. Militant black Episcopalians were small in number. Monroe Trotter’s wife, Deenie was an Episcopalian. She probably had some acquaintance with Crummell by personal contact or simply by reputation. Crummell’s presence loomed large in the personal and professional life of Monroe Trotter.106

101 Boston Guardian, August 26, 1911.
102 Moses, Crummell, 262.
103 Bennett, Pioneers in Protest, 229.
104 Moses, Crummell, 234.
105 Patler, Wilson Administration, 122.
106 Fox, Guardian, 221.
A concept popular among African American nationalists in the nineteenth century was “Ethiopianism.” An exceptional Christian kingdom conceived by erudite black people on the continent of Africa was the basic premise of Ethiopianism.\textsuperscript{107} Many followers of this movement believed this ideal society was an affirmation of a Biblical prophecy found in Psalm 68:31, “that Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God!”\textsuperscript{108} This passage alluded to civilized Christianity spreading across the African continent. The \textit{Guardian’s} coverage of Abyssinia in the early twentieth century was influenced by the utopian ideas of Ethiopianism. Ethiopia was a country in northeastern Africa near Egypt and since antiquity had been known as Abyssinia. Several articles in the \textit{Guardian} discussed the implementation of a new monetary system in Ethiopia and the transformation of the administrative structure from feudalism to a Republican form of government.\textsuperscript{109} These reports gave the impression of Abyssinia being the fulfillment of Holy Scripture.

Trotter vehemently detested the complicity of the church in the lynching and disenfranchisement of African Americans in the South. The \textit{Guardian} produced a visual depiction of the attitude of Southern clergy. It illustrated the routine apathy the church displayed in race relations in the South. Furthermore, the caricature amplified the church’s approval of lynching. It supported the assertions made in the editorial, “Tale of a Sermon White.” The central character in this cartoon was an Episcopal cleric.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{109} Boston \textit{Guardian}, November 2, 1907; July 16, 1904, 1.
Bishop William Brown’s justification of lynching African Americans drew the undivided attention of the *Guardian*. Brown asserted African Americans accused of criminal offenses should be punished by lynching. The Episcopalian clergyman stated lynching was a remedy for restraining black Americans, “when the fact was taken into account of the low moral, intellectual and economic status of the Negro, who had unquestionably deteriorated since emancipation.” He advocated separate congregations for blacks and whites. Brown stated, “The highest ambition of the colored girl was to be the mistress of a white man.” Brown claimed the Negro was a “being practically without the moral sense, possessing a maximum of religion and a minimum of morality.” “Everything about the Negro had failed because he was an incomplete being . . . The suffrage was not an inalienable right, but the reward for thrift and character” according to Brown. His sentiments, like the speeches of Theodore Roosevelt and James K. Vardaman, echoed the rhetoric of Booker T. Washington. The opinions of Bishop Brown represented those of a typical Southerner. The Arkansas diocese endorsed his views.
Under unyielding media scrutiny and political pressure from many, including the Guardian, Brown was compelled to modify his statements on lynching. Brown stated, “I now realize as I never did before that the good citizens of Arkansas and of the South generally, should on many accounts band themselves together for the double purpose of preventing lynchings . . . and of eliminating the barbarous features of torture and burning” associated with mob violence. Trotter attributed the recanting of Brown to the “criticism of the white editors and clergy of the north and east.”

Agitation on the part of African Americans also contributed to the declaration of Brown. Ideally, the editor of the Guardian thought strategic agitation could foment change. Christian morality needed to be engaged in the confrontation with Jim Crow. Agitation humbled Bishop Brown according to Trotter.

Agitation was an effective political tool for the Guardian because it operated in two ways. It challenged racist theology and compelled voices of conscience to speak aloud. The Roman Catholic Church unwittingly found itself on the receiving end of an unsavory report. The Guardian detailed an incident where an elderly black woman named Dorsey, the mother of a Roman Catholic priest, was escorted out of the Church of Immaculate Conception. Father Patrick Donahue hurried a group of black parishioners out of their house of worship. Donahue said, “Negroes [have] no right in churches of whites.” Trotter wrote, “The Roman Catholic Church breaks over into the class of churches that draw the color line. So now, even the Roman Catholic Church, which boasted of its Christianity without the color line finds itself unable to be true to Christ and welcome all God’s children to worship in its temples.” The Guardian’s criticism was not of the incendiary sort. The editorial appealed to a sense of expectation and atonement.

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115 Boston Guardian, June 4, 1904, 4.
116 Ibid., 4.
117 Boston Guardian, July 16, 1904, 1.
118 Ibid., 1.
William M. Hart, a sensible Catholic sent a letter to Trotter responding to his editorial. Hart wrote, “In this respect I, with hundreds of thousands of other Catholics beg to differ. Never in all her history has the Catholic Church drawn the color line. It is in that church, the Roman Catholic Church alone where the black and white, the rich and the poor may kneel side by side and worship God.” Hart approved of the Guardian’s condemnation of Donohue’s behavior: “The action of Father Donohue is so deplorable and so far from the spirit of the church that it deserves and receives nothing but scorn and contempt.” Hart concluded his letter by stating, “The Roman Catholic Church alone is the only true friend the Negro has.” Agitation of the fire and brimstone variety subdued Bishop Brown. In this instance, Trotter used agitation to cultivate an ally.¹¹⁹

Trotter’s activism drew W.E.B. Du Bois even more aggressively into the fray. The noted scholar had not denounced Booker T. Washington until 1903, with the publication of The Souls of Black Folk. Observing the harsh treatment of Monroe Trotter convinced him to take up arms against the wizard of Tuskegee. The incarceration of Trotter also united the radical factions. Reflecting on national politics and the basis of all his activism, Trotter began seriously reconsidering the effectiveness of his political strategy. He concluded that the radical groups needed a national organization to effectively combat racism in the Progressive era.

Radical factions convened a meeting in 1905. The Niagara Conference, in upstate New York was part of the movement against the philosophy of Booker T. Washington. Members of the conference agreed on their enmity toward Washington. Their platform outlined a declaration of Niagara’s principles: “We refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro-American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults.”¹²⁰ Trotter

¹¹⁹ Boston Guardian, July 23, 1904, 1.
and Du Bois wanted an exclusively black organization to work for social equality and political enfranchisement for African Americans.

Meanwhile, race warfare engulfed the nation in 1906. Atlanta found itself in the clutches of devastating race riot. White mobs assaulted black residents of the city with impunity. A violent incident on August 13, 1906 in Brownsville, Texas involving African American soldiers exhausted a tenuous relationship between the Republican Party and the black masses. Unknown persons exchanged gunfire in the town of Brownsville. One citizen was killed and several people were injured. Whites claimed armed blacks shot up the town. Acting on the recommendation of his Inspector General, Ernest A. Garlington, Theodore Roosevelt dismissed three companies of 167 men without honor and barred several former soldiers from civil or military service in the United States. His Secretary of War, William H. Taft carried out the order of the commander in chief. Black men were convicted and punished without benefit of trial or a forum to dispute the conclusions of the executive.121

Roosevelt further alienated African American citizens with his speech on lynching in December. He declared, “The greatest cause of lynching is the perpetration, especially by black men of the hideous crime of rape.” Roosevelt suggested that the most effective method of preventing this heinous crime was a Tuskegee-type education.122 Black leaders across the country gradually repudiated their allegiance to the party of Lincoln. Booker T. Washington was a notable exception to this trend.

Sympathetic whites eagerly joined the radical cause in the aftermath of Brownsville and Atlanta. At this point, Du Bois welcomed the support of white activists and their philanthropic funds. Their entrance into the radical ranks shifted the emphasis of the movement toward legal

121 Fox, Guardian, 151.
122 Schneider, Boston Confronts, 70.
Monroe Trotter rejected the membership of whites in the Niagara Movement. His intransigence on political agitation and white participation in the organization led to an end of friendly relations with Du Bois. Although Trotter disagreed with the new direction of the Niagara movement, his emphasis on political rights and agitation were important elements in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People a few years later.

Notwithstanding the divisions in the Niagara movement, uncompromising militancy and relentless agitation gained political traction. In 1906, black leaders revived the Georgia Equal Rights Convention. The convention’s address took an uncompromising position on political rights: “The right to vote is in itself an education; and if Georgia had taken as much time and trouble to fit us for political responsibility as she has denying us our rights, she would have a safer and saner electorate than that which is today swaying her by appeals to her worst passions.”

In February 1908, twenty-five bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal, A.M.E. Zion, and the Colored Methodist Churches met in Washington, D.C. In an “Address of Negro Bishops,” the black clergy unapologetically demanded equality from the United States: “We ask at the bar of this Christian nation nothing to which we are not entitled under the Law and Constitution. We ask only for that which belongs to us as a right, for justice, for equality, for freedom of action and opportunity before the law and in the industrial life of the land, North and South alike.”

Monroe Trotter’s efforts facilitated the spread of militancy.

Trotter drew on precedent. Two figures, the heroic Christ-like Uncle Tom and the rebellious Nat Turner figure defined the religious myth of slavery. These stereotypical renditions of the slave experience found currency in the political discourse of blacks and whites alike. Trotter used these themes in his newspaper in his coverage of electoral politics. The Uncle

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123 Apthecker, *Documentary History*, 891.
Tom character was useful as a rhetorical device reinforcing the notion of sacrifice and self-help. The servile damnation of the Uncle Tom, like that of Christ, initiated the spiritual redemption of the earth and the moral regeneration of humanity. Yet the denial of aid to African Americans by the President rejected the noble agony of the Christ-like Uncle Tom. Trotter connected this idea with African Americans’ loyalty to the Republican Party. He wanted them to embrace a more aggressive stance. The avenging angel figure emerged in the absence of the demure Uncle Tom. The avenging angel was a vengeful Christian soldier in the mold of Nat Turner. Turner was a slave, who led a bloody revolt in Virginia in 1831. He claimed God ordained his rampage.\textsuperscript{126} This personality represented the uncompromising figure Trotter favored against Jim Crow politicians. The \textit{Guardian} published a historical list of several important black men of the past. The final name on this list was “Nathaniel Turner, Negro prophet.”\textsuperscript{127} This description connected militancy to divine inspiration. African American leaders like Trotter, who confronted Jim Crow, employed different aspects of this religious mythology to drive their constituents into action.

The image of the Cyrenian cross appeared in the \textit{Guardian} a second time in 1908. The caption accompanying the illustration read, “Cross colored will have to bear if Taft is elected.”\textsuperscript{128} It likened the President of the United States to Simon of Cyrene in the context of this illustration. The President was supposed to provide some relief to the sufferance of black Americans akin Simon aiding a fatigued Jesus. This Biblical allusion suggests the President had the ability to be a redemptive agent. But the \textit{Guardian} also warned of the future torment African Americans faced under the Taft administration: The “negro may expect to be crucified on the

\textsuperscript{126} Nash, et al., \textit{The American People}, 344-346.
\textsuperscript{127} Boston \textit{Guardian}, January 6, 1912, 2.
\textsuperscript{128} Boston \textit{Guardian}, August 1, 1908, 3.
cross of perfidy and political dishonor while wearing on his brow a crown of thorns,” if Taft is elected.129

Roosevelt’s successor to the White House, William Howard Taft, had an ignoble record on civil rights. The Guardian described Taft as a dangerous race baiter: “He has done more to foster and encourage race prejudice and race antagonism than any man in the history of the country.”130 Trotter further denounced anyone supporting Taft as destined for eternal damnation: “Any black man who supports Taft thereby assents to Republican mistreatment and puts himself in eternal disgrace. He is branded with the mark of Cain.”131 Since the age of Lincoln, the black electorate had held steadfast to the Republican Party, but the Democratic Party was becoming a viable option for many disappointed African Americans.

Trotter founded his own protest organization, the National Independent Political League, to influence national politics and fight for social and political equality for African Americans in 1908. He described the league as “an organization of the colored people and for the colored people and led by the colored people.”132 On the opposite end of the protest continuum, Du Bois helped form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an interracial protest organization in 1909. The N.I.P.L. changed its name to the National Equal Rights League. The group was not as prominent as the N.A.A.C.P. in the fight for racial equality in the Progressive era, but Trotter’s organization did make national headlines in two meetings with President Woodrow Wilson.

Dismayed at the Republican Party’s record on civil rights, Trotter looked to the Democratic governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson was an academic, who had been

129 Boston Guardian, December 30, 1911, 4.
130 Boston Guardian, July 3, 1909, 4; Fox, Guardian, 160.
131 Boston Guardian, January 25, 1908, 4; Fox, Guardian, 155.
132 Fox, Guardian, 140.
president of Princeton University. Many African Americans hoped the Democratic nominee would halt the spread of segregation. Wilson promised to enforce the law and constitution, regardless of color. Trotter and many African American leaders were increasingly frustrated by the actions of the Republican Party and so began to drift to the Democratic side.

Wilson was a Southerner. He had been born on December 28, 1856 in Virginia. As a youth, he was reared in the political traditions of the old South. His parents were sympathizers for the South during the Civil War. He witnessed the demise of the South in the last days of the Civil War. The Wilson family had strong roots in Virginia. Wilson’s father, Joseph Wilson was a Presbyterian minister. Joseph’s father and brother were also Presbyterian ministers and that religious background likewise affected his son. After college and graduate school, Wilson briefly entertained a career in the legal profession, but he found the law uninteresting and unchallenging. He eventually returned to academia and completed the requirements for a doctoral degree. He wrote *Congressional Government* and embarked on career in the academe.\(^{133}\)

In his early years, Wilson enthusiastically proclaimed his allegiance to the Presbyterian faith. In 1873, he wrote a series of essays for the North Carolina *Presbyterian*. In an essay entitled “A Christian Statesmen,” Wilson argued for the need for Christianity to guide politicians. Although there are principles of duty to his party and to the cause he has espoused, still no statesman should allow party feeling to bias his opinions on any point which involves truth or falsehood, justice or injustice. He should search for truth with the full determination to find it, and in that search he should most earnestly seek aid from God, who will surely hold him responsible for the course he pursues. When he has arrived at what he is convinced is the truth, he should uphold that truth, both by word and deed, irrespective of party.\(^{134}\)


Adherence to Christian principles of justice and righteousness overruled political obligations in Wilson’s mind. He believed the Christian statesman was bound to his principles. These precepts were sacrosanct. Seeking the truth was the only consideration and motivation.

On racial matters, Wilson’s opinions were decidedly Southern. He thought African Americans were unfit to govern and lacked the maturity necessary for reorganizing the South during Reconstruction. Wilson expressed his views on Reconstruction in an essay, “The Reconstruction of the Southern States,” that appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1901. The future President wrote:

> Here was a vast “laboring, landless, homeless class,” once slaves, now free; unpracticed in liberty, unschooled in self-control; never sobered by the discipline of self support, never established in any habit of prudence; excited by a freedom they did not understand, exalted by false hopes; bewildered and without leaders, and yet insolent and aggressive; sick of work, covetous of pleasure, a host of dusky children untimely put out of school.  

Southern custom demanded that men of the upper crust of society hold the reigns of leadership. In this society, African Americans were expected to be submissive to upper class whites.

Southern tradition and Presbyterian religiosity heavily influenced the political career of Wilson.

The doctrine of the Social Gospel made a strong impression on Woodrow Wilson. He believed that the church had a special responsibility to uphold the moral standards of society.

Speaking to the General Theological Seminary in New York in April of 1910, he stated:

> It is evident to us all that within the past few years there has been an extraordinary awakening in civic consciousness, and, beyond this, an extraordinary awakening of the public mind with relation to the moral values involved in our national life. We are now witnessing the dawn of a day when there will be a universal reevaluation of men and of affairs . . . It seems to me perfectly clear that an extraordinary opportunity is afforded by the present day to the Church; to the whole Church, whether Protestant or Catholic, an opportunity to supply what society is looking for; that is, a clear

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135 Ibid., 206.
standard of moral measurement, a standard of revaluation, a standard of re-assessment, of men and affairs.\textsuperscript{136}

Like many Progressive reformers of this era, Wilson thought the church could provide the moral and ethical guidance for a wayward society. These ideas continued to develop as his political career prospered.

As the Presidential election of 1912 approached, Wilson campaigned across the country. In Denver, Colorado, he addressed a religious gathering celebrating the 300th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Wilson’s speech touched on religion and politics. His lecture suggested America had a special duty to be a shining example of Christian virtue. Wilson declared, “America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture.”\textsuperscript{137} Wilson continued to extol audiences to embrace their responsibility to Christ, but he never explicitly took a position on race prejudice and discrimination in the South in public.

In 1912, Monroe Trotter was still active in the struggle for equality for African Americans. He loathed Theodore Roosevelt and his successor, William Howard Taft for their handling of the Brownsville incident. In the presidential election, he endorsed Woodrow Wilson. Trotter was obsessed with evicting the Republican Party from the White House. Wilson thought black Americans had the potential to excel in education. In 1902, he invited Booker T. Washington to his presidential inauguration at Princeton University. Yet, African Americans had reason to distrust the democratic nominee. As president of Princeton University, Wilson refused to allow the admission of African American students. He acknowledged the support of W.E.B.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 47, 49.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 59.
Du Bois and Bishop Alexander Walters in his campaign, but carefully distanced himself from his black supporters.\textsuperscript{138}

Trotter hoped the Democrat, Wilson would make good on his promises to be a Christian diplomat. Trotter sent a letter to him inquiring about his stance on segregation: “I am saying that you told us that you were not in sympathy with race and color prejudice, or with discrimination, disfranchisement or lynching because of race or color, that you respect the constitution in its entirety including the amendments and will carry out the law not only according to its letter and spirit, but in the spirit of the Christian religion, endeavoring to be a Christian gentleman to all, according even-handed justice and equal rights to all regardless of race, color or nativity.”\textsuperscript{139}

Trotter’s letter to Wilson also described the expectations of African American voters: “I find many Colored men ready to vote for you if assured by you that in so doing they would not be voting for a President who would disregard the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments as part of the supreme law of the land.”\textsuperscript{140} As president, Trotter expected Wilson to enforce the constitutional amendments of Reconstruction and obey God’s will in ensuring the civil rights of African Americans.

On November 6, 1913, Monroe Trotter met with President Woodrow Wilson. They discussed allegations of segregation in the federal government in Washington, D.C. Trotter presented a petition against segregation with 20,000 signatures from 38 states.\textsuperscript{141} Trotter admonished Wilson to resist the implementation of Jim Crow segregation in the nation’s capital because it placed a permanent badge of inferiority on black employees. He said, “There can be no equality, freedom or respect from others, in segregation by the very nature of the case.

\textsuperscript{138} Cooper, \textit{Warrior and Priest}, 210-211.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 558.
\textsuperscript{141} Fox, \textit{Guardian}, 175.
Placement of employees on any basis except capability is out of the usual course.”

Trotter reminded Wilson of his pledge to fairly execute the law according to “the spirit of the Christian religion.” In this meeting, Trotter characterized segregation as “unjust, un-Constitutional, un-Christian and an underserved limitation, degradation, a terrible injury, and by virtue of its influence for contempt, for mal-treatment, for race discrimination, for curtailment of industrial freedom and civil rights, a calamity.” In Trotter’s eyes segregation stifled liberty.

Wilson assured Trotter that he would carefully consider his grievances. “Of course,” he said, “I need not say that an impressive petition like this will receive my most earnest and most careful consideration.” Many critics of the administration believed the source of the segregation policy was the President’s cabinet. Wilson wanted to quash any anxiety Trotter felt with his inaction in confronting the spread of segregation. Wilson said, “I am particularly anxious that you should not go away with the impression that there is anything hostile in the attitude of my colleagues. I am slowly making myself familiar with the matter with the hope that I shall see my way clear to do the right thing all along the line.”

Trotter recorded an unflattering assessment of the Wilson administration in the Guardian. The newspaper reported, “W. Monroe Trotter, editor of the Boston Guardian, was spokesman. He made an extended statement and gave instances of discrimination, which had been discovered and insisted that these were calculated to humiliate and degrade our race and bring it into scorn and contempt, and that it was all the worse since it is being done under authority of the national government.”

143 Ibid., 494.
144 Ibid., 495.
145 Ibid., 496.
146 Ibid., 496.
147 Boston Guardian, November 15, 1913, 3.
segregating the capital, he acknowledged the willingness of Wilson to investigate the harmful nature of segregation.\textsuperscript{148}

Trotter’s first meeting with President Wilson had been a hospitable affair. The second was less amicable. Trotter met with Wilson again on November 12, 1914. Trotter chastised the President for facilitating the spread of Jim Crow segregation in the capital. Trotter fumed, “One year ago we presented a national petition, signed by Afro-Americans in thirty-eight states, protesting against the segregation of employe[e]s of the national government whose ancestry could be traced in whole or in part to Africa as instituted under your administration.”\textsuperscript{149} Trotter claimed that the segregation of black employees in the federal government marked them as inferior and was an intolerable injustice: “We stated that there could be no freedom, no respect from others, and no equality of citizenship under segregation for races, especially when applied to but one of the many racial elements in the government employ. For such placement of employe[e]s means a charge by the government of physical indecency or infection, or of being a lower order of beings, or a subjection to the prejudices of other citizens, which constitutes inferiority of status.”\textsuperscript{150}

Trotter perceived a greater threat to American society in the precedent of segregating the capital. He stated, “We have been sent by the alarmed American [\textit{sic}] citizens of color. They realize that if they can be segregated and thus humiliated by the national government at the national capital [then] the beginning is made for the spread of that persecution and prosecution which makes property and life itself insecure in the South, the foundation of the whole fabric of

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 298-299.
their citizenship is unsettled.” After thoroughly admonishing the President for his inability to halt the spread of segregation, Trotter declared it was the President’s duty to protect and ensure the political rights of African Americans: “As equal citizens and by virtue of your public promises we are entitled at your hands to freedom from discrimination, restriction, imputation and insult in government employ. Have you a new freedom for white Americans and a new slavery for your Afro-American fellow citizens? God forbid!”

Wilson offered a weak reply. He saw no reason for the issue to be political in nature. “Let us leave politics out of it. If the colored people made a mistake in voting for me, they ought to correct it and vote against me if they think so.” Wilson argued that segregation was not a harmful condition for African Americans: “A white man can make a colored man uncomfortable, as a colored man can make a white man uncomfortable if there is a prejudice existing between them. And it shouldn’t be allowed on either end.” According to Wilson, segregation saved both races from awkward social mixing. In his mind, discrimination was only a symptom of minority status. “Now, what makes it look like discrimination is that the colored people are in a minority as compared with the white employees. Any minority looks as if it were discriminated against.”

After listening to Trotter at length, Wilson stated, “You are the only American citizen that has ever come into this office who has talked to me with a tone with a background of passion that was evident. Now, I want to say that if this association comes again, it must have another spokesman.” Trotter responded, “Mr. President, I am sorry for that. Mr. President, [an] America that professes to be Christian cannot condemn that which” embodies the Christian spirit.

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151 Ibid., 300.  
152 Ibid., 300.  
153 Ibid., 301.  
154 Ibid., 302.  
155 Ibid., 302.
Wilson snidely remarked, “I expect those who profess to be Christians to come to me in a Christian spirit.” Trotter commented, “Mr. President . . . don’t misunderstand me, I have not condemned the Christian spirit. I am pleading for simple justice. Mr. President, I am from a part of the people who will take me at my word . . . If my tone has seemed so contentious, why my tone has been misunderstood . . . I would like to be able to say, and do so [that you are] without prejudice.” Race was not the principle issue of this exchange. Trotter and Wilson were debating the merits of the Christian religion and the meaning of the social gospel.\(^{156}\)

Trotter continued appealing to the President on religious grounds, “We ought to be truthful, Mr. President. We ought to be frank and truthful. I hope you want to be frank and true and not be false to your faith. Now Mr. President, you know it would be an unmanly thing to appear to be false.” Trotter wanted to know if faith or Jim Crow guided Wilson. It was salvation or segregation in Trotter’s mind.\(^{157}\)

Departing the Oval office, Trotter remarked, “Mr. President we were trying to bring about racial harmony throughout the country.”\(^{158}\) Reporting this meeting to the press, Trotter denounced the President’s explanation for segregation. Woodrow Wilson and Monroe Trotter were both Progressive reformers, but each man had radically different solutions to the race problem in America. Racial separation continued to spread in the government departments.

Once again, Wilson became the subject of controversy after viewing the film *Birth of a Nation* in the White House. On February 18, 1915, he saw the film at the behest of his friend and classmate; author Thomas Dixon, who wrote the book, which the movie was based. Referring to the film, Wilson expounded, “It is like writing history with lightning.” Meanwhile, the N.A.A.C.P. and Trotter voiced their disapproval of the cinematic production. Wilson had

\(^{156}\) Ibid., 305-306.
\(^{157}\) Ibid., 306.
\(^{158}\) Ibid., 308.
reservations about the picture, but did not want to appear to surrender to the agitation campaign:

“If there were some way in which I could do it without seeming to be trying to meet the agitation . . . stirred up by that unspeakable fellow Tucker.”

“Tucker” or “Tucker darkey” was a derogatory racial epithet Wilson used to describe persistent and assertive African Americans like Monroe Trotter.

D.W. Griffith’s motion picture, *Birth of a Nation* opened nationally in Los Angeles in 1915. The film was an adaptation of Thomas Dixon’s novel, *The Clansman*. The film debuted in Boston in April 1915. Trotter had successfully prevented the appearance of a play based on *The Clansman* on two occasions in Boston. He and the N.A.A.C.P. worked together to ban *Birth of a Nation* in Boston. A hearing was scheduled to determine if the film would be shown. Members of the N.A.A.C.P. argued against the film on legal grounds. Despite their efforts, the film was shown in a Boston theatre. One week after the first showing of the film, Trotter and a group of demonstrators were arrested at the Tremont Theatre. Trotter had attempted to acquire tickets for the film to fill the theatre with black occupants. He also organized picket lines outside the theatre. After the local demonstration failed, N.A.A.C.P. officials successfully lobbied the state committee in passing the Louis R. Sullivan bill. This bill established a new censorship board. The most offensive portions of the film were cut because of the provisions of the Sullivan bill. The law prohibited lewdness in cinematic productions. Although *Birth of a Nation* remained in circulation, Trotter made his point, but could not change the result.

The ebb and flow of history moves with the currents of struggle and strife. Victory is an elusive prize and an ephemeral commodity. Redemption birthed the seed of Jim Crow; apathy nurtured the tree of segregation. The roots of the Jim Crow system stretched from the country

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159 Fox, *Guardian*, 189.
161 Schneider, *Boston Confronts*, 148-158.
roads of Mississippi to the concrete payment of New York. Monroe Trotter fought it aggressively. Contemporaries compared him to John the Baptist. Reminiscent of the Biblical figure, Trotter stood firm as voice of agitation in the wilderness of Jim Crow. His singular accomplishment was the triumph of the apostates over Tuskegee. The Guardian’s editorials pierced the cloak of accommodation. Trotter remade the character of race protest in the United States. Political and civil rights became requisite rather than optional. Unsatisfied with the apolitical benign Christianity of the slave ethos, Trotter embraced an uncompromising militant religion. While Trotter never managed to change national politics, he made a difference. His sacrifice was immense; his reward was minimal. Regardless of the outcome of the battle between Christianity and Jim Crow, Trotter’s insistence on agitation forever changed the landscape of race protest.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{162} Boston Guardian, August 25, 1906, 3.
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