NATURAL RIGHT AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Essays in Honor of
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Chapter Fifteen

From Statesman to Secular Saint

Booker T. Washington on Abraham Lincoln

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In 1905 a white woman from California sent Booker T. Washington her design for a "Negro Flag": a portrait of Abraham Lincoln surrounded by thirty-six stars representing the states in the Union at the conclusion of the Civil War. It was apparently the custom of the day for various immigrant groups to display a heritage flag, such as the flag of their ancestral land, alongside the Stars and Stripes. A flag acknowledging Lincoln as the Moses of the Negro people in the United States would enable Afro-Americans to do something similar. In his response to Mrs. Colton, Washington, while courteously thanking her, makes plain that "the Negro needs no special insignia," having been "an integral part of the country" from the beginning: "as a consequence, Old Glory is his flag" (Harlan 1972–89, 8:299–300).

Directing his criticism at the very idea of a Negro flag (and its assumption of divided or dual loyalties), Washington says nothing about the specific design. We might note, however, that Mrs. Colton's proposed design is not in fact parallel to "other nationalities carrying their colors together with the Stars and Stripes" since it does not refer to a preexisting ethnic or national affiliation but instead commemorates the moment of emancipation *within* the United States. The flag asserts that Abraham Lincoln was the agent of black peoplehood and belonging. *He* put the hyphen in Afro-American. Washington may well dissent from that attribution also; his statement that blacks have "been identified in a most essential and important manner with the whole country's progress and development" applies to the era of black slavery as well as that of black freedom. As important as emancipation was, blacks had legitimate claims on, and attachments to, the land of their birth long before that most welcome revolution in their situation.

Washington, however, perhaps preferred not to say anything that might be construed as derogatory to Lincoln. Certainly, no black leader hosannaed Lincoln higher than Booker T. Washington did. *Hosanna* is from the Hebrew meaning "pray, save us!," and one of Washington's earliest memories was of his mother praying not *to* Lincoln but *for* him and for earthly salvation *through* him. Here is the story as told in the opening chapter of Washington's autobiography, *Up from Slavery:* "So far as I can now recall, the first knowledge that I got of the fact that we were slaves, and that freedom of the slaves was being discussed, was early one morning before day, when I was awakened by my mother kneeling over her children and fervently praying that Lincoln and his armies might be successful, and that one day she and her children might be free" (Washington 1986, 7). Washington's attitude toward Lincoln was thus fixed early in life. His adoration of Lincoln was by no means unusual. In a 1907 essay, "Early Problems of Freedom," Washington describes the joyous celebrations with which former slaves greeted the end result of the war: "No one who saw them could have any doubt whatever as to the Negro's appreciation of his freedom. It is a notable fact that in none of them was ever heard a word of hatred or revenge toward those who had been responsible for their long enslavement. Their gratitude was too great to leave room for resentment. God, Lincoln, and Freedom formed a mysterious trinity in the new awakening of these emancipated people" (Brotz 1992, 385). In this Trinitarian metaphor, Lincoln takes the person of Christ (rather than Moses), with Freedom as the Holy Spirit.

As a child born fatherless into slavery and freed at the age of nine, Washington experienced the "new birth of freedom" heralded in the Gettysburg Address. Not surprisingly, in later life he often described Lincoln as his "patron saint." The 1901 advertisement for *Up from Slavery* contained the following blurb:

> Booker T. Washington says biography is his favorite reading and Abraham Lincoln is his patron saint. He claims to have read every book written about Lincoln. Perhaps this is one reason why his own autobiography, just published by Doubleday, Page & Co., is so full of anecdotes and stories, and withal one of the more interesting, helpful and solid of American biographical writings. In his single-hearted devotion to a righteous cause he is not unlike the great President. (Harlan 1972–89, 6:365)

This comparison of Washington to Lincoln became common and not just in public relations boilerplate. The noted novelist and literary critic William Dean Howells, in an extended review of *Up from Slavery* (along with two biographies of Frederick Douglass), embraced the linkage: "His origin was not much more obscure, his circumstances not much more squalid, than Abraham Lincoln's, and his impulses and incentives to the making of himself were of much the same source and quality" (6:192). Belton Gilreath, a Birmingham coal and iron magnate of liberal sympathies, contacted Washington after reading his autobiography, having found it, he said, "more interesting than any book I have ever read with the single exception of part of the life of Abraham Lincoln. He too is my ideal Saint" (6:95). Gilreath became a strong supporter of Washington's and eventually a Tuskegee trustee. A humbler correspondent, a carpenter named Thomas A. Cooper, by his own description "an obscure atom of humanity," wrote a heart-felt letter in which he recurred to the Moses analogy, describing Lincoln and Washington as sequentially sharing the mission of Moses, with Lincoln conducting the black race out of Egypt and Washington leading them "out of the wilderness of enforced

ignorance" toward the promised land of "education progress and agricultural commercial prosperity" (6:350).

GRAVEN IMAGES

This exact idea of Washington is embodied in a statue erected at Tuskegee two decades later, in 1922, some years after Washington's death. Titled "Lifting the Veil of Ignorance," it displays Washington standing behind the seated figure of a freedman, one arm outstretched as if offering the way, the other removing a veil that had draped the freedman's face. Bare-chested and bare-legged, the freedman (perched on a plow and anvil with an open book on his lap) joins the formally attired Washington in looking toward a point in the far distance. The composition of the figures is astonishingly like the Freedmen's Monument in Washington, D.C. That statue, "Emancipation," shows Lincoln standing beside a half-kneeling slave, with one hand holding the Emancipation Proclamation and the other outstretched above the manacled slave—again bare-chested and bare-legged—who is in the act of breaking his chains and rising. Commissioned and erected by "emancipated Citizens of the United States" (according to the plaque on the statue's pedestal), the Freedmen's Monument was dedicated in 1876 on the eleventh anniversary of Lincoln's assassination, with Frederick Douglass delivering his great "Oration in Memory of Lincoln." The two sculptures are strikingly similar; in both, the great benefactor stands with either a slave or a recently freed slave crouching at his feet. Lincoln and Washington are depicted realistically, in contemporary dress, while the slave/freedman is emblematic (his near-nudity an allegorical rendition of his material impoverishment). However, in neither statue is there intended to be anything of spiritual abasement in the lower figure. So, for instance, the slave does not look beseechingly to Lincoln; he is intent on his own rising, his head uplifted and his eyes forward. So, too, the freedman of the Washington statue is preparing himself, through labor and learning, for fuller freedom to come.

Nonetheless, despite the artists' intentions, viewers both then and especially now have expressed dissatisfaction with these "Mosaic"

depictions. While the statesmanship of Lincoln and Washington was premised on the rights-based equality of all men (and furthermore was directed toward the political achievement of that equality), the depiction of their benefactions required a stark acknowledgment of the then-existing inequality of conditions. Moreover, both statues allude to a deeper and permanent form of natural inequality: there are characteristics of soul that distinguish a rare few from the vast majority. Our discomfort with these statues—only in part attributable to specifically racial sensitivities about black agency—indicates a profound democratic suspicion of greatness. I suspect we can admire a statue of a conquering hero on horseback more readily than we can an instantiation of gratitude that depicts both benefactor and beneficiary. Gratitude may be strongly felt in the moment, but reified gratefulness soon begins to grate on our egalitarian sensibilities. Viewing the figure on horseback, one can experience either a disinterested admiration of nobility or, alternatively, a self-referential delight from identification with the hero. By contrast, these statues of Lincoln and Washington compel one to identify with the beneficiaries. One has the experience that Alexander Pope described as "the inferiority which obligation implies." Absent an already felt sense of gratitude toward Lincoln and Washington, the statues themselves are unlikely to evoke or instill it. Indeed, they are just as likely to provoke ingratitude.

Missing from these graven images are the humility and humor with which both Lincoln and Washington tempered their grand statesmanship—and made it democratically palatable. Contemporary scholars have explored the degree to which Washington modeled his manner of speaking on Lincoln. A highly acclaimed recent biography of Washington notes that "his humility was reminiscent of that of Abraham Lincoln on the stump, and the presentation was undoubtedly deliberate. A student of rhetoric who observed Booker closely characterized it as having 'the quality of the sinking self . . . [which] takes attention away from the speaker and turns it to what he is saying'" (Norrell 2009, 138). Washington's deployment of humor also put his audiences at ease. As his biographer notes, "in his storytelling, there was again a strong similarity to Lincoln, with a rustic character always delivering the punch line" (139). At the same time, his use of dialect humor and "darky" stories could serve more sophisticated and critical purposes. Speech, particularly

speech that involves irony, has layers of meaning that a plastic creation cannot achieve. The literary man William Dean Howells glimpsed something of the depths hidden by Washington's "unfailing sense of humor"—a trait that Howells regarded as characteristic of blacks who had risen to eminence:

> It enables them to use reason and the nimbler weapons of irony, and saves them from bitterness. By virtue of it Washington, and Dunbar and Chesnutt enjoy the negro's ludicrous side as the white observer enjoys it. . . . The fact is of all sorts of interesting implications; but I will draw from it, for the present, the sole suggestion that the problem of the colored race may be more complex than we have thought it. What if upon some large scale they should be subtler than we have supposed? What if their amiability should veil a sense of *our* absurdities, and there should be in our polite inferiors the potentiality of something like contempt for us? The notion is awful; but we may be sure they will be too kind, too wise, ever to do more than let us guess at the truth, if it is the truth. (Harlan 1972–89, 6:195–96)

LINCOLN: OUR MAN AND OUR MODEL

Monuments expressing gratitude to great men should not be scorned; nonetheless, speech is superior to sculpture (or any other fine art) as a vehicle of public gratitude and civic instruction.[1] Since Washington himself was both an admirer and emulator of Lincoln, it is worthwhile to examine those instances in which he reflected on Lincoln's life and work. They turn out to be central to an understanding of Washington's own life and work.

Washington's thoughts on Lincoln are of two main sorts: first, brief references to Lincoln in pedagogical and hortatory speeches delivered to black audiences; and second, a few speeches devoted explicitly and extensively to Lincoln, presented on ceremonial occasions to mainly white audiences. Most typical of the first are Washington's "Sunday Evening Talks"—a regular forum that Washington held for students at Tuskegee. In these homilies on character formation, Washington fairly often cited

Lincoln, counseling emulation of his virtues, especially honesty and simplicity. Four of the addresses in which Lincoln figures are "Reading a Means of Growth," "Self Denial," "Giving the Race a Reputation," and "Strength in Simplicity."

In the first, from 1890, Washington advises students to follow Lincoln's example of Bible reading. The recommendation is not so much for the sake of piety as proper self-development (which always has in view service to one's fellow man). Thus, "you never read in history of any great man whose influence has been lasting, who has not been a reader of the Bible" (Harlan 1972–89, 3:93). Washington is obviously aware of the world-altering impact of tyrants; but he is convinced that the power of good outlasts that of evil. The point about a life devoted to the good of others is sharpened in a talk a year later trumpeting the role of self-denial: "This is the secret of Abraham Lincoln's success in life. . . . He practiced this self-denial, and it gave him an element of strength which won for him the name of the 'first American'" (3:130–31). In 1898, while outlining the elements of a good reputation, Washington illustrates Lincoln's legendary honesty with a tale his students had obviously heard from him before:

> You recall that story of Abraham Lincoln, how when he was postmaster at a small village he had left on his hands $1.50 which the government did not call for. Carefully wrapping up this money in a handkerchief he kept it for ten years. Finally one day the government agent called for this amount and it was promptly handed over to him by Abraham Lincoln. . . . That trait of his character helped him along to the presidency. (4:514)

Finally, in a sermon on the value of simplicity as the outward expression of inner strength, Lincoln is offered as the model. Washington explores various ways in which one projects the self into the world. We utter or "outer" ourselves—whether through words or more superficial expressions like modes of address and dress. Washington urges simplicity in all three: neat and modest rather than attention-grabbing garb, no self-aggrandizing titles, and simple, direct speech. Lincoln is appealed to first with respect to naming: "Nobody would ever speak of Abraham Lincoln as LL.D., or anything of the kind. You could not add a single element of strength to his name by giving him all the titles you could conjure"

(10:11).[2] More importantly, Lincoln shows the great power of the simplest words. As a young man, while at Hampton Institute, Booker had studied the speeches of Lincoln. In turn, he recommended such study to the students at Tuskegee:

> If you will read, as I hope you will, . . . his speeches—especially that great speech, which will live longer than perhaps any other speech ever uttered in the English language, the speech at Gettysburg—read it for its simplicity of language, the shortness of its words and the directness of its sentences, the nobility and inspiring character of it, and you will see in it all and through it all, that Lincoln was great, that he was powerful, because in every movement, in every word, in every utterance, he was a simple, direct, natural human being.[3] (10:11)

The result of these lessons in rhetoric is confirmed by Howells, who says of Washington that "he has lived heroic poetry, and he can, therefore, afford to talk simple prose" (6:194). Greatness is a winnowing force. Howells concludes his review of Washington's life by crediting "the mild might of his adroit, his subtle statesmanship (in the highest sense it is not less than statesmanship)" (6:199). Simple prose is not incompatible with subtle statesmanship. It will not do to underestimate either Honest Abe or Uncle Booker.

THE SUBTLE STATESMANSHIP OF SIMPLE PROSE

Within a month of this Sunday Evening Talk, on February 12, 1909 (the centennial of Lincoln's birth), Washington delivered his most important speech about Lincoln before the Republican Club of New York City.[4] This "Address on Abraham Lincoln" deserves to be ranked with Frederick Douglass's "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln." Moreover, it is a speech that serves as a precursor for two important later African American speeches with a connection to Lincoln: Robert Russa Moton's speech at the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial on the Mall in 1922 and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 on the centennial of the Emancipation

Proclamation.[5] The tradition of black leaders reflecting on Lincoln, with a backdrop often provided by various Lincoln monuments and memorabilia, continues today: witness both Jesse Jackson Jr. (a member of the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission) and Barack Obama.[6]

Washington had to decline, with "keen regret," an invitation to speak in Springfield, Illinois, on Lincoln's birthday because of his longstanding New York commitment. In a letter to James R. B. Van Cleave, Washington states, "There is no spot in America where it would have given me greater satisfaction to have spoken my word than in Springfield," and not just because it was "the city that he loved and the city where his body rests," but because of "recent occurrences in this city" (Harlan 1972–89, 10:26–27). What Washington had in mind were the Springfield race riots of the previous summer. Those events (two days of intense rioting followed by weeks of sporadic attacks) were far from the first instance of antiblack mob action in a northern city, but they captured the attention of the press and the nation given both the location and the toll of the violence (two black businessmen lynched, four whites dead, more than forty black homes burned, extensive property damage to black businesses, threats against white establishments that employed or served blacks, and many injured residents).

In his letter to Van Cleave, Washington suggests that the context for these recent provocations is an increase in racial interaction. Population shifts mean that "many white people in the North who are now honoring the memory of Lincoln, are coming into contact with the race that Lincoln freed for the first time"—and behaving in very un-Lincolnian ways. Legend has it that the first black person to settle in Springfield was a Haitian named William Florville, who set up a barber shop in 1831 after benefiting from the assistance and advice of a young Abraham Lincoln in nearby New Salem. By 1908 the black population stood at 2,500 (of a total population of 47,000). In the rioting the first person lynched was a black barber. While the irony of that malicious act was doubtless not premeditated, the rioters were aware of the larger symbolic significance of their action, as some were heard to shout, "Lincoln freed you, now we'll show you where you belong!"[7]

In the wake of the attacks, Washington advises both groups on how they ought to handle themselves. The letter to Van Cleave gives a

précis of his message: law-abidingness on all sides. Blacks must remain "patient, law-abiding and self-controlled as Lincoln was."[8] Whites must cease to "inflict injustice upon the Negro because he is a Negro or because he is weak. Every act of injustice, of law breaking, growing out of the presence of the Negro, seeks to pull down the great temple of justice and law and order which he [Lincoln] gave his life to make secure." The letter, obviously intended for publication, was printed in the Springfield *News* on February 13, 1909. It can be read as a reworking of the theme of Lincoln's "Lyceum Address" delivered in Springfield in 1838. That speech too was composed in response to the threat of mob rule; the rash of vigilante actions at that time included the lynching of gamblers, blacks suspected of crimes, and abolitionists. To counter the danger, Lincoln recommended a "political religion" of obedience to and reverence for the law. The solution may be a simple one, but it was no easier to effect in Washington's day than in Lincoln's. Both men summon the sentiment of gratitude to assist them. Lincoln calls for a national oath, sworn upon "the blood of the Revolution," to support the Constitution and laws; Washington presents his call for law-abidingness as fidelity to the memory of "the sainted Lincoln." These are names to conjure with. Lincoln closes the Lyceum Address by reminding his listeners of "our WASHINGTON"; George Washington's namesake (the fatherless Booker had chosen "Washington" as his surname when he first attended school lacking that appurtenance) closes his appeal by invoking the name of Lincoln. Moderation, which is always at risk of seeming tepid or mean, is ennobled by these great examples, and at the same time given firm roots in the soil of civic piety.

For a fuller account of what Washington means by—and expects from—the invocation and imitation of Lincoln, we turn to the "Address on Abraham Lincoln," noting first its careful construction.[9] The speech has twenty-seven paragraphs, which can be divided into four parts (see the outline below). Between the opening and concluding parts (each two paragraphs in length), there are two substantial parts of roughly equal length (thirteen and ten paragraphs respectively), one devoted to the legacy of the Emancipation Proclamation, the other to Lincoln's virtues. Each of these longer parts is in turn divided into four sections. The pattern of these two parts is identical: an introductory paragraph followed

by sections addressing first blacks, then including whites, and finally expanding the message to the world at large.

I. Introduction: Slave Prayers (§§1–2)
II. Lincoln's Legacy "as chief executive of the nation" (§§3–15)
  A. "One composite nation" (§3)
  B. Black Citizens (§§4–6)
    1. Physical Freedom (§4)
    2. Educational and Economic Success (§5)
    3. Moral Aspiration (§6)
  C. All Citizens (§§7–11)
    1. Freedom of Soul (§§7–8)
    2. "Twenty-seven millions of Americans of another color" (§§9–11)
  D. The World (§§12–15)
    1. Free and Enlightened (§§12–13)
    2. From Slavery to Service (§§14–15)
III. Lincoln's Virtues "as a man" (§§16–25)
  A. The Risen Lincoln (§16)
  B. Black Imitation of Lincoln: Patience, Courage, and Service (§§17–20)
  C. "Brave and true white men of the South": Courage and Kindness (§§21–23)
  D. Gratitude and Progress (§§24–25)
IV. Conclusion: Freedom Oaths (§§26–27)

Washington's opening is humble. He stresses his slave origins, retelling the story of his mother's prayers for Lincoln and crediting Lincoln with turning "a piece of property" into "a free American citizen." In a curious way, however, Lincoln too is humbled, for he is presented as "the answer to that prayer." He was "an instrument used by Providence." To the extent that appeals to heaven are efficacious, slaves were not passive, nor were they without knowledge. In *Up from Slavery,* when Washington tells of his mother's prayers, he makes the point that slaves, although illiterate, were "accurately and completely informed about the great National questions that were agitating the country" (Washington 1986, 7). Thus

the celebration of Lincoln is situated in the context of a dialogue initiated by freedom-seeking slaves with God. Despite Washington's initial claim that he is "not fitted by ancestry or training to be your teacher tonight," by the end of the introduction he has subtly insinuated a claim based on "knowledge of Abraham Lincoln."

The long second part is an explication of a Bible verse "as applied to our martyred President." The verse, Washington's paraphrase of John 11:25, reads, "Though a man die, yet shall he live." Washington finds that Lincoln still lives through his influence on the "complex American civilization"—which is described as "the moving story of men and women of nearly every race and color in their progress from slavery to freedom." Having begun with a national rather than narrowly racial focus, Washington is explicit about his intention to confound expectations: "Perhaps you expect me to confine my words of appreciation to the great boon which, through him, was conferred upon my race." While "undying gratitude" and "eternal fame" do come to Lincoln for freeing the slaves, "this is not the only claim that Lincoln has upon our sense of gratitude and appreciation." Washington aims to enlarge (or perhaps deepen) the ground for both black gratitude and the nation's gratitude.

He begins with his own race (§§4–6), asserting that "Lincoln lives today" in the visible educational and economic advancement of blacks. What he highlights is not the mere fact of freedom but rather the successful employment of freedom. He gives a quick survey of the record so far, citing data on such things as black property holdings and black schools staffed by black teachers. Five years earlier, on Lincoln's birthday, Washington had delivered a speech in Madison Square Garden entirely devoted to setting forth "the condition of my race." Filled with statistics and even polling data, that speech, titled "Negro Education not a Failure," mentioned Lincoln only once, in its opening sentence (Harlan 1972–89, 7:429). Now, however, he is in every paragraph and in some paragraphs, every sentence ("Lincoln" appears 33 times; "he" 25 times, along with other references such as "our martyred President," "our Emancipator," and "the Great Emancipator"). What Washington is tracking in this present speech is not what is seen but what is unseen, for "that which is unseen is eternal." Thus after only a paragraph on the tangible evidence of black accomplishment, Washington moves to its inward

cause: "the steady and unalterable determination of ten millions of black citizens." It is through this moral aspiration toward self-perfection that "Lincoln lives."

Washington's analysis hinges on the distinction between inner and outer freedom. We learn, moreover, that this distinction applies "in every corner of the republic." With this phrase, Washington delicately begins to bring his message to bear on whites as well as blacks (§§7–11). He speaks in the first person again, expressing gratitude to Lincoln for "freedom of soul." His description of what it means to "live up in that atmosphere" is extremely interesting. Freedom, whether physical or spiritual, is a demanding activity. The man whose soul is free "refuses to permit sectional or racial hatred to drag down, to warp and narrow his soul." Spiritual freedom is ever vigilant, denying malice entrance. One is reminded of the closing lines of Lincoln's Second Inaugural. Washington took very literally the order of those famous clauses "with malice toward none; with charity for all," believing the first to be the precondition for the second. Washington does not say whether all or most blacks have experienced this highest form of emancipation. In speaking of spiritual freedom, he speaks "as an individual"; the gratitude he expresses to Lincoln is "my gratitude."

Having broached the theme of spiritual freedom, Washington now reveals its application to whites: "We who celebrate this anniversary should not forget that the same pen that gave freedom to four millions of African slaves at the same time struck the shackles from the souls of twenty-seven millions of Americans of another color." The end of slavery didn't just free blacks; it freed whites also. It freed them from participation and complicity in slavery. From this point forward, Washington charitably avoids racial modifiers (indeed, even the first reference to whites deployed the euphemism "Americans of another color"). However, in stating that "wherever people act upon the idea that the disadvantage of one man is the good of another, there slavery exists," the conclusion is inescapable: by enslaving blacks, whites enslaved themselves. (And by continuing to discriminate against blacks, whites prolong the self-inflicted harm on their own souls.) In antebellum America, blacks were physically enslaved, but it was whites who were spiritually enslaved. (Blacks may have been spiritually enslaved also but not inevitably so.) Washington agreed with

Saint Augustine who said that it was better by far to be the slave of a man than the slave of lust, especially the lust for dominion.

Washington, despite the misrepresentations of those who labeled him an "accommodationist," was a statesman of considerable moral audacity. He extends sympathy to whites from a position of moral superiority over them. Although whites sought to oppress blacks, "them it was their poison hurt" (to borrow a famous line from A. E. Housman). At the conclusion of an 1896 speech titled "Democracy and Education," Washington clearly expresses this insight about wrongdoing and its boomerang-like effect:

> The Negro can afford to be wronged; the white man cannot afford to wrong him. Unjust laws or customs that exist in many places regarding the races injure the white man and inconvenience the Negro. No race can wrong another race simply because it has the power to do so without being permanently injured in morals. The Negro can endure the temporary inconvenience, but the injury to the white man is permanent. It is for the white man to save himself from his degradation that I plead. (Brotz 1992, 370)

By abolishing slavery, Lincoln took the first step to release both races from their respective burdens: "He freed men's souls from spiritual bondage; he freed them to mutual helpfulness. Henceforth no man of any race, either in the North or in the South, need feel constrained to fear or hate his brother." With the shackles struck off, it remains to them to exercise their freedom. Given the recent events (and the longer-term advent and extension of disfranchisement, segregation, and discrimination), it is obvious enough that some of those brothers of another color have persisted in their malice. Washington's analysis has made plain that they do so *needlessly,* which is to say, willfully. Washington is precise in specifying what the Emancipation Proclamation achieved. It freed the physical slave and was "the symbol" of a more far-reaching spiritual emancipation. Lincoln "proclaimed the principle" that "the welfare of each is . . . the good of all," but the realization of this principle will depend on how whites and blacks behave. Do they move in the direction the new birth of freedom points them: "to mutual helpfulness"?

The scope of Washington's speech now expands to encompass the whole world (§§12–15). Just as the Gettysburg Address shifts its focal point from "this continent" (on which the new nation was conceived) to "this ground" (here where the battle was fought and the soldiers lie buried) and then finally to "the earth" (which has a stake in the fate of American liberty), so too Washington considers the global reach of the "Lincoln spirit of freedom and fair play." Lincoln himself, of course, in his 1857 speech on the Dred Scott decision, asserted that this transnational power belonged to the Declaration of Independence:

> [It] set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere. (Current 1967, 89)

Although Washington does not mention the Declaration in this speech, what he does say—namely, that Lincoln "*reestablished* the dignity of man as man" (original emphasis)—is compatible with Lincoln's view that the aim of his statesmanship was to return Americans to their ancient faith in the equality of all men (and further, that moral and political progress were contingent on that return). While Lincoln did not shy from the word *equality,* Washington never uses it in this speech (indeed, rarely uses it). When speaking of equality, Lincoln was careful to define exactly what he meant by the term, in part to stave off the misrepresentations of his political opponents. Thus he stated that the Declaration "did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity" but rather that all were equally entitled to their natural rights. I suspect that after slavery the term *equality* became even more contentious, particularly in the mouth of a black spokesman, inasmuch as it would imply civic equality (not just equality with respect to natural rights).

Lincoln's and Washington's respective strategies might be understood as an instance of rhetorical chiasmus: the white statesman appealed to *natural equality* in order to further the ultimate aim of *physical liberty*

for the slaves, whereas the black statesman appealed to *spiritual liberty* in order to further the ultimate and unstated aim of *civic equality.*

In this section Washington adds the crucial ingredient of "enlightenment" to liberty. Because real freedom belongs to the soul, not the body, enlightenment is essential. The worst form of ignorance is a blinding race-consciousness: "One who goes through life with his eyes closed against all that is good in another race is weakened and circumscribed." There is, I think, a tacit acknowledgment in this sentence that the Springfield riots had indeed manifested white hostility toward the best elements in the black population. Although the rioters rampaged first in two impoverished downtown black neighborhoods (with commentators speculating that whites were responding to crime emanating from these areas, which also housed the city's red-light district), very quickly the rioters targeted working-class black neighborhoods and particularly more well-to-do blacks who owned homes and shops. If whites were intent on sabotaging black economic advancement, Washington's well-developed strategy of putting economics before politics might be derailed. And, indeed, the Springfield riots galvanized a more concerted effort to demand political rights; later the same year a conference was held leading to the founding of the NAACP. Although Washington was invited (very much against the wishes of some of the organizers), he declined, preferring to redouble his efforts to enlighten these white delinquents rather than turn to the politics of racial petition and protest. In this "global" section of the speech, Washington presents the lesson in a generalized and thereby more oblique form. So, for instance, he says "*The world* is fast learning" that "*one man* cannot hold *another man* down in the ditch without remaining down in the ditch with him" (emphasis added). Washington couches his argument in terms of an elevated self-interest: surely whites in the United States won't want to sentence themselves to such backwardness.

Part II of the speech concludes with a celebration of Lincoln as a model of spiritual self-emancipation. The Great Emancipator was first a great self-emancipator: "Lincoln was in the truest sense great because he unfettered himself." In breaking the enchainment of race hatred, he "climbed up out of the valley . . . unto the mountain top . . . which enabled him to rate all men at their true worth." Thus spiritual freedom

conduces to equality in the sense that each individual is treated as an individual. It is "on such a mountain" that "the American people" should "strive to live." Half a century later, this mountaintop imagery was brilliantly elaborated by King in the "Let freedom ring" peroration of his "I Have a Dream" speech.

FROM GOOD CITIZEN TO GOOD MAN

Washington emphasizes that freedom abolishes slavery but not service. Indeed, in freedom, service to others becomes more possible and more powerful, since enlightened freedom enables individuals to render one another "the highest and most helpful form of service." We have seen that Part II of the speech presents Washington's assessment of the service Lincoln performed in signing the Emancipation Proclamation—how it benefited both blacks and whites; how it benefited both our nation and the world. Part III of the speech delineates a yet higher form of service rendered by Lincoln. It moves, we might say, from Lincoln's statesmanship to his saintliness (or in more Aristotelian terms, from Lincoln as a good citizen/ruler to Lincoln as a good man).

In keeping with his conviction that the personal is infinitely more important than the political, Washington here examines not Lincoln's actions as president but his rise to the presidency: "In fighting his own battle up from obscurity and squalor, he fought the battle of every other individual and race that is down, and so helped to pull up every other human who was down." In lifting oneself, one lifts others. Service to others isn't necessarily a matter of "giving back" or reaching out with a helping hand, as we tend to think today. Instead, individual example is itself uplifting. Lincoln spoke in these same terms of the system of free enterprise: "That some should be rich, shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprize" (Current 1967, 296). Washington generalizes and spiritualizes the lesson: Lincoln's struggle—"his ambition to do something and be something"—speaks to each of us "as individuals, no matter of what race or nation." The occasional passing references that Washington made to Lincoln (outside of either the Sunday Evening Talks or the Lincoln Day addresses) were

almost invariably on this theme of Lincoln's rise "from the humble log cabin to the Presidency of the greatest republic on earth."[10]

Although Lincoln is a universal role model, Washington once again draws out specific messages for specific audiences. He begins as he did in Part II with his own race (§§17–20). The debt of gratitude toward Lincoln is paid by imitating him. The virtues that characterized Lincoln—or at least that subset of his virtues relevant to "my people"—were "patience, long suffering, sincerity, naturalness, dogged determination, and courage." When Washington restates Lincoln's virtues in §20, it is the first and last of these—patience and courage—that Lincoln is said to have "possessed in the highest degree."

Without retracting his earlier statement that the Proclamation "gave freedom to four millions of African slaves," Washington now asserts that "freedom, in the broadest and highest sense, has never been a bequest; it has been a conquest." The struggle, being first internal and second interpersonal, does not require militancy but instead the virtues of Lincoln: patience and courage, by which Washington means "moral courage." There are "new possibilities furnished by Lincoln's Proclamation," but only those individuals will succeed who meet the internal demands of freedom. Washington recaps some of what he had said in the Sunday Evening Talk at Tuskegee just the month before about the value of simplicity. It takes courage "to persistently seek the substance instead of the shadow." Expanding on his conception of service, Washington links it also to courage. A soul sovereign over itself can subordinate self to others. Fittingly, this section culminates in Washington's praise of black teachers, the "brave young souls who are erecting schoolhouses, creating school systems, prolonging school terms," "with little thought of salary, with little thought of personal welfare." Near the beginning of this section Washington had said "As a race we are learning . . . that the best way for us to honor the memory of our Emancipator is by seeking to imitate him." The end of the section reveals that this learning is owing to the guidance and example provided by Tuskegee-trained teachers, with the quite explicit intention "to lift up their fellows." This is courage "of the Lincoln kind."

The coin of Washington's realm is gratitude. He is attempting to establish what might be called a "service economy," driven by debts of

gratitude, payable by the tribute of emulation. Praising Lincoln naturally leads to praising others whose gratitude to Lincoln led them to become Lincolnian. Benefactions fructify and propagate like seeds.

Whites too, even Southern whites, can be Lincolnian. The next section (§§21–23) praises the moral courage displayed by "brave and true white men of the South." Washington speaks of those who have "loyally accepted the results of the Civil War"—whatever their previous stance—and who are now working to "complete the emancipation that Lincoln began." He instances two former Confederate commanders, Robert E. Lee and John B. Gordon. In Part II Washington had appealed to white self-interest (with his argument that oppressors damage themselves by their oppressions). Now he appeals to what might be called "white pride." The noblest Southern whites are magnanimous. Washington points out that Lincoln himself "was a Southern man by birth." In the early twentieth century, white supremacists like Thomas Dixon, author of *The Clansman* (1905), were attempting to lay claim to Lincoln as one of their own.[11] Citing Lincoln's prewar disavowal of any intention to establish political and social equality, along with his support for colonization, Dixon sought to make Lincoln "the true prophet of white supremacy" (Peterson 1994, 168). Washington avoids any direct reference to the Jim Crow appropriation of Lincoln. Instead, he counters with a different conception of Anglo-Saxon superiority—one that does not rest on race hatred. Thus he says Lincoln "was one of those white men, of whom there is a large and growing class, who resented the idea that in order to assert and maintain the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race it was necessary that another group of humanity should be kept in ignorance." This is an extraordinarily deft maneuver. Washington does not want any element of white opinion to feel alienated from Lincoln. If segregationists want to embrace Lincoln, so be it, since that embrace allows Washington to show that white dominance is not incompatible with treating others decently. Lincoln was confident enough in his own strength to be "just and kind." Washington throws down the gauntlet, challenging the proponents of white pride to be chivalrous and to disdain fear. In essence, he accuses the vicious breed of white supremacists of cowardice: "it requires no courage for a strong man to kick a weak one down." Like a jujitsu master, Washington tells whites, if you really had pride, you wouldn't be

without pity. Moreover, the pitiless are truly pitiful. Thus, I, Booker T. Washington, pity you.

Recognizing that race pride is not so easily dismantled, Washington appeals to race pride of a better sort to vanquish the nastier versions of race pride and perhaps to lay the groundwork for the disappearance of race pride. Washington does what he can to convince white Americans that their proper pride lies in dedication to "the Lincoln spirit of freedom and fair play."

The final section of Part III (§§24–25) summarizes Washington's this-worldly answer to the biblically inspired question with which he began: "If a man die, shall he live?" According to Washington, "Lincoln lives today" because he attained the peak of virtue. The amalgam of moral courage and patience, to which Washington now adds "foresight," enabled Lincoln "to suffer in silence, to be misunderstood, to be abused, to refuse to revile when reviled." Washington here accounts for Lincoln's persistence in the face of a very large measure of public incomprehension and ingratitude. This section might be read as a gloss on the closing lines of Lincoln's Cooper Union address: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." Once again, there is a startling element of moral reproof in what Washington is willing to say to white Americans. Citizens are inclined to believe that the outpourings of gratitude, occasioned by the centennial of Lincoln's birth, honor not only Lincoln but also themselves in a certain sense. There is an element of self-satisfaction in linking oneself and one's nation to past greatness. Washington works against this national complacency. He reminds the celebrants that they can receive credit only for hindsight and not, as with Lincoln, for foresight. Here is how Washington drops his hint that a dose of democratic contrition should figure in our remembrance of Lincoln:

> He knew, too, that at some time in the distant future our nation would repent of the folly of cursing our public servants while they live and blessing them only when they die. In this connection I cannot refrain from suggesting the question to the millions of voices raised today in his praise: "Why did you not say it yesterday?" Yesterday, when one word of approval and gratitude would have meant so much to him in strengthening his hand and heart.

The statesman acted for the good of all, North and South. But he had to proceed without gratitude. One can't help but hear Washington's own lament. He too was a public servant who was much abused and whose aims and policies were misrepresented (often by those whom Washington called, with some derision, "The Intellectuals"—a group of northern black leaders that included W. E. B. DuBois). While Washington believed that the virtues of patience and courage may be found even in ordinary men, "foresight" is rare, and those blessed with it need perhaps a double share of patience and courage for they will have to press forward alone. Washington points to the role that public support could play in strengthening the democratic statesman's "hand and heart." Note he exempts the "head" from this (a significant omission given that Washington was well known for his definition of education as involving the "head, hand, and heart"). The statesman's "head"—his knowledge of right and his foresight—is an independent capacity. The attitude of the public may well affect his efficacy—restricting what his hands can achieve—but it will not alter his principles.

The final paragraph of Part III (§25) looks ahead. Because of Lincoln's example (especially now that the audience has been properly chastened by the reminder of its own past failures), "faith in the future" is strengthened. The recollection of Lincoln sustains the faith in moral progress. Despite the backsliding that appears "for a little season," righteousness will prevail—not only among us, but throughout the world.

The conclusion of the speech (§§26–27) proposes a dramatic act in the present moment: a mutual oath-taking by whites and blacks that will bridge past and future. Declaring whites and blacks "brothers all," Washington asks ("may I not ask") that his audience ("the worthy representatives of seventy millions of white Americans") join with black Americans (all "ten millions") and "swear eternal fealty to the memory and the traditions of the sainted Lincoln." Washington's formulation of the oath indicates a key difference between blacks and whites. His invitation highlights the distance between these "worthy representatives" of white America (who may be inclined to extend themselves "heart and

hand" across the color line) and the unworthy sort. Blacks are, on the whole, frankly better, for they "have never lifted their voices or hands except in defense of their country's honor and their country's flag." The same cannot be said of whites. Perhaps that is why he repeats the invitation with a telling modification: "I repeat, may we not join with your race." Although both versions are formulated with a deferential negative ("may I not ask that you join" and "may we not join"), they are not precisely reciprocal. In the first formulation he had asked "worthy" whites to join with blacks; in the second, although still asking something of whites (acceptance rather than outreach), the initiative shifts to blacks. After all, the condescension, if there is any among brothers, would be on the black side. They, in their loyalty, are willing to reach out to the whole white world, even though so many white Americans have so often traduced the nation's founding principles. If kept, this oath of brotherhood sworn on the blood of Lincoln could heal both the sectional and racial divides, thereby ensuring that Lincoln "shall not have lived and died in vain." This is what we must "here highly resolve."

Washington's language deliberately echoes the Gettysburg Address, although the idea of a sacred oath as a political instrument for securing our national freedom is more reminiscent of the Lyceum Address. Despite these resonances and parallels, Washington's Address has a different overall arc than either the Lyceum or Gettysburg Addresses, both of which begin with praise of the Founding Fathers who bequeathed to us "a political edifice of liberty" (as the Lyceum Address puts it) or "brought forth . . . a new nation, conceived in Liberty" (as the Gettysburg Address has it). Washington, however, did not begin either his speech or his life in that way. He takes his initial conception from slavery: "I was born a slave." He moves from a slave's prayers to a free man's promises.

In the final paragraph, Washington offers his own pledge on behalf of his race. I believe he intends this pledge to be kept regardless of the success or failure of the mutual black/white justice oath. This pledge transcends politics, although it is not without political ramifications:

> And, finally, gathering inspiration and encouragement from this hour and Lincoln's life, I pledge to you and to the nation that my race, in so far as I can speak for it, which in the past, whether in ignorance or intelligence, whether in slavery or in freedom, has always been true to the Stars and Stripes and to the highest and best interests of this country, will strive to so deport itself that it shall reflect nothing but the highest credit upon the whole people in the North and in the South.

Washington does not call for blacks to behave in ways that will be (as the saying once went) "a credit to their race." His aspiration is much higher and more redemptive. What he pledges is that his race will be a credit to America. Blacks have it within their power to manifest the highest possibilities of citizenship and humanity. That power, being spiritual, does not depend on whites making good on their oath to "justice, good will, and peace." Washington acknowledges through the qualifying phrase "in so far as I can speak for [my race]" that he cannot in fact guarantee black deportment. Thus the firmest pledge here is for himself alone. Even if either whites or blacks collectively fail in their respective pledges, the individual possibility of abiding with Lincoln would remain. Booker T. Washington, through times of great trouble in American race relations, did remain true to Lincoln, "for he knew that, if he was right, the ridicule of today would be the applause of tomorrow." The time will come when Booker T. Washington will be generally acknowledged as an American statesman and secular saint.

NOTES

1. The phrase is from Frederick Douglass's "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln." In that speech Douglass began by asserting that Lincoln, as a white man, was not "either our man or our model." Over the course of the speech, Douglass considerably revised that assessment. For interpretations of the Douglass speech, see Schaub n.d. See also Morel 2003, 2005; Myers 2010.

2. Lincoln is not appealed to as a model for proper dress. Far from overdressing, he may rather have erred on the side of underdressing. There are stories of Lincoln greeting visitors at his home in Springfield with bare feet, and his suits were notoriously ill fitting.

3. Frederick Douglass always spoke of Lincoln's Second Inaugural as his greatest speech. This difference in their judgments might reveal interesting differences in their temperaments and teachings.

4. Ten years earlier Washington had given another Lincoln birthday address, "An Abraham Lincoln Memorial Address in Philadelphia" (Harlan 1972–89, 5:32–38). Some of its themes are similar.

5. Moton was Washington's successor at Tuskegee Institute.

6. See Jackson's May 9, 2009, Lincoln College commencement address and his September 3, 2008, column, "The Power of Forgiveness and Reconciliation," and his December 3, 2007, column, "Jesse Jr. to Jesse Sr.: You're wrong on Obama, dad." Obama announced his candidacy for the presidency in Springfield and took the oath of office on the Lincoln Bible (now known as the Lincoln-Obama Bible). Obama's 2005 essay in *Time* magazine, "What I See in Lincoln's Eyes," is his most sustained reflection on the meaning of Abraham Lincoln.

7. Available at http://sangamon.ilgenweb.net/1881/florville.htm (last accessed May 2011).

8. Washington essentially repeats the kernel of the lesson about simplicity from the Sunday Evening Talk, which was delivered during the time he was preparing the "Address on Lincoln."

9. Since my exposition follows the order of the speech paragraph by paragraph, I will not provide page citations beyond this first mention: Harlan 1972–89, 10:33–39.

10. See Letter to the Editor of the Charleston *West Virginia* (Harlan 1972–89, 2:73). See also "An Interview in the Chicago *Inter Ocean*," where Washington speaks of the need for black role models for black youth (4:355).

11. Dixon's novel was the inspiration for the D.W. Griffith film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which led to the second founding of the Ku Klux Klan.

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