

1972

## Booker T. Washington's Florida Incident, 1903-1904

Arthur O. White



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

White, Arthur O. (1972) "Booker T. Washington's Florida Incident, 1903-1904," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 51 : No. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol51/iss3/3>

## BOOKER T. WASHINGTON'S FLORIDA INCIDENT, 1903-1904

by ARTHUR O. WHITE\*

"COME WITHOUT fail. You will receive kindly and friendly welcome. Address to be given in courthouse to both races."<sup>1</sup> This telegram of February 4, 1903, reinvited Booker T. Washington, America's best known black man, to speak on the occasion of the joint meeting of the General Education Board and county superintendents of education at Gainesville, Florida. It was front page news throughout the United States. Washington's acceptance of an earlier invitation from State Superintendent of Education William N. Sheats, one of the South's most renowned educators, had caused intense controversy among Floridians over the idea of a black man, however prominent, addressing white people. Realizing the threat to his movement if not to his person, Washington had offered to withdraw, but the message from Sheats, Gainesville's Mayor W. R. Thomas, and Alachua County Superintendent of Education W. M. Holloway helped convince him to lecture on February 5, 1903, to a racially mixed crowd of some 2,000. Washington later insisted he had "never received a more delightful welcome," and he described his visit as a major triumph over southern race prejudice.<sup>2</sup>

Yet in large part because of his involvement, Sheats would lose the Democratic race for state superintendent of public instruction in 1904. Sheat's opponent was Holloway who used Washington's visit to Gainesville to accuse Sheats of advocating "social equality" with Negroes. Sheats would have Holloway arrested, and he would sue him for criminal libel. As a result the Democratic Executive Committee almost jeopardized the integrity of the Florida election primary by ruling that Holloway's

---

\* Mr. White is assistant professor of education at the University of Florida, Gainesville.

1. W. R. Thomas, W. M. Holloway, and W. N. Sheats to Booker T. Washington, February 4, 1903, Booker T. Washington Papers, container 542 (Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.).
2. Washington to Lyman Abbot, February 9, 1903, *ibid.*, 249.

name be taken off the ballot. While Floridians debated the correctness of the executive committee's decision, Gainesville citizens sought to ostracize those they felt were responsible for Washington's visit.

It was Washington's sponsors on the General Education Board who began the chain of circumstances that brought him to Gainesville. This board was organized in 1902 by John D. Rockefeller, the Standard Oil magnate, who used it to channel his philanthropy to education. Subsequently, Robert C. Ogden, a New York City corporate executive and member of the Tuskegee Endowment Committee, founded the Southern Education Board at Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Meetings between the General Board and southern educators were arranged, and efforts to encourage a wider local tax base for education were made.<sup>3</sup>

At the first joint meeting in May 1902, at Athens, Georgia, forty "northern capitalists" met with 500 school officials. Rural education in the South needed support, and the board agreed to distribute funds through local officials. Though board members discussed Washington's theories of rural black education, Washington himself had not been invited to Athens nor to any of the other conferences.<sup>4</sup> Thus, on January 28, 1903, when the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, the state's best known paper, announced that Sheats had invited Washington to Gainesville for a joint meeting of the General Education Board and Florida's county superintendents, many people perceived the invitation as a threat to southern tradition and the southern way of life.<sup>5</sup>

Sam DeBose, a Gainesville black, played an influential role in the decision to extend the invitation. Since 1901 DeBose had been trying to organize a private Negro industrial school, and he sought to bring Washington to Gainesville as a "fund raising attraction." In a letter to his mother asking for a \$200 loan to finance his school, he asked that she recommend him to Washington. In this communication, which later came into Washington's possession, DeBose claimed that if he was head of his own school he could defeat "the skin game," as he called it, that

3. *The General Education Board: An Account of Its Activities, 1902-1914* (New York, 1915), 3, 11.

4. Sheats to Mrs. W. W. Cummer, February 25, 1902, W. N. Sheats Letterbooks, Letterbook 14 (State Commissioner of Education Office, Tallahassee); *Savannah Morning News*, January 30, 1903.

5. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 28, 1903.

operated in southern politics, churches, and educational institutions. He criticized officials who promised black teachers that their schools would remain open four months and then closed them because of "inadequate finances." DeBose personally wrote Washington in February 1902, saying that he did not have "a single dollar" to start his school and asking, "did you have such a time when you began your school?" DeBose urged him to help by spending a few days in Gainesville, predicting that he would attract the largest assembly in the history of the city. Washington refused, even after he was asked to name his own price for a "one night stopover."<sup>6</sup>

When rumors began to spread throughout the South after the Athens, Georgia, meeting that funds would soon be available for black education, DeBose secured support in his effort to lure Washington to Gainesville.<sup>7</sup> County Superintendent Holloway agreed to serve as treasurer of DeBose's school for one per cent of all collected funds and two per cent of those expended. J. B. Holley, who had built up a large congregation as pastor of the First Baptist Church in which Holloway served as deacon, volunteered to manage DeBose's campaign for "benevolent funds." The Scientific, Normal and Industrial Institute for Colored Youth was subsequently incorporated with DeBose listed as president.<sup>8</sup>

Although the school only existed on paper, Washington was again approached for support. On December 27, 1902, Holley and J. M. Rivers, a member of the state legislature from Alachua County, invited Washington to deliver a lecture on "The Educational Possibilities and Necessities of the Colored Youth." Although Holley emphasized the need of the black community for funds from the "Ogden party," Washington again refused.<sup>9</sup>

Undaunted, DeBose, on Holloway's suggestion, persuaded

6. S. W. DeBose to Mrs. A. Chipman, December 20, 1901, Washington Papers 225; DeBose to Washington, February 1, 15, 1902, *ibid.*; DeBose to Washington, February 15, 1902, *ibid.*

7. Jacksonville *Metropolis*, March 19, 1904.

8. *Affidavit of Sam DeBose*, Sheats's campaign circular 1904, William N. Sheats Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill; microfilm copy, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville); Jacksonville *Metropolis*, March 19, 1904; J. B. Holley to Washington, December 27, 1902, Washington Papers, 236; *Gainesville Daily Sun*, September 28, 1904.

9. Holley to Washington, Washington Papers, 236; Jacksonville *Metropolis*, March 19, 1904.

State Superintendent Sheats to extend an invitation. Wallace Buttrick, executive officer of the General Education Board, described Sheats as having done perhaps "more than any other southerner to promote universal education"; he was known as "Florida's little giant of education." In 1885, while Alachua County superintendent, he had written the educational provisions for the new state constitution. Elected state superintendent in 1892, he had established the procedures for certifying teachers, helped organize normal schools and teacher institutes, and had written the legislation that regulated the dual school system. A frequent speaker at national educational gatherings, Sheats had been president of the Southern Education Association in 1902.<sup>10</sup>

He was a strong advocate of industrial training for blacks and often expressed concern that Negroes were not being prepared to become part of the free work force.<sup>11</sup> Though declaring himself no "red nose negro loving Yankee," he thought it his duty "to do all that I could to get them educated in a way that I think is best for them." After hearing Washington speak, Sheats declared, "I never heard . . . a more noble defense of the attitude of the southern white man towards the negro. Booker T. Washington advocates teaching the negro how to work and how to do something and not teaching him books alone. I say he is right."<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, Washington's visit to Gainesville did provoke controversy. Reaction had swept the South after he and Theodore Roosevelt had dined together at the White House. Many

---

10. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 8, 1903; Oswald L. Parker, "William N. Sheats, Florida Educator" (masters thesis, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1949), *passim*.

11. Parker, "William N. Sheats," 215

12. Sheats to J. M. Slater, October 26, 1903, Sheats Letterbook 18. Immediately after Washington had spoken in New Orleans in 1901, Sheats had asked him to recommend someone for the principalship of the State Normal and Industrial School for Colored Students in Tallahassee. He told Washington: "I want a man who could build up a twin institution to your own," and he claimed to be able to "get any amount of funds if I could only secure a proper man to popularize the work." Sheats to Washington, June 7, 1901, *ibid.*, 12. Sheats wrote a letter of inquiry about Nathan B. Young, who he appointed to head the institution, declaring that he wanted "a second Booker Washington." Sheats to J. H. Phillips, June 13, 1901, *ibid.* Sheats often employed Tuskegee graduates in the state's most prestigious black teaching positions. When a state black criticized this practice, Sheats replied that he was not going to appoint a "conceited black head" to a responsible position. Sheats to C. Z. Whitefield, March 1, 1902, *ibid.*, 14.

Florida papers carried broadside cartoons lampooning the President, and others criticized him in their editorials and news reports. The view of the *Ocala Banner* was typical: The white people of the South must preserve "the purity of the white race . . . . We owe this much to our women, to our country, to our God."<sup>13</sup> Another paper insisted that "there never lived (and please God there never will) a white man so low in the social world but he was ten times better than the most respectable negro."<sup>14</sup>

Tension had abated somewhat when Sheats issued the invitation to Washington, and Florida papers were again praising the Tuskegee movement. From DeBose's letter Sheats learned that Holley and Holloway were associated with the proposed school, and he was informed that Washington's lecture would be an "off program address" presented in a Negro church. Thus on January 6, 1903, he invited Washington to "deliver an address on one of the evenings during the meeting" in Gainesville.<sup>15</sup> Washington accepted, expecting to be on the program. Buttrick informed him that his expenses would be paid, and he congratulated "Florida on having a superintendent with sense enough to invite you to address a meeting of its superintendents."<sup>16</sup>

DeBose immediately announced the opening of his industrial school, and changed the site of the address to the 600-seat Edward's Opera House and Wine Room, across from the courthouse square. Sheats told him not to charge an admission fee for Washington's talk and to prepare for Florida's leading black teachers who would attend a special conference with Washington.<sup>17</sup>

---

13. *Ocala Banner*, October 25, 1901.

14. *Palmetto News*, quoted in *St. Petersburg Times*, October 26, 1901.

15. Sheats to Washington, January 5, 1903, Washington Papers, 241; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 11, 1903; *Pensacola Daily News*, February 3, 1903; Jacksonville *Metropolis*, March 19, 1904. One example of praise of the Tuskegee movement is the *Florida Times-Union* of January 11, 1903. The paper carried a feature article on the Negro Industrial School of Eatonville, Florida. It stressed that this school grew out of Washington's Tuskegee movement, and showed a picture of "Booker T. Washington Hall" and quoted from the school's alma mater, "Tuskegee Our Mother."

16. Wallace Buttrick to Washington, January 27, 1903, Washington Papers, 249.

17. *Affidavit of Sam DeBose*, Sheats Papers; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 31, 1903.

Within a day of Sheats's invitation, agitation began. On January 7, the *New York Times* headlined "Race Issue Alive Again." Theodore Roosevelt's appointment of blacks to positions in the South had irritated many Southerners, and they believed that Washington was advising the President in this matter.<sup>18</sup> Florida newspapers had joined others in the South, protesting that "the people of the South don't want their offices filled with negroes."<sup>19</sup>

By late January, criticism of the invitation to Washington became more open, particularly when rumors began to circulate that he would lecture before white educators in the "white school auditorium." As one observer put it, "Washington had been invited to speak with the 'white folks' and in the 'big house' instead of the kitchen." As feelings intensified, the reception committee, which included Mayor W. R. Thomas, C. C. Thomas, and Dr. J. F. McKinstry, announced their resignations.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile County Superintendent Holloway, who was planning to run for state superintendent of education the following year, saw that he could use this incident to attack Sheats. After showing people in Gainesville Sheats's communication to DeBose, which confirmed the invitation to Washington, he cancelled use of the white auditorium as the place for the talk. H. H. McCreary, editor of the *Gainesville Sun*, unhappy with Sheats because of the latter's opposition to passage of the uniform state textbook bill which he supported,<sup>21</sup> printed the following statement by Holloway:

Believing social equality inconsistent with the ideas, customs and institutions of the South, and consequently inimical to her highest good and best interests, I can not sit idly by and permit so serious an infraction of her social laws as has been attempted. I therefore declare the auditorium unavailable for the use of Booker T. Washington, or any other colored person during the convention of superintendents or upon any subsequent occasion.<sup>22</sup>

18. *New York Times*, January 7, 1903.

19. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 23, 1903.

20. Jacksonville *Metropolis*, March 19, September 29, 1904.

21. Sheats wrote to a colleague: "The Senator [McCreary] swore that he would pass that bill at the next term of the legislature, in order to verify his oath he deems it necessary to have me out of the way." Sheats to R. S. Nash, October 14, 1903, Sheats Letterbook 18.

22. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, January 28, 1903, quoted from the *Tallahassee Daily Capital* by the *Pensacola Daily News*, February 3, 1903.

McCreary insisted that though Sheats had received a copy of this message, the superintendent would only confirm that Washington would speak in Gainesville February 4. When Sheats refused to issue a denial statement, McCreary insisted that this meant that he had scheduled the lecture for the white school. While McCreary felt that "it would be eminently proper to have . . . Washington address the colored people," Sheats had committed a "grave insult" by inviting him to address a white audience in a white school. The press generally agreed with McCreary, and many papers compared Sheats with President Roosevelt in his alleged pro-black attitude.<sup>23</sup>

Sheats tried to defend himself. In a telegram to McCreary, he blamed DeBose for the invitation and denied that he had ever planned to allow Washington in the white auditorium. He then told a reporter that Washington would speak either in the Negro academy, the courthouse, or the opera house exclusively on "plans for educating the Negro" and that "whites could attend if they desired to." Sheats promised that Washington would "not warp the judgment of white democrats" and would "not allude to social equality unless to disapprove of it." According to Sheats, Washington would "doubtlessly behave himself as approvingly to the general public as will the politest Negro waiter in the city hotel." Sheats guaranteed that Washington would not participate in the conference nor have his words recorded in the proceedings. He also noted that the controversial invitation had been extended before the "Roosevelt episode."<sup>24</sup>

After Holloway's telegram protesting social equality appeared in a number of national newspapers,<sup>25</sup> Washington, advised by Ogden and Buttrick, offered to release Sheats from the engagement: "If the opposition in anyway embarasses you, I am willing to withdraw acceptance of invitation." In the meantime, Washington sent his advanceman, M. B. Thrasher, into Gainesville to advise him on the situation. Also the General Board dispatched

---

23. *Ibid.*, *Gainesville Daily Sun*, January 29, 1903, quoted from the *Tallahassee Daily Capital* in the *Pensacola Daily News*, February 3, 1903; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 30, 1903.

24. *Tallahassee Daily Capital*, quoted in *Pensacola Daily News*, February 3, 1903.

25. For example, see *Savannah Morning News*, January 29, 1903; *Atlanta Constitution*, January 30, 1903; *New York Times*, January 30, 1903; *Washington Post*, January 31, 1903.



Buttrick to Gainesville to be an "angel of peace" lest there be a "hot time in the old town."<sup>26</sup>

From Tallahassee, Sheats asked Mayor Thomas for a report on local feeling. The mayor then met with twelve Gainesville leaders to evaluate the situation. After conferring for six hours, all present except J. W. Wideman, principal of the high school and a friend of Sheats, agreed that Washington had been invited to speak in the white auditorium. But without a full consensus, Thomas informed Sheats that he could not "presume to voice the sentiments of the people."<sup>27</sup> The Jacksonville *Metropolis* reprinted an accusation made by the *Charleston News and Courier* that Thomas by his statement "dodges" the issue.<sup>28</sup>

At a public meeting chaired by Wideman in the high school, many citizens "bitterly" denounced Sheats for his invitation to Washington. No one, except perhaps Wideman, knew that Sheats was in Gainesville, and when he suddenly entered the hall, many people acted as if a "bomb had been thrown into the crowd." Called to the platform to "straighten himself out," Sheats, with "commendable calmness," explained that on the request of DeBose he had reissued the invitation to Washington which originally had been made by Representative Rivers and Holley.<sup>29</sup>

When the crowd became silent, indicating that many accepted Sheats's explanation, C. C. Thomas rose to introduce resolutions

26. Robert C. Ogden to Frederick L. Moore, February 9, 1903, Robert C. Ogden Papers, container 13 (Library of Congress, Washington). Buttrick to Sheats, June 28, 1904, Washington Papers, 20; Washington to Sheats, January 31, 1903; *ibid.*, 542; Sheats to Washington, February 1, 1903, *ibid.*; M. B. Thrasher to Washington, February 4, 1903, *ibid.*; Ogden to Buttrick, February 2, 1903, Ogden Papers, 13.

27. Jacksonville *Metropolis*, September 29, 1904.

28. *Charleston News and Courier*, February 3, 1903, Washington Papers, 1035, quoted in Jacksonville *Metropolis*, February 4, 1903. The Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 4, 1903, also reported that the mayor should have made a more "definite reply."

29. *Ibid.*; Jacksonville *Metropolis*, February 4, 1903, March 19, 1904. The surprise at Sheats's arrival was reported by the *Florida Times-Union* the day following the meeting. *Florida Times-Union*, February 4, 1903. However, the Jacksonville *Metropolis*, also reporting the next day, asserted that Sheats knew of the meeting and it "was a mystery why he was not present." C. C. Thomas, almost seventeen months later in a letter to the Jacksonville *Metropolis*, reported that it was generally known that Sheats was in Gainesville and would come to the mass meeting "to ascertain for himself what the sentiments of the people were upon this question." Jacksonville *Metropolis*, February 4, 1903, September 29, 1904. According to Sheats he "happened in upon that so called indignation meeting," *ibid.*, March 19, 1904.

demanding that the superintendent be censured and that the invitation to Washington be withdrawn. Thomas read DeBose's letter from Sheats, and emphasized "the phraseology" to show that Sheats had "extended the same invitation to Washington which had been given to Dr. Buttrick and other distinguished white speakers." Angry at being "roasted," Sheats in a "temper" condemned the disturbance as a plot to "besmirch him" so that Holloway could be elected state superintendent. Before a vote could be taken on Thomas's resolutions, arguments broke up the meeting at ten o'clock with many people, according to one news report, "more indignant than before the meeting had been called."<sup>30</sup>

Despite the controversy, Sheats, Holloway, and Mayor Thomas agreed that Washington should come to Gainesville, and they hoped to convince the educator to accept the invitation. Not wanting to provoke the General Board, Holloway and Mayor Thomas insisted that their only objection was to Washington's appearance in the white school but that he would be cordially received at the courthouse.<sup>31</sup> Sheats then wired Washington: "Reason has asserted itself. Speak here Thursday night without fail." When there was no response, Thomas, Holloway, and Sheats together assured Washington by telegram of a "kindly and friendly welcome." Thomas and Sheats next called on Buttrick to urge Washington to accept, and Thrasher separately sent a similar message. After receiving these communications on February 4, Washington consented to speak the following evening.<sup>32</sup>

- 
30. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 4, 1903; Jacksonville *Metropolis*, March 19, September 29, 1904. A day later, the Alachua County school board sustained Holloway in refusing the auditorium to Washington. When the resolution was offered a member exclaimed: "Mr. Chairman, that resolution is the proper thing, and I heartily move that it be unanimously adopted by this board." "I can agree with you on that," replied the chairman, and so it went, *ibid.*, February 5, 1903.
31. They had to be careful since preparations were being made to entertain the General Board's executive secretary, Wallace Buttrick, a friend of Washington and the man thought most influential in recommending grants from the General Board. Representatives from Jacksonville and other cities also planned "to spare" nothing to influence Dr. Buttrick. Jacksonville, *Florida Times-Union*, February 7, 1903; *Pensacola Daily News*, February 9, 1903.
32. Sheats to Washington, February 3, 1903, Washington Papers, 241; W. R. Thomas, Holloway, and Sheats to Washington, February 4, 1903, *ibid.* 20; Buttrick to Washington, February 4, 1903, *ibid.*, 542; Thrasher to Washington, February 4, 1903, *ibid.*; Washington to Sheats, February 4, 1903, *ibid.*

The Gainesville controversy afforded Washington an opportunity to enhance his movement. With nationwide coverage, he could demonstrate his methods for dealing with southern prejudice. The *New York Times* on January 30, had headlined a story, "Race Prejudice in Florida, Citizens of Gainesville Refuse to Allow Booker T. Washington to Speak in Auditorium." The *New York World* pitied Southerners if "a body of one horse school officials in Florida could be compromised in its dignity . . . by a man of Booker T. Washington's brains and character." "A Great Blunder," the Springfield (Massachusetts) *Union* announced; "probably no case in the South illustrating race prejudice has attracted so much general condemnation as that of the citizens of Gainesville." A Connecticut paper described, "the latest southern kick as expressing general horror at Superintendent Sheats for inviting a nigger to appear before white men . . . who . . . by mental ability [is] the equal of and the superior of most of them."<sup>33</sup>

Other newspapers followed a similar line. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* predicted that Florida teachers would lose nothing by refusing to hear Washington as "he would have talked over their heads." Similarly the *Peoria Star* decided that Gainesville citizens were afraid to let Washington speak because he might prove himself "superior to those . . . refusing to recognize his high purpose." It was clear to a California newspaper afterwards that "if the people of Gainesville, . . . had half of Washington's manliness, politeness and ability, they would never have been guilty of their unmannerly act."<sup>34</sup>

Southerners held differing interpretations. Mobile and Pensacola papers praised Washington's inclination to withdraw as "delicacy," "discretion," and "good sense." A *Charleston News and Courier* editorial, reprinted in the Jacksonville *Metropolis*, warned Washington, the "politician and office broker," to stay away from Gainesville and described the antipathy there as representing the "feeling against him in other southern communities."<sup>35</sup>

33. *New York Times*, January 30, 1903; scrapbook, Washington Papers, 1035; *New York World*, quoted in Massachusetts *Springfield Union*, February 1, 1903; *ibid.*; clipping, Bridgeport, Connecticut, February 6, 1903, *ibid.*

34. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 4, 1903, *ibid.*; *Peoria Star*, February 8, 1903, *ibid.*; *Sacramento Record Union*, February 10, 1903, *ibid.*

35. *Mobile Weekly Register*, February 7, 1903, *ibid.*; *Pensacola Daily News*,

Some southern editors contradicted these assertions. The *Houston Daily Post* cited Washington's appearance before that city's "best white citizens," and asserted that the "Florida incident does not reflect the best southern sentiment." The *Atlanta Constitution* criticized the people for not distinguishing "between negro and negro." The *Washington Post* attributed Sheats's trouble to the unjust southern castigation of Roosevelt for similar courage. A black friend of Washington, Daniel Murray, wrote in the *Post* that the Gainesville situation raised "more forcible doubt than any incident in the South for the last fifty years regarding the civilization of that section."<sup>36</sup>

Florida editors vigorously disputed the issue. The *Florida Times-Union* in several issues described Washington as a man who would not "force himself where he is not wanted." He knew he "must keep his place as a negro," but since he had made a "life study of negro education" he should speak if limited to this topic. Furthermore, white encouragement of Washington was wise because he "makes no claim to social equality." In fact, northern visitors "prejudiced against southern methods of solving the negro problem" should interview Washington and he would enlighten them that the southern white man protected Negroes in all their rights, while excluding them from his "drawing room and his table."<sup>37</sup>

Such praise of Washington incited the chairman of Florida's railroad commission, Jefferson B. Browne, to label Washington "a threat to the preservation and purity of the white race." He cautioned against allowing Washington to mingle with white educators as an equal; it would "endanger society." Black young people would come to believe that by industrial training "they too can dine with the white president in the North and sit on the rostrum with the white educators of the South."<sup>38</sup> From

---

February 3, 1903, *ibid.*; *Charleston News and Courier*, February 3, 1903, *ibid.*, and reprinted in the *Jacksonville Metropolis*, February 4, 1903.

36. *Houston Daily Post*, February 4, 1903, *ibid.*; *Atlanta Constitution*, February 7, 1903, *ibid.*; *Washington Post*, January 31, February 2, 1903.

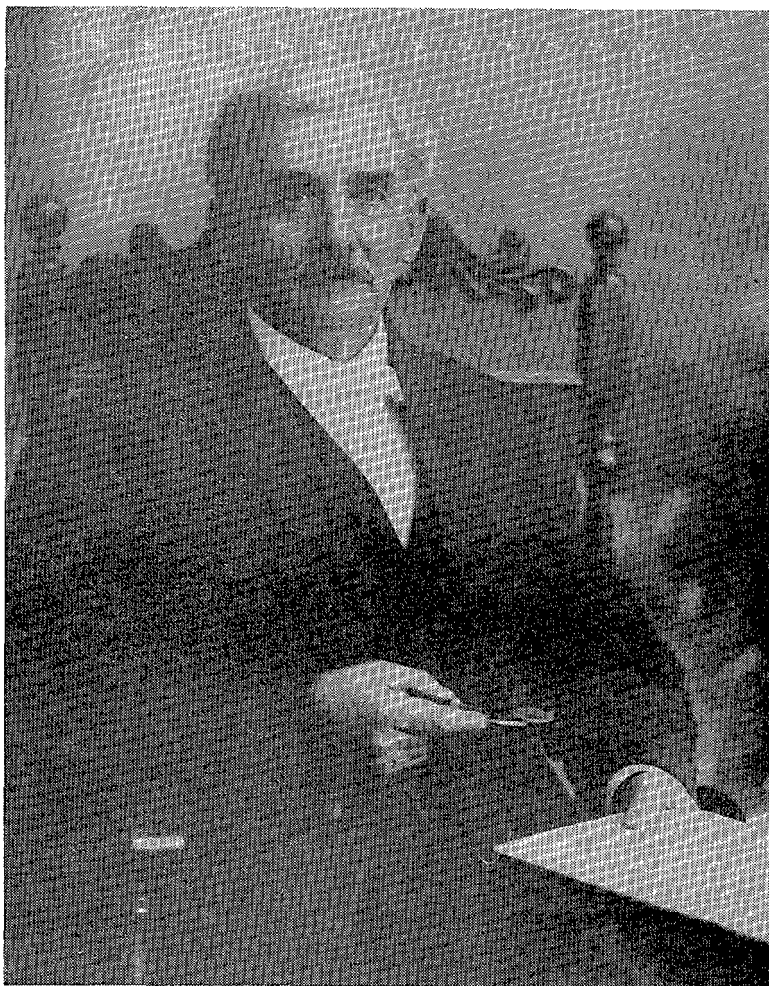
37. *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, January 28, February 4, 5, 1903.

38. *Jacksonville Metropolis*, February 2, 1903. Recent scholarship on Washington supports Browne's assertions. According to Professor Louis Harlan, "while Washington publicly seemed to accept a separate and unequal life for black people, behind the mask of acquiescence he was busy with many schemes for black strength, self-improvement and mutual aid"; Louis R. Harlan, "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," *The Journal of Southern History*, XXXVII (August 1971), 394-95.

Holmes County came the warning that by recognizing Washington on equal terms with white orators, the obstacles to social equality would be destroyed, and "our posterity shall be mulattoes instead of Anglo-Saxons."<sup>39</sup>

By facing such critics Washington realized that he could blunt charges from other blacks that he cowered before white racism. On February 3, the day before his final agreement to speak, the *Washington Post* carried scathing criticism of him by W. H. Ferris,<sup>40</sup> a black associated with Monroe Trotter's Boston-based drive to discredit the Tuskegee movement.<sup>41</sup> Ferris assailed Washington for depicting the Negro as inferior, for opposing all black aspirations, especially higher education, and for departing from his life work by engaging in politics while condoning the Jim Crow laws and black disenfranchisement.<sup>42</sup> Stung by this criticism, Washington complained to T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age*: "Notwithstanding, the

- 
39. Bonifay *Holmes County Advertiser*, undated and quoted in the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 21, 1903.
40. Ferris's experiences during a brief stay in Florida had influenced his career. A graduate of Yale, he was employed in 1900 to teach science at the Florida State Normal and Industrial School for Colored Students. After he had taught six months the state board of education withheld a half a month of his salary and terminated his employment. "Minutes of the State Board of Education, Book 3," October 8, 1895 to April 9, 1909 (mss. in State Commissioner of Education Office, Tallahassee), 230-66. According to J. D. Wetmore, a Jacksonville black who was a friend of Booker Washington, Ferris had "come near blowing up the school" while teaching science. Wetmore added that Ferris then went to Jacksonville, "and walked around here until he was almost barefoot and ragged and a few of us young fellows who were ashamed to have a college man around town in his condition . . . gave him money to go to Boston;" J. D. Wetmore to Washington, May 11, 1904, Washington Papers, 26. It is possible however, that Ferris was caught in a feud between his principal T. de S. Tucker and Superintendent Sheats. Both Tucker and Ferris were among the earliest blacks to advocate that bright young members of their race be given a liberal education to prepare them for leadership. Sheats opposed this scheme, wanting blacks trained to spread "the Booker T. Washington idea" of industrial education. Two weeks after Ferris was dismissed Sheats persuaded his colleagues on the state board of education to dismiss Tucker because he was "not inherently sympathetic with industrial education having repeatedly announced that it shall not interfere with literary work," and because he had "criticized instead of learning from Booker Washington." At the hearing Wetmore spoke on behalf of Tucker and Josiah T. Walls, superintendent of the normal school's farm and formerly black congressman from Alachua County during Reconstruction, joined Sheats in speaking against Tucker. "Minutes Book 3," 273-75.
41. A comprehensive study of Trotter's movement is Stephen R. Fox, *The Guardian of Boston: William Monroe Trotter* (New York, 1970).
42. *Washington Post*, February 3, 1903, Washington Papers, 1035.



William N. Sheats, ca. 1916, from "William N. Sheats, Florida Educator"  
(Master's thesis, University of Florida, 1949) by O. L. Parker.



Booker T. Washington, from *The Story of the Negro, The Rise of the Race From Slavery* (New York, 1909) by George G. Rockwood.

many things I have tried to do to help the race, I notice that the enemies in Washington and in Boston seem to be most active at this present time."<sup>43</sup>

The following evening he began his journey to Florida. At Jacksonville he was met by J. D. Wetmore, lawyer, real estate broker, and one of the nation's leading black businessmen, who, fearing for Washington's safety, accompanied him on the train to Gainesville.<sup>44</sup> During the trip it was reported that both blacks and whites, recognizing the distinguished scholar, came up to shake his hand and to congratulate him for his willingness to appear before the convention.<sup>45</sup> At one stop, a man, described by Wetmore as a "typical cracker," shook Washington's hand and called him "the greatest man in America." When Washington demurred, naming Theodore Roosevelt as the leading American, the man roared, "No suh, since he invited you to dinner I think he's a (blank) scoundrel." Washington later sent an account of this incident to the President, who laughed "uproariously" and wrote back that this story "is almost too good to believe. What a splendid confusion of ideas it does show."<sup>46</sup>

43. Washington to T. Thomas Fortune, February 3, 1903, Washington Papers, 290. Washington may also have been drawn to Florida by the opportunity to impress Andrew Carnegie. After speaking in Gainesville, Washington wrote Carnegie that he had tried unsuccessfully while in Gainesville to arrange a visit with him at his Florida winter home. Washington to Andrew Carnegie, February 10, 1903, *ibid.*, 252. The following day Washington informed W. H. Baldwin, chairman of the Tuskegee endowment committee, of failure "to reach the Florida party." Washington to W. H. Baldwin, February 11, 1903, *ibid.*, 792; On April 17, 1903, a few days after a meeting of the Tuskegee trustees, presided over by former President Grover Cleveland, Carnegie added \$600,000 to the Tuskegee endowment fund. Pamphlet, *Carnegie's Big Gift*, *ibid.*, 252.
44. In a letter discussing the Negro Businessmen's League he placed J. D. Wetmore "Real Estate" among the nation's leading black businessmen. Washington to Scott, July 27, 1903, *ibid.*, 275.
45. Indianapolis *Freeman*, February 21, 1903.
46. *Baltimore Herald*, July 3, 1903; clipping enclosed with Washington to Theodore Roosevelt, July 9, 1903, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, File Box 57 (Library of Congress, Washington); Ray Stannard Baker, *American Chronicle: The Autobiography of Ray Stannard Baker* (New York, 1945), 171; Theodore Roosevelt to Washington, July 13, 1903, Roosevelt Papers, 145; Washington also refers to the incident in a book he wrote in 1911, but he appears to have confused the date with the "dinner party" controversy of 1901. He noted that "this remark of a Florida farmer is but one of the many experiences that taught me, that prejudice is something it does not pay to disturb. 'It is best to let sleeping dogs lie.'" Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education, Being a Chapter from My Experience* (New York, 1911; reprint edition



In Gainesville a Negro delegation met the train and escorted Washington to the home of Mrs. Agnes Clinton, a prominent black resident who had met Mrs. Washington in 1895. Her late husband, J. N. Clinton, had been trustee and principal for Union Academy, one of two black high schools in the state, and from 1887 to 1889 had published a newspaper in Gainesville. During his Gainesville stay, Washington invited his hostess to Tuskegee, and he promised to send her a copy of his book *Up From Slavery*.<sup>47</sup>

Wetmore, who often passed for white, reported after visiting in the Brown Hotel, one of Gainesville's best known hostelries, "even those who had protested loudest against his [Washington] speaking in the white school auditorium, were anxious to hear him."<sup>48</sup> The courthouse had been finally selected as the place for the talk, and it was announced that the "spacious" courtroom, the only sizable facility in the building, would be divided into white and black seating sections. Sheats had arranged for electric lights, and Sheriff Fennell, whose deputies would serve as ushers, promised that there would be no "confusion" in seating the audience. Washington had been cautioned to confine himself to "practical suggestions for the advancement of the negro."<sup>49</sup>

As the hour of the scheduled talk approached, one of the "largest crowds ever seen" in Gainesville, some 2,000 people, tried to push into the courthouse. There were not enough seats, and most of the crowd stood in the corridors and on the stairs leading to the courtroom. Hundreds, "turned away from the packed house," overflowed on to the square and the surrounding

---

Miami, Florida, 1969), 177-78. Wetmore claimed that the cracker had called Washington "the smartest Negro in the world." *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 21, 1903.

47. Agnes J. N. Clinton to Washington, March 4, 20, 1903, Washington Papers, 254; "Minute Book Alachua County School Board: 1869 to 1887" (mss. County School Board Office, Gainesville), 214; Jess G. Davis, *History of Gainesville Florida With Biographical Sketches of Families* (Gainesville, 1966), 25. Wetmore described the Clinton home as "beautiful," and he asserted that Mrs. Clinton gave them "the best of care and attention." *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 21, 1903.
48. *Ibid.* Wetmore probably acted on Washington's suggestion. Using spies that "eavesdropped on white conversations about him in hotel lobbies and trains was commonly Washington's strategy." Harlan, "Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," 408.
49. Jacksonville *Metropolis*, February 5, 1903; Jacksonville, *Florida Times-Union*, February 5, 1903.

streets. Washington arrived at approximately 8:00 p.m. escorted by the sheriff who forced a path through the crowd to get him into the courtroom. Sheats introduced him by declaring that while he could not name the greatest white American, he knew Booker T. Washington was the greatest Negro American. This brought noisy approval from the audience which was divided about equally between the races and included about 100 school officials.<sup>50</sup>

For two hours, interrupted by frequent applause, Washington emphasized the essential goodness of the white man and the usefulness of the Negro. He assured his audience that there was "nothing unnatural or unusual" in his being invited to explain the work at Tuskegee, for even in the days of slavery "there was no master who would not permit his slave to . . . talk to him freely about his conditions and aspirations." He wanted his students to be of value to themselves and to society. Believing that blacks performed best when cultivating the soil, his Tuskegee faculty, he said, encouraged agricultural science. Agriculture, according to Washington, taught the dignity of labor and the spirit of industry. Tuskegee graduates "thought it just as honorable to work in the field, or in the shop, or in the kitchen, or in the laundry, as to teach school or clerk in a store." It was a splendid way, Washington thought, to keep young people on the farm where they would learn "to love the soil, to love fruit trees, to love cows and horses and birds and creeks."

Washington struck a sympathetic note with his white audience when he emphasized that "every man who does not produce

---

50. Indianapolis *Freeman*, February 21, 1903; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 6, 7, 9, 1903. It seems that Washington's controversial involvement with Roosevelt had helped him attract a big audience in Florida. When he appeared at Jacksonville, a larger city than Gainesville, in January 1898, his audience was disappointingly small, both as to the number of blacks and whites. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 1898. However during the discussion whether he should be allowed to talk in Gainesville, considering he had "helped Roosevelt insult the South," observers predicted correctly that "the comment has been so great and diversified on the matter, should he come . . . he will be a star attraction." *Ibid.*, February 4, 1903. A county superintendent and high school principal from Ocala informed reporters that one object in attending the convention was "incidentally to hear Booker T. Washington the great Negro and orator." *Ocala Banner*, February 13, 1903. County Superintendent N. B. Cook of Escambia told representatives of his home town paper that he went to hear Booker T. Washington, "but left on account of the crowd." *Pensacola Daily News*, February 9, 1903.

his own living is a burden upon the pockets of the man who does work." Washington emphasized that blacks had to be taught "to do a common thing in an uncommon manner, to lift common labor out of drudgery . . . to where it becomes beautiful." The races he said, "are bound together in a way that we cannot tear ourselves assunder," and so "as one race is lifted up and made more intelligent useful and honest . . . are both races strengthened."

He lauded his "humble patient and law abiding" people, and noted that "to right his wrongs the Indian appeals to his tomahawk, the Russian appeals to dynamite, but the Negro will always depend upon his prayers, his foreday songs and upon an unfailing faith in the justice of his cause and I do not believe, I cannot believe, that the Negro will ever appeal to the Southern white man in vain."<sup>51</sup>

The audience cheered and clapped as Washington concluded his address. Many rushed up to shake his hand. A group of enthusiastic whites invited him to speak again the following evening, and some of the out-of-town visitors urged him to appear in their communities.<sup>52</sup> The newspapers generally applauded his talk. The *Florida Times-Union* praised his assertion that the Negro would never appeal to the white man in vain, and described it as a "higher tribute to the manhood of the South than any statesman can write into law and against this faith the President will break his head in vain."<sup>53</sup>

- 
51. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 8, 1903. Apparently Washington had somewhat restrained the tone of his talk. In July 1904, the *Gainesville Daily Sun* headlined that he had declared, "Southern Whites Are Stupid," before 6,000 members of the National Education Association meeting at St. Louis during the world's fair. According to J. A. Ormond, a prominent Floridian, he and other leading Floridians, including M. H. DeLand, had heard Washington declare: "I will concede that Southern white boys and girls are stupid but I will not concede that it requires ten times as much [money] to educate a white child as it does a negro." *Gainesville Daily Sun*, July 7, 1904.
  52. Washington to Baldwin, February 9, 1903, Washington Papers, 792; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 8, 1903; *Pensacola Daily News*, February 9, 1903; Petition from Mayor Fishel *et al.*, to Washington February 5, 1903, Washington Papers, 258; G. M. Elliott to Washington, February 9, 1903, *ibid.*, 257; A. S. McArthur to Washington, February 24, 1903, *ibid.*, 248; S. T. French to Washington, June 25, 1903, *ibid.*, 258; B. F. Hartwell to Washington, April 23, 1903, *ibid.*, 261.
  53. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 9, 1903. See also *Ocala Banner*, February 13, 1903, and *Palatka News* reprinted in *Florida Times-Union*, February 21, 1903.

The following morning Washington made his promised address to the black educators in Union Academy. This time he was introduced by Buttrick, and after being cheered for several minutes by the largest assemblage of black educators in Gainesville's history, Washington inquired about the prospects of Negro education in Florida, especially the length of school terms, suitability of buildings, qualifications and compensation of teachers, and facilities for training teachers.<sup>54</sup> At this point Sheats, who had taken time away from the superintendents conference meeting in the high school, made a few remarks on his experiences with educating blacks. Washington then concluded the conference with a general address of advice to "the colored teacher of Florida."

Southern and national newspapers generally supported Washington's talk in Gainesville. A Chattanooga editor said that he was "unafraid to speak anywhere in the South," and the *Atlanta Constitution* noted that Washington "will guide our feet into the way of peace. The people of Gainesville, Florida have done themselves proud." Similarly, Savannah, Washington, Philadelphia, Hartford, and Boston papers cited Gainesville as proof of southern progress on the race question.<sup>55</sup> *The Colored American* and *The Freeman*, black newspapers, carried J. D. Wetmore's account of how Washington had swayed his audience.<sup>56</sup> Wetmore had hoped that if Washington's critics could have seen him master "those Negro hating crackers and heard them applauding him when he scored them for their misdeeds . . . I am sure that none of them would ever again accuse him of being a 'good nigger'."<sup>57</sup> The *Boston Transcript* lauded Sheats who "had stood bravely by his guns . . . Mr. Washington never received a more

---

54. *Ibid.*, February 6, 7, 8, 1903.

55. Clipping, Chattanooga, Tennessee, February 6, 1903, Washington Papers, 103.5; *Savannah Morning News*, February 6, 1903, *ibid.*; *Atlanta Constitution*, February 7, 1903, *ibid.*; *Washington Star*, February 9, 1903, *ibid.*; *Philadelphia Record*, February 10, 1903, *ibid.*; *Hartford Courant*, February 10, 1903, *ibid.*; *Boston Herald*, February 7, 1903 *ibid.*

56. Both these newspapers were included in a web of newspapers that Washington controlled through political and economic maneuvers. August Meier, "Booker T. Washington and the Negro Press: With Special Reference to the Colored American Magazine," *Journal of Negro History*, XXXVIII (January 1953), 67-90.

57. Washington, D. C., *Colored American Magazine*, February 14, 1903; Indianapolis *Freeman*, February 21, 1903.

delightful welcome even in Boston than in Gainesville.<sup>58</sup>

In letters to President Roosevelt, William H. Baldwin, Jr., chairman of Tuskegee's endowment committee and the General Board, William Lloyd Garrison, son of the emancipator, Lyman Abbott, editor of *Outlook*, Charles Dabney, president of the University of Tennessee, and Daniel Murray, outspoken critic of "southern barbarism," Washington described his Gainesville experience as a "distinct victory." He cited Sheats's "magnificent courage" for giving him one of his best audiences which included among the whites "a large portion of women."<sup>59</sup>

Washington's associates were pleased by his success. Baldwin expressed "delight"; Buttrick thought that he had disarmed "every critic." The "Florida report," Buttrick said, "makes my heart burn for those people." Charles Dabney described Washington's Gainesville address as "wisely, prudently and nobly done." Pressured for a public statement on southern racism, Ogden insisted that the "potency of . . . Gainesville is infinitely above any expression that could be made." Washington's visit, Ogden claimed, had "lifted away" his depressed feeling about solving the southern race problem.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, most Floridians responsible for Washington's visit emerged with damaged careers. The year following Washington's

- 
58. *Boston Transcript*, February 10, 1903, Washington Papers, 1035. The only criticism of Washington was by the editor of the *Washington Post*. He editorialized that Washington's success at Gainesville indicated he should spend more time in the South dealing with the race problem and not wasting so "much time dining and winning among northern folks." Such action had disclosed "a species of vanity most unfortunate in a man so potent and so promising"; *Washington Post*, February 7, 1903. This editorial sparked Ogden to rebuke the *Post* editor. In a letter to a friend of the editor, Ogden stated that Washington would not accept an invitation for "purely social reasons." Ogden to Frederick L. Moore, February 9, 1903, Ogden Papers, 13. Ogden then alerted Baldwin that Washington had sent the *Post* a letter of protest: "a few of us are neither cows nor donkeys concerning the Negro question, but—"; Ogden to Baldwin, February 16, 1903, *ibid.*
59. Washington to Roosevelt, February 10, 1903, Roosevelt Papers, reel 32 (microfilm, University of Florida Library, Gainesville); Washington to Baldwin, February 9, 1903, Washington Papers, 792; Washington to William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., February 9, 1903, *ibid.*, 250; Washington to Lyman Abbott, February 9, 1903, *ibid.*; Washington to Charles W. Dabney, February 10, 1903, *ibid.*, 255; Washington to Daniel Murray, February 9, 1903, *ibid.*, 266.
60. Baldwin to Washington, February 9, 1903, *ibid.*, 542; Buttrick to Washington, February 1903, March 4, 1903, *ibid.*, 249; Dabney to Washington, February 7, 1903, *ibid.*, 255; Ogden to Baldwin, February 12, 1903, Ogden Papers, 14; Ogden to E. C. Branson, February 16, 1903, *ibid.*

departure, Sheats experienced his first major election defeat when he lost the Democratic nomination for state superintendent of public instruction to Holloway in the Democratic primary. Holloway had made Sheats appear corrupt to Florida's rural voters by distributing 40,000 reprints of Sheats's letter to DeBose which included the phrase "white school auditorium," and charged in the circular that Sheats by so inviting Washington, "a great man but unfortunately . . . a negro," had "trampled underfoot the most sacred traditions which a people ever cherished." Though Sheats retaliated with charges of forgery, supported by letterbook imprints of his note to DeBose which did not have the damaging words, the accusation of "Negroism" influenced the voters, and they rejected him by over 4,000 votes.<sup>61</sup>

In desperation Sheats appealed to Buttrick for aid. "Pauperized" by campaign expenses, he sought employment from the board, and he also asked for a "couple of hundred dollars" to prosecute Holloway for libel and forgery. Buttrick refused Sheats's request for money. "Southern sentiment," he said, "did not permit our board to even slightly participate in the choice of officials."<sup>62</sup> Sheats continued the legal action, hoping to persuade the State Democratic Executive Committee to declare Holloway unfit for office and to choose him as the candidate. The committee did renounce Holloway, but instead of Sheats, it picked J. Emmett Wolfe of Pensacola, a party regular, who Holloway easily defeated in the state election.<sup>63</sup>

Sheats's friends were also hurt as a result of the Washington incident. J. W. Wideman informed Sheats that the Alachua County School Board had discharged him as principal of Gainesville High School, since he had been involved in the alleged attempt to use his school auditorium for Washington's talk.<sup>64</sup>

61. *Holloway-Sheats Controversy: Some Facts About the Booker T. Washington Matter*, campaign circular of W. M. Holloway (1904) Sheats Papers; Sheats to Buttrick, May 25, 1904, Washington Papers, 18; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 16, 1904; *Sheats Makes Concise Reply to Holloway*, Sheats campaign circular (1904), Sheats Papers.

62. Sheats to Buttrick, May 25, 1904, Washington Papers, 18; Buttrick to Sheats, June 28, 1904, *ibid.*, 20.

63. Shears to C. L. Peek, September 27, 1904, Sheats Letterbook 21; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 22, 1904; *Pensacola Daily News*, October 19, 1904; *Gainesville Daily Sun*, November 11, 1904.

64. Sheats to J. W. Wideman, June 4, 1903, Sheats Letterbook 14. Wideman who had headed the school for many years was bitterly disappointed at having to leave Gainesville. Soon after his dismissal he wrote Sheats

Sheats struck back at both J. B. Holley, the local Baptist minister, and DeBose during his primary campaign. He claimed that Holley had promised to make his church available if the school auditorium could not be secured. Holley implored Washington to send him the original invitation which would refute this charge, but, advised by Sheats, Washington did not respond. Sometime in July 1904, Holley resigned his position in Gainesville, and he moved to Jacksonville to become co-editor of the *Southern Baptist and Baptist Witness*.<sup>65</sup>

Initially, it seemed that DeBose would join Holloway as one of the few men connected with the invitation that would profit from Washington's visit. Shortly after Washington's departure the enrollment at DeBose's school increased from thirteen to twenty-seven pupils, causing him to write Washington on February 8, 1903, seeking an additional teacher. He informed Washington that "the tempest is calm" and that he had been "advised by some of the white people that they are more in favor of helping us since hearing you speak." Unfortunately, during the primary campaign Sheats charged that DeBose had served as Holloway's "negro henchman," and this helped to weaken the school. On April 1, 1904, inadequate funds forced DeBose to close the institution. Two weeks later, he gave Sheats an affidavit supporting forgery allegations against Holloway, but it was now too late. Moreover, this action did not win him any friends when Holloway became state superintendent.<sup>66</sup>

---

from Key West that he could not obtain another teaching position and that he had left his family in Gainesville while working for Carnegie's Traveling Library. *ibid.*; Sheats to Wideman, June 28, 1903, *ibid.*; Wideman to Sheats, September 2, 1904, *ibid.*, 21.

65. Jacksonville *Metropolis*, March 9, 1904; Holley to Scott, November 24, 1903, Washington Papers, 261; W. N. Sheats, Jr. to Scott, November 27, 1903, *ibid.*, 275; Sheats to Washington, December 23, 1903, *ibid.*, 241; Sheats to Washington, January 7, 1904, Sheats Letterbook 19; *Gainesville Daily Sun*, July 14, 1904. Holley immediately engaged in a dispute with his co-editor, W. A. Hobson, over whose name would appear first on the masthead of the newspaper. Holley submitted the matter to arbitration and Hobson withdrew his claim. Hobson however published an editorial describing the management of the newspaper in which he repeatedly placed his name before Holley. After Holley saw the editorial he went to Hobson's office and punched him in the face fifteen times. Arrested and fined \$200, Holley was reprimanded by the Baptist churches of Gainesville and Jacksonville. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, June 1, 14, 1904. The following fall Holley became pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Jacksonville. *Ibid.*, September 28, 1904.

66. Samuel W. DeBose to Washington, February 8, 1903, Washington Papers, 256; *Affidavit of Sam DeBose*, Sheats Papers; DeBose to Washington,

Washington's visit did not abate the trend to decrease public expenditures for Florida's black schools.<sup>67</sup> Centering his campaign on the charge that the Washington incident had proven Sheats too liberal toward Negro education, Holloway advocated a reduction of expenditures.<sup>68</sup> After the election, Sheats wrote to a friend that the poll and property taxes paid by Florida blacks exceeded the amount that was being spent on black education. He certainly "felt sorry for the poor negroes," if his successor carried out "his policy advocated on the stump."<sup>69</sup>

The Southern Education Board did nothing to relieve the situation, disappointing those who had hoped to secure a large grant as a result of Washington coming to Gainesville. Not until 1907 did Florida receive any Rockefeller funds and then only for a professor of secondary education at the University of

---

August 1903, Washington Papers, 256. In 1913, a year after being re-elected superintendent, Sheats again became involved with DeBose. He revoked DeBose's teaching certificate after receiving complaints from superintendents in Clay, Alachua, and DeSoto counties that DeBose had tampered with their teacher examinations. Because these allegations were not proven DeBose had grounds to take Sheats to court. However, in February 1913, Pinellas County Superintendent Dixie M. Hollins obtained an affidavit from a black female that DeBose had forged her name on a copy of his teaching certificate for \$20.00, and Hollins had DeBose jailed to await trial. Hollins explained that although "the negro . . . has been very nice and subordinate as a teacher . . . I feel that my duty is to enforce the law." Hollins to Sheats, January 18, 1913, Pinellas County Transfer File 1913 to 1920 (mss., State Commissioner of Education Office, Tallahassee); Sheats to Hollins, January 20, 1913, *ibid.*; Hollins to Sheats, February 24, 1913, *ibid.*

67. In 1895-1896 the state spent \$4.25 on each enrolled black child and approximately \$10.51 on each enrolled white child. In 1903-1904 these figures were \$3.42 per black child and \$10.33 per white child. During Holloway's Alachua County administration the figures for blacks in that county went from \$5.03 in 1894-1896 to \$3.37 in 1903-1904, while those for whites increased from approximately \$9.00 in 1895 to \$10.92 in 1903-1904. W. N. Sheats, *Report of the Twenty-Seventh and Twenty-Eighth Years of the Public Schools of the State of Florida* (Tallahassee, 1897), 342, 362, 366; W. N. Sheats, *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Florida for 1903-1904* (Tallahassee, 1904), 124.
68. Sheats to Buttrick, May 25, 1903, Washington Papers, 18; *Some Facts About the Booker T. Washington Matter*, Holloway campaign circular, Sheats Papers.
69. Sheats to A. H. Patterson, July 21, 1904, Sheats Letterbook 21; Sheats to E. E. DeBaughn, July 9, 1904, *ibid.* This had not been the first time Sheats had made such a statement. In 1901 the *National Independent* had cited him for "bravery" after he had exposed that white school boards in Florida's "black belt" counties [Florida's predominantly black northern counties had taken over \$4,000 more from blacks in taxes than they had returned in educational benefits, "Florida Schools and Mr. Sheats," *National Independent*, Vol. 53 (May 1901), 1090-91.



Florida, and in 1911 for a rural school inspector.<sup>70</sup> Somewhat over a year after the rural school inspector had been appointed, Sheats, recently reelected state superintendent, severed his department's connection with the board, explaining that it had interfered with his appointment of state officers.<sup>71</sup>

The Gainesville experience illustrated Washington's paradoxical impact on Southerners. While purporting accommodation to soothe racists' torments, he had contributed to a turmoil which drew national attention and which decisively affected Florida's politics. As suspected by some Floridians, behind the "mask of acquiescence" was a man of courage striving to show his people how to improve their status.<sup>72</sup> After all he had transcended the bounds of his caste when he stood as an expert before a white audience, and he had occasionally strayed from the assigned topic of Negro education to discuss the needs of all races.

Still, this episode proved another example of southern willingness to accept Washington while condemning those who would inspire his race by giving him a higher social position. Thus, Sheats joined Theodore Roosevelt as a scapegoat, since he had afforded Washington an opportunity to violate southern customs. Washington's efforts had no discernible effect on the widening gap between per capita expenditures for black and white education. As it turned out, when Sheats tried to gain support for black schooling by having Washington discourse with Florida educators he lost his office to a man described by Ogden as "an obscure county official" who advocated less public money for the black school child.<sup>73</sup> Ironically, many Floridians, like

70. Thomas Everette Cochran, *History of Public-School Education in Florida* (Lancaster, Pa., 1921), 194-96.

71. A. A. Murphree to Buttrick, June 13, 1912, Sheats Papers; Sheats to Buttrick, June 19, 1912, *ibid.*; Sheats to Buttrick, June 25, 1912, *ibid.*; Sheldon Phillips to Sheats, October 12, 1912, *ibid.* Sheats persuaded the legislature to appropriate the funds for this official. W. N. Sheats, *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1914* (Tallahassee, 1914) 243-44. Notwithstanding, Florida has not been favored by the board as a place for investment. For example between 1907 and 1914 the state received annually an average of \$1,453 from the board for development of secondary education, the lowest amount among twelve southern states. This was \$500 behind Georgia, the state that received the next smallest amount. *General Education Board*, 93.

72. Harlan, "Secret Life of B. T. Washington," 394.

73. Ogden to Moore, February 9, 1903, Ogden Papers, 13.

other Southerners, seemed to be using Washington's success as a cover against northern criticism while they subtly withdrew black opportunity.<sup>74</sup>

---

74. This thesis is supported by Emma L. Thornbrough in "Booker T. Washington As Seen By His White Contemporaries," *Journal of Negro History*, LIII (April 1968), 161-82.