

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: A Mississippi Response to Booker T. Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, and the White House Incident of 1901

By David H. Jackson, Jr.

“A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt’s invitation of Booker T. Washington to visit—to dine at the White House was taken as an outrage in many quarters. America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time. There is no better evidence of this than the election of an African American to the presidency of the United States. Let there be no reason now ... for any American to fail to cherish their citizenship in this, the greatest nation on Earth.”¹ These words were uttered by the Arizona senator and 2008 Republican presidential candidate John McCain during his concession speech to Barack Obama, the first non-white to become president of the United States.

McCain’s remarks about President Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, and the White House flew over the heads of those not grounded in that period of American history. Nonetheless, McCain’s comments were timely and full of meaning and revealed the currency of this topic. This article revisits the era that informed Senator McCain’s comments. While McCain’s assertion referred to the entire South’s reaction to Washington’s dinner at the White House, I will address here specifically how white Mississippians responded to the incident.

The subject is not entirely a new line of inquiry for historians.

¹ *New York Times*, November 4, 2008.

DAVID H. JACKSON, JR., is professor of history and chairman of the Department of History, Political Science, Public Administration, Geography and African American Studies at Florida A&M University. The author wishes to thank Lawrence Brown and Shango Rivers for research assistance with this article.

Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., wrote the article “Dinner at the White House: Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, and the South” for the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* in 1958; Willard Gatewood devoted a chapter of *Theodore Roosevelt and the Art of Controversy: Episodes of the White House Years* (1970) to the subject, as did Louis Harlan in his Bancroft Prize-winning work *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader* (1972). Likewise, Robert Norrell’s *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (2009) addresses the subject. However, all of the above studies assessed the topic from a regional and/or national perspective. In fact, in some cases, historians have drawn conclusions about the entire South’s reaction to this affair without reviewing a single Mississippi newspaper article. For instance, Gatewood cites only two Mississippi papers in his chapter, one from 1903 and the other from 1904, while Grantham, Harlan, and Norrell do not cite any.²

No scholar has examined how white citizens in the Magnolia State, exclusively, reacted to this occurrence. This essay seeks to fill that void, and also to clarify McCain’s purpose in evoking the White House dinner in his concession speech. Also, considering the fact that Booker T. Washington was in Mississippi speaking when he received the dinner invitation from Roosevelt, it provides an opportunity to see just how quickly southern white public opinion could turn against a popular black leader if he dared momentarily to forget his place or breach the South’s code of social and racial etiquette.

By the turn of the twentieth century, life for southern blacks, especially those in Mississippi, proved to be very difficult. African Americans were subjected to Jim Crow-style terrorism in the Magnolia State. Neil

² Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., “Dinner at the White House: Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, and the South,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18 (June 1958): 112-30; Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 304-24; Willard B. Gatewood, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Art of Controversy: Episodes of the White House Years* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 32-61. Norrell asserts that “editorial opinion [about the dinner] across the South was universally negative.” See Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 244-253. Clarence Lusane has recently published *The Black History of the White House* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2011), 219-31. In 1976, John K. Severn and William W. Rogers examined the topic as it related to how white Floridians responded to Washington’s White House dinner. See John K. Severn and William W. Rogers, “Theodore Roosevelt Entertains Booker T. Washington: Florida’s Reaction to the White House Dinner,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 54 (January 1976): 306-18.

McMillen called Mississippi the “heartland of American Apartheid.” Racial discrimination so prevailed in Mississippi at the end of Reconstruction that some whites there did not see the need for Jim Crow legislation. Blacks and whites in the state were separated in private and public hospitals and did not use the same entrances to state-funded healthcare facilities. Black and white criminals were not even incarcerated in the same prison cells. In Mississippi, racial segregation largely became a matter of custom, and the state “seems to have had *fewer* Jim Crow laws during the entire segregation period than most southern states,” noted McMillen.³

Indeed, wherever they turned African Americans in Mississippi faced segregation. More often than not Jim Crow customs required not merely separation, but exclusion. At funerals, public facilities, weddings, courtrooms, and other places of social gathering, habit dictated the races would never integrate. The racial code prohibited any form of interracial activity that might have implied equality. Nevertheless, blacks were not as concerned about integration as they were about having access to public facilities. McMillen identified the years between 1889 and 1919 as “among the most repressive in Mississippi history.”⁴

On numerous occasions, a breach in the code of racial etiquette by African Americans led to swift and irrevocable punishments. Blacks in Mississippi met with “indescribable cruelties” from white mobs—they were drowned, torched, bludgeoned, dragged to death behind automobiles, tortured to death with hot irons, and publicly burned at “Negro Barbecues.” Mississippi’s African Americans, especially those who sought economic independence, were also victims of whitecapping, where night-riding whites burned and shot into their homes, trampled their crops, and forced them off of their own land. Whitecaps beat, maimed, burned, and lynched black people without reservation.⁵

³ Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 1-32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10, 31; Vernon Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi 1865-1890* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 230-33. See also Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

⁵ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 120-21, 233-34; David Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 1-133; James A. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 112-18; William F. Holmes, “Whitecapping: Agrarian Violence in Mississippi, 1902-1906,” *Journal of Southern History* 35 (May 1969): 165-85; *American Citizen*, November 8, 1901; William F. Holmes, “The

African Americans were not passive victims of white violence in Mississippi. Blacks responded a number of ways when they felt disrespected or cheated by whites. For example, around August 30, 1901, Dick Hill, an African American man, killed Ed Barrett, a white man, after Barrett accused Hill of stealing watermelons. Ultimately Hill was pursued by a posse of around one-hundred men, who shot and killed him at Somerville, Mississippi. Each time stories spread about black resistance, aggression, and violence against whites, it dispelled Old South mythology about black passivity and docility, which remained disturbing to the southern social order.⁶

Nonetheless, blacks received very little reprieve in Mississippi courts when they were charged with crimes, especially against whites. In fact, there were instances when judges themselves participated in lynch mobs.⁷ The educational picture looked just as bleak for African Americans in the Magnolia State. Although blacks constituted a majority of the state's school-age population, their facilities received little tax support. Mississippi held the shameful distinction of being the southern state that spent the least on African American education.⁸ Economically, blacks were confronted with conditions similar to those they faced during slavery.⁹ In 1890, Mississippi legislators called a constitutional conven-

Leflore County Massacre and the Demise of the Colored Farmers' Alliance," *Phylon* 34, no. 3 (Third Quarter 1973): 267-74.

⁶ William King, an African American married father of five or six children, serves as another example of black resistance. He was killed by Estelle Jones (white) in Holly Springs in 1901 when the two men got into an altercation over a settlement on the property of a Mr. Smith. When Jones told King the amount he owed him, the latter disputed the figure then allegedly came after Jones with an axe. As a result, Jones shot King three times killing him almost instantly. See *The Mississippi Democrat*, September 3, 1901; Robin D. G. Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem": Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," in *The New African American Urban History*, ed. Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, Jr. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1996), 187-95; Leon F. Litwack, *How Free is Free? The Long Death of Jim Crow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 4-8.

⁷ For instance, after three black men were lynched in Biloxi and talk began circulating about pursuing their killers, Judge Stevens, "who is said to have been on the scene when the lynching occurred is not likely to be a witness, as he is out of the State." See *The Mississippi Democrat*, September 3, 1901.

⁸ By 1900, African American children received only nineteen percent of the state's funds for education although they accounted for at least sixty percent of the school-age population. Whites believed if they could limit the educational achievements of blacks, they could also stifle their political, economic, and social aspirations. See McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 73, 78; Wharton, *Negro in Mississippi*, 234-55; Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery*, 89.

⁹ Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, (New York:



Booker T. Washington, 1859-1915. All images accompanying this article are from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

tion that resulted in the disfranchisement of most African Americans. The convention delegates imposed poll taxes, literacy requirements, and prohibited voting by those who had been convicted of perjury, theft, bribery, arson, or burglary.¹⁰

Mississippi governor James K. Vardaman affirmed the position of most white Mississippians when he wrote that he opposed “the nigger’s voting, it matters not what his advertised moral and mental qualifications may be. I am just as much opposed to Booker Washington’s, with all his Anglo-Saxon reinforcements, voting as I am to voting by

the cocoanut-headed, chocolate-colored typical little coon, Andy Dotson, who blacks my shoes every morning. Neither one is fit to perform the supreme functions of citizenship.” Vardaman even wanted to repeal the Fifteenth Amendment, which, he said, “gave the nigger the right to pollute politics.”¹¹ Being a child of the South, Booker T. Washington fully understood all of these things.

Washington came from humble beginnings. He was born a slave in 1856 to a black mother and a white father he never knew. He made the most of his opportunities and eventually graduated from Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. Washington was clearly inspired by the founder of Hampton, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, and he carried

Vintage Books, 1980), 336-449; Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery*, 86.

¹⁰ Wharton, *Negro in Mississippi*, 206-15.

¹¹ Quoted in Norrell, “Understanding the Wizard: Another Look at the Age of Booker T. Washington,” in *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up from Slavery 100 Years Later*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 68.

lessons he learned at the school and from Armstrong as he built his professional career. Armstrong recommended Washington to build a school in Tuskegee, Alabama. In 1881 Washington accepted the challenge and built Tuskegee Institute into one of the leading educational institutions of the South.¹²

Washington's ambition drove him, and he founded a number of other organizations that stimulated knowledge, progress, and economic development among African Americans. Two of those groups, the National Negro Business League (NNBL) and the Tuskegee Farmers Conference, would become important facets of Washington's so-called "Tuskegee Machine." The NNBL served to not only stimulate business in the African American community, it also became an incubator for a number of other black organizations like the National Negro Bankers' Association, the National Negro Funeral Directors' Association, the National Association of Negro Insurance Men, the National Negro Retail Merchants' Association, the National Negro Press Association, and the National Negro Bar Association.¹³

While Booker T. Washington was not the wealthiest black person in the United States, he may have been the most influential black leader of the twentieth century. His influence extended throughout black America and into white America in ways that were not repeated by any other African American leader during the twentieth century. His control over the black press, his influence and support from the Talented Tenth and white philanthropists, his creation of the Tuskegee Institute, the NNBL, the Tuskegee Farmers' Conference, along with his close connections with black ministers, bishops, Masonic leaders, educators, and businessmen, all gave Washington a tremendous amount of power that went unmatched for decades even after his death.

In 1895 Booker T. Washington delivered one of the most important addresses of his life before the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition. The primary reason the Tuskegean and other blacks desired to be a part of the event was because "Negroes saw in the exposition a chance to dem-

¹² See Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*.

¹³ Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe, *Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918), 221. For the best recent scholarly works see Michael B. Boston, *The Business Strategy of Booker T. Washington: Its Development and Implementation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 108. Also see J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 541-85.

onstrate their progress since emancipation." The climax of Washington's speech came when he told the mixed audience that when it came to social matters, blacks and whites "can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." For all that people read into it, the speech not only defined Washington's philosophy, it also set the tone for race relations in the country for years to come. Frederick Douglass died that same year, and Washington became the most powerful African American leader in the nation and the recognized spokesman for the race. Black and white vied to see and hear the man from Tuskegee, Dr. Booker T. Washington.¹⁴

A number of Mississippi whites surely were not pleased with a recent letter Washington had written to the editor of a southern newspaper about the assassination of President William McKinley, and they believed Washington was beginning to move into the realm of politics, an area off-limits for southern blacks especially. President William McKinley was shot two times by anarchist Leon Czolgosz on September 6, 1901, at the Temple of Music in Buffalo, New York, while attending the Pan-American Exposition. Initially it appeared McKinley would recover from his wounds, but he took a turn for the worse and died eight days later on September 14. On that day Theodore Roosevelt became McKinley's successor.¹⁵

"We cannot sow disorder and reap order, we cannot sow death and reap life," Washington wrote in his letter to the editor of the *Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser* on September 24, 1901. Comparing McKinley's assassination to lynch mobs, Washington believed the best way to control these acts of anarchy was to change the conditions in which these kinds of acts were condoned. If people committed crimes, he felt they should receive justice through a fair trial, not through vigilante groups. As Washington saw it, "one criminal put to death through the majesty of the law does more ... to prevent crime than ten put to death by the hand of lynching anarchists."¹⁶

The editors of the *Biloxi Daily Herald* reported to their readers Washington's view that the "assassination of the late President McKinley,

¹⁴ Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*, 206, 212.

¹⁵ James West Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, *The United States: A History of the Republic* (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 501.

¹⁶ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, September 24, 1901; Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*, 305-06.

and the existence of anarchism in the United States, is due more to the numerous lynchings that have taken place throughout the country during the past few years than to anything else. He says that the laxity of the enforcement of the laws had bred that spirit that cultivated anarchism and caused it to live and flourish in this land." In other words, Washington was saying, as Malcolm X said after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, that the chickens had come home to roost.¹⁷ While Washington was generally praised by southern whites after his 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address, this Mississippi newspaper did not appreciate Washington's condemning lynching and associating the pervasive lynch mob mentality in America with the assassination of President McKinley.

In response, the editors issued a stern warning to Washington: "The subject of lynching is one that Washington had best let alone, or he will, like some of the others of his race, permit his passions and prejudices to be aroused to such an extent that his expressions will become offensive to the citizens of all sections of the country, and he will be largely the sufferer thereby." In so many words, Washington was told that he needed to abandon voicing his opinion where politics were concerned, and if he did not, "it is worthwhile repeating that he is making a mistake, and may not discover his error until it is too late to rectify it."¹⁸ For African Americans in the South, the veiled threat of violence in this message was crystal clear.

At the request of trustees of the John F. Slater Fund, in early October 1901 Washington visited Jackson, Natchez, Vicksburg, and Greenville, Mississippi, to speak on education. Named for its founder, the philanthropic John F. Slater Fund began in 1882 and initially aided schools training blacks to become teachers. Eventually it assisted both church and private schools in their teacher-training programs and expanded into "country training schools."¹⁹

During his visit to Mississippi the Tuskegee leader discussed a number of subjects, including the importance of education, correct moral

¹⁷ *The Biloxi Daily Herald*, October 3, 1901.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2000), 294; *New York Evening Post*, October 21, 1901, reprinted in Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, ed., *Booker T. Washington Papers* [hereafter BTWP] (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 6:243-47.

habits, blacks building decent homes, proper relations between the races, and the need for blacks to practice thrift, economy, and industry. Although he went to Mississippi intending to speak only to African Americans, whites surprised him by attending every meeting.²⁰

A number of African Americans in the Magnolia State impressed Washington with the progress they were making. For example, the city of Greenville had an African American police officer who had served on the force for twelve years. Natchez businessman Louis Kastor owned the city's largest saddle and harness store. In Vicksburg, the Tuskegean stayed at the home of Wesley Crayton, an African American liquor dealer who had served as a delegate to the first NNBL convention in 1900. "I had not been in this home five minutes before the lady of the house asked me if I would not like to inspect her kitchen and pantry," Washington recalled. "And I found everything in the kitchen as neat and intelligently arranged as one would expect to find in a home in New England."²¹

In Jackson, Washington saw African Americans conducting all sorts of business and found them owning "their own homes more largely than is true of any other city I have visited." He also witnessed successful black lawyers in Vicksburg and Natchez who told him that their race and color did not prevent them from being treated fairly in the courts.²² If this claim was true, the experience most likely was unique to those specific lawyers. However, Washington shared this information to give African Americans hope amidst the increasing tide of disfranchisement and discrimination and to encourage them to remain in the South.

These experiences deeply impressed Washington and reinforced his belief that improved economic situations would be the most feasible path to political and social justice for his race. The successful businessmen he met during his visit "cast their votes without question, and have them counted," he said. Washington therefore reasoned that "... these few colored men really exercise more influence in politics than the masses who voted without restraint a few years ago, for the reason that their votes were in most cases freely counted out or in some way gotten rid

²⁰ Washington to Emily Howland, October 13, 1901, BTWP, 6:240-41; *New York Evening Post*, October 21, 1901, reprinted in BTWP, 6:243-47; *The Wichita Searchlight*, November 9, 1901.

²¹ *New York Evening Post*, October 21, 1901, cited in BTWP, 6:243-45.

²² *American Citizen*, November 8, 1901; Washington to Emily Howland, October 13, 1901, BTWP, 6:240-41; *New York Evening Post*, October 21, 1901, cited in BTWP, 6:246-47.

of.”²³ Then came the clincher: “I may be mistaken, but I am led to feel that gradually, as our people get property and intelligence, become conservative, and learn the lesson of casting their fortune in every honorable way with their neighbors, they are not going to be refused an opportunity to vote.”²⁴ Until his death Washington continued to believe that economic uplift would eventually lead to full political participation for black Americans.

Washington was praised for his visit and the lectures he delivered during his trip to the Magnolia State. For instance, the *Greenville Times*, a conservative white newspaper that once opined that farming is a “natural calling” for African Americans, referred to Booker T. Washington as a “great leader” and stated that “by his acts and deeds towards both classes he has won the utmost confidence of the entire people both North and South.” The paper went on to assert that the Tuskegean’s speeches in Mississippi “were sound in logic, convincing in argument, and at times he grew very eloquent.” These comments provide some insight into how white Mississippians felt about Washington at that point; however, that viewpoint would soon change.²⁵

While in Mississippi, Washington received an invitation from President Theodore Roosevelt that would forever enhance the Tuskegean’s image among most blacks, while damaging his reputation with many whites. Only one month into his term, the president invited Washington to the White House. According to Louis Harlan, this dinner “was the final crown of success that secured his [Washington’s] position as virtual monarch of the black people in the United States.” On October 16, 1901, Washington wired his reply to Roosevelt: “My dear Mr. President—I shall be very glad to accept your invitation for dinner this evening at seven-thirty.”²⁶ The Tuskegean hurried off to Washington, D.C., and went to the home of Whitefield McKinlay, a local African American friend and realtor, with whom he usually stayed while in the city. McKinlay handed Washington Roosevelt’s invitation for dinner that actually began that evening at eight o’clock.²⁷

²³ *New York Evening Post*, October 21, 1901, cited in BTWP, 6:246.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *The Greenville Times*, October 19, 1901. This same paper promoted Washington’s visit prior to the trip. See *The Greenville Times*, October 3, 1901.

²⁶ Washington to Theodore Roosevelt, October 16, 1901, BTWP, 6:243; Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*, 304.

²⁷ Gatewood, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Art of Controversy*, 34; Harlan, *Making of a*



President Roosevelt and Booker Washington reviewing the 61 “industry” floats, Tuskegee, Ala.

Prior to the invitation, Washington and Roosevelt had known each other for years, at least as early as 1898. They had consulted many times regarding racial and political matters in the South, and as far as Washington saw it, Roosevelt made “no distinction as to the color of a man’s cuticle when he wants to get at facts, and is as ready to consult with the Negro, Indian or China-man as he is with the Anglo-Saxon.”²⁸ Roosevelt had planned to visit Washington at Tuskegee Institute in the autumn of 1901 but canceled his plans after McKinley’s assassination.

Black Leader, 311; for full discussion see pp. 304-24.

²⁸ *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 21, 1901; see also Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education: Chapters from My Experience* (1911; repr., New York: Humanity Books, 2004), 149-52; Norrell, *Up from History*, 4-5.

However, Roosevelt still wanted to meet with Washington. In fact, the same day he became President he wrote the Tuskegee leader: "When are you coming north? I must see you as soon as possible. I want to talk over the question of future appointments in the south exactly on the lines of our last conversation together."²⁹

After Washington arrived at the White House on the evening of October 16, he had dinner with Roosevelt and his wife Edith, their three sons, and their seventeen-year-old daughter, Alice Lee. Philip Bathell Stewart, a Colorado mining and utilities executive and one of Roosevelt's old friends, also attended. After the dinner Roosevelt and Washington discussed social problems in the South and Roosevelt's plans for that area. They also discussed black politicians, the appointment of well-qualified blacks to political offices in the North, black Republicans' struggles with lily-white Republicans, the qualifications white southern Republican appointees should have, and the question of lynching and disfranchisement.³⁰

President Roosevelt effectively used the Tuskegee leader as his patronage referee for the South partially so he could weaken Democratic control in the region, while he simultaneously built up the Republican Party. Moreover, Roosevelt used Washington to wean the southern Republican Party from its attachment to Mark Hanna, Roosevelt's most formidable challenger for the 1904 Republican presidential nomination.³¹

By chance, reporters saw Washington's name on the White House guest list and published a brief report saying: "Booker T. Washington, of Tuskegee, Alabama, dined with the President last evening."³² As news of this dinner became public, southern correspondents in Washington swarmed around the story like bees on honey. The president had breached the South's code of racial etiquette, and some vowed to never

²⁹ H. W. Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books: 1997), 421-24; Theodore Roosevelt to Booker T. Washington, September 14, 1901, in Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951-1954), 3:149; Grantham, "Dinner at the White House," 114; Norrell, *Up from History*, 5; Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 404-05.

³⁰ Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*, 307, 311; Norrell, *Up from History*, 244; Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 404-05.

³¹ Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic*, 422; David H. Jackson, Jr., *A Chief Lieutenant of the Tuskegee Machine: Charles Banks of Mississippi* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 129-30; Norrell, *Up from History*, 242.

³² Quoted in Grantham, "Dinner at the White House," 115.



President and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt seated on lawn, surrounded by their family, 1903.

forgive him. One question that remained unanswered in the immediate aftermath of the affair was whether Mrs. Roosevelt and her daughter attended the dinner.³³ Historian Lerone Bennett asserted that the two major taboos in the Jim Crow South were interracial dining and interracial marriage. “Anything approaching interracial eating was proscribed. Anything which might by any stretch of the imagination lead to intermarriage was interdicted” Why? Bennett concluded that “the root rationalization for all this was sex.”³⁴ One Mississippian affirmed Bennett’s point about these taboos in 1901, arguing that by having dinner with Washington, Roosevelt had “given his stamp of approval to social equality, and proclaimed to the world that the son of Booker Washington

³³ *Biloxi Daily Herald*, October 19, 1901; Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 404.

³⁴ Lerone Bennett, *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 256, 329.

is good enough to be the son-in-law of Theodore Roosevelt.”³⁵

Roosevelt responded to the controversy by saying: “When I asked Booker T. Washington to dinner I did not devote very much thought to the matter ... I respect him greatly and believe in the work he has done. I have consulted so much with him it seemed to me that it was natural to ask him to dinner to talk over this work, and the very fact that I felt a moment’s qualm on inviting him because of his color made me ashamed of myself and made me hasten to send the invitation. I did not think of its bearing one way or the other, either on my own future or on anything else.”³⁶

Due to the racial climate, blacks in the South did not generally articulate their true feelings about this matter through the southern press because of fear of retribution and the potential danger it involved.³⁷ On the other hand, responses from African Americans in the northern black press were quite robust. While Washington’s northern black opponents like William Monroe Trotter and George Forbes used the newly established Boston *Guardian* to score points against him, most African American newspapers supported the Tuskegee leader.³⁸ The *Colored American* published in Washington, D.C., responded by pondering: “Why all this fuss about Booker T. Washington and President Roosevelt? In what way has the President acted wrongly?” The publication described Roosevelt as a man who did not discriminate based on race, color, or religion and said he had dinner with Washington because of merit. “Booker T. Washington is an American gentleman, a thinker, scholar, educator, reformer—one who is a greater friend not only of his own race, but of the

³⁵ *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, October 24, 1901.

³⁶ Theodore Roosevelt quoted in Gatewood, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 32, 59-60.

³⁷ There were ninety-seven black newspapers that operated in Mississippi from 1900 to 1920. However, many of those papers were short-lived, suffered financially, and are no longer extant for contemporary research. See Julius E. Thompson, *The Black Press in Mississippi, 1865-1985* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 11-12. African Americans knew that commenting on these matters was very dangerous. In fact, the roots of the Wilmington, North Carolina, Race Riot of 1898, just three years before the Roosevelt-Washington dinner, can be traced to an editorial written by Alexander Manly, the owner of the black-owned *Daily Record*, for commenting on the possibility and probability of consensual sex between black men and white women. For details see H. Leon Prather, Sr., “We Have Taken A City: A Centennial Essay,” in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and its Legacy*, ed. David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 23, 25.

³⁸ Norrell, *Up from History*, 248.

South, than all the mouthing politicians of that section," it concluded.³⁹

"Mississippi has long been the storm centre of race hatred, the home of the shot gun policy and the scene of massacres," the black-owned *Washington Bee* wrote in November of 1901. "It was the first State to disfranchise the colored people." The same paper also questioned why white southerners were so alarmed about the dinner considering the fame of Booker T. Washington. The *Bee* found it very strange that President Roosevelt could not "exercise his private social rights without so much criticism."⁴⁰ The *Cleveland Gazette*, also owned by African Americans, averred that any American citizen, including the president, should feel highly honored to have a man like Washington dine with him.⁴¹ "It is a pity that the South should presume to take exceptions to the fact that President Roosevelt invited a man of brains to his table, and that the objections rests solely on the fact that he is black. It is not Washington who is black—it is his skin," *The Broad Axe* proclaimed. "His brains are not black. His work is not black. His morals are not black. His reputation is not black. His manhood is of the highest type and if he was not fit to dine at the table of the President then there are very few white men who would be fit."⁴²

The African American-owned *Indianapolis Freeman* also attempted to bring clarity and balance to this matter by highlighting the fact that while in Paris, France, Booker T. Washington had dined with French cabinet ministers and some of the highest functionaries of that country. The paper questioned why Washington's dinner with the president at the White House "has elicited the outbursts of indignation in the newspapers of the Southern states." This question was answered in many ways throughout the Mississippi press.⁴³

While some northern whites applauded the president's decision, in the southern press most white Mississippians lashed out at Roosevelt and Washington for this incident. The *Biloxi Daily Herald* declared that "the most damnable outrage which has ever been perpetrated by any citizen of the United States was committed by the president when he invited a negro to dine with him at the white house."⁴⁴ Some saw clear

³⁹ [Washington, D.C.] *Colored American*, October 26, 1901.

⁴⁰ *Washington Bee*, November 9, 1901, and November 2, 1901.

⁴¹ *Cleveland Gazette*, October 26, 1901.

⁴² [St. Paul, Minn.] *Broad Axe*, October 24, 1901.

⁴³ *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 21, 1901.

⁴⁴ Gatewood, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 35; *Biloxi Daily Herald*, October 20, 1901.



Booker T. Washington seated on steps of porch, with wife Margaret and two sons.

political implications in the dinner. "After such an incident a respectable Republican party in the South is out of the question," one Mississippian wrote. "The South must remain as it has been solidly Democratic, and it may be that there are respectable Republicans in the North who will resent the attempt to force social equality upon them, and will repudiate the President who practices it, and his party."⁴⁵

Southern congressmen were certainly outraged over Roosevelt's actions, which they viewed as counterproductive, but many were slow to openly criticize him since he was new to the office. That is why one newspaper noted that "Southern members of congress who are here criticize the president, but none has been found who will permit the use

⁴⁵ *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, November 7, 1901.

of his name in connection with these criticisms.”⁴⁶

Southern politicians may have initially held back, but the southern press began to lambaste the president immediately for the “indiscretion” of this “damnable outrage.” A Mississippi newspaper suggested that no criticism would be too severe. “It is generally admitted that this act is going to arouse a great deal of prejudice in the minds of the people of the country, those of the south in particular, against him,” the *Biloxi Daily Herald* informed, “and it is going to deprive him of the possibility of winning their friendship, which it was supposed he would try to cultivate, if we can judge by the evidences we have had before us since his accession to the presidential chair.” However, in the end the writer concluded that “Mr. Roosevelt will find that he had made a fatal mistake, but it will be too late for him to rectify the error. He should have carefully weighed his action and its possible effect upon a very considerable portion of the country, and if he had done so we are quite sure he would not have committed it.”⁴⁷

Mississippians informed Roosevelt that any future effort to woo southern converts to the GOP would be futile, and racial demagogue James K. Vardaman, a Democratic leader who would later become governor of Mississippi and a United States senator, accused Roosevelt of “coddling a ‘nigger bastard’ for political advantage.” Vardaman also claimed that the White House had become “so saturated with the odor of the nigger that the rats have taken refuge in the stable.”⁴⁸ Another perturbed white southerner wrote: “I have more respect for the blackest, rankest-smelling chicken thief in Mississippi than I have for the occupant of the White House. He has put himself so low in my estimation that he would disgrace the funky smell of an unwashed corn-field nigger.”⁴⁹

As word spread that Roosevelt’s wife and children attended the dinner, furor against the president reached a fever pitch. The *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* seems to have been the most vociferous critic of the president out of all the Mississippi papers examined in this study. The paper published several articles on the White House incident, one under the headline “Roosevelt Roasted.” “Roosevelt has dashed all hopes to

⁴⁶ *Biloxi Daily Herald*, October 19, 1901.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, October 20, 1901.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1902; Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery*, 87-88; for last Vardaman quote see *Greenwood Commonwealth*, January 31, 1903, quoted in Gatewood, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 36-37.

⁴⁹ *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, October 24, 1901.

the ground, and the South, the land that gave his mother birth, now looks upon him with loathing and contempt," the paper asserted. What apparently bothered the writer most was that Roosevelt had "practiced social equality in the white house, degraded the country, and disgraced the position he holds, by having the negro Booker Washington to dine with him, to eat at his own table, and be entertained, forsooth, by Mrs. Roosevelt." The paper concluded that Roosevelt "has made this negro his social equal, the equal of his family, his wife, sons and daughters. Oh, what a spectacle! What an outrage upon decency! What a shock to society!"⁵⁰

The *Clarion-Ledger* went on to assert that Roosevelt was the first Republican president in history "to overleap all bounds and take a negro, a former slave, into the sanctity of his home circle as his guest, and thereby the guest of the nation. The whole South is up in arms against this act of the president," the paper concluded, "and he is being denounced from one side of Mason and Dixon's line to the other ..." In another short blurb, a *Clarion-Ledger* writer cynically "suggested that Roosevelt resign the office of President in favor of his social equal, Booker Washington."⁵¹

One Mississippi newspaper was chagrined that immediately after the incident a "thoughtless" Roosevelt seemed to be "impatient" and "defiant" over the situation. About a week later, and following swift condemnation by a number of southern newspapers, an editor believed Roosevelt had begun to see the error of his ways. Without apologizing for Roosevelt's breach in the code of racial etiquette, the writer surmised that the president never thought this "offense would arouse the storm of indignation it did, and that it was more a matter of thoughtfulness [sic] on his part than any defiance of the laws and customs of the nation as bearing upon the subject of social equality of the races."⁵²

For his part, Roosevelt tried to draw attention away from this "breach." A Mississippi newspaper quoted him as saying that he invited Washington to the White House because he wanted to discuss southern affairs with him and "to get from him his ideas as to the best man to appoint to office, etc." However, Roosevelt miscalculated again. "This further explanation does not help matters in the least," the *Biloxi*

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Biloxi Daily Herald*, October 25, 1901.



Booker T. Washington standing on a stage before large crowd in Lakeland.

Herald opined, “but on the other hand, makes it look even worse. If the president had wanted counsel or advice upon this score it would have been far more in accord with proprieties and common decency to have invited some of the representative white men of this section to meet and confer with him.” To add insult to injury, Roosevelt “ignored them and called a negro into his confidence who could not have advised him as intelligently and comprehensively as could the white men of the south.”⁵³

On October 24, 1901, the *Port Gibson Reveille* weighed in on the controversy by informing its readers that “the *Reveille* has never been an admirer of Roosevelt.” The editor wrote that he never believed Roosevelt’s claims that he would bestow federal patronage in the South based strictly on the merit of the person, regardless of their political affiliation. Likewise, he was not as surprised about the president entertaining Washington as were “the southern papers that have been toadying to him since he reached his high state.”⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Port Gibson Reveille*, October 24, 1901. In the newspaper article, the writer does not specify exactly which southern newspapers to which he is referring.

Likewise, the *Sunflower Tocsin* opined simply that "Roosevelt desecrated the White House, disgraced himself and brought his family into contempt by giving a private dinner to Booker T. Washington." The *Oxford Globe* asserted that Roosevelt "played the wild when he had a negro to dine with him in the White House. He has lost the respect of the whole South, both white and black." While the *Lawrence County Press*, published in Monticello, Mississippi, noted that "those Southerners who were trying to find something good in Teddy, and really felt encouraged at the prospect, have now dropped him like a hot potato."⁵⁵

White Mississippians spewed the same type of venom toward Booker T. Washington. They felt betrayed, as they believed he opposed social mingling between the races. They recalled the one line in his Atlanta speech when he said that in matters social "we can be as separate as the fingers." "I am surprised that the invitation should have been extended," the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* admitted, but "I am more surprised that the nigger should have accepted it. I thought better of Booker." Then in an effort to expose Washington's true objectives, a journalist wrote: "It shows the aim, ambition and end of Booker Washington's work. I have contended all along that social equality was the end to which Washington and his pusillanimous ilk were striving. He has advised the members of his race to so live, accumulate property, educate themselves, and when they should become fortified and entrenched that they could then enforce the recognition of their rights, etc." Ultimately, this writer could not believe Roosevelt "had no more decency than to take a nigger into his home." This white man felt betrayed by Washington because he believed "that nigger had too much sense to be caught in such a trap."⁵⁶ Others felt the same way arguing, that Washington "should have been too smart to have accepted the President's invitation to dine," because "he knew better if the president didn't and will live to regret his indiscretion."⁵⁷

The *Southern Reporter*, published in Sardis, Mississippi, appears to have been more sympathetic towards Washington even though it was white-owned. In an article published a few days after the dinner the paper began with a disclaimer: "The readers of the Reporter know and need not therefore be told that we have been an admirer of Booker

⁵⁵ *Oxford Globe*, October 17, 1901; *Lawrence County Press*, October 24, 1901; *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, October 31, 1901.

⁵⁶ *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, October 24, 1901.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, October 31, 1901.

Washington and have held him up to them as a man of sense and a wise man in his treatment of, and his dealings with, his race. We have heretofore credited him with being a patriotic negro who sought, above politics and self-interest, the promotion of the [substantial?] welfare of the negro race, and at the same time the preservation and promotion of kind feeling between the white people and the negroes." However, the editor of the paper was disappointed Washington had accepted the dinner invitation. The paper's criticism of Roosevelt was mild compared to other papers throughout the state. "We frankly admit that we are sorry he has committed this *faux pas*, for we had been favorably impressed by him." The *Reporter* concluded that in the final analysis Roosevelt had "shown himself a renegade, and that he neither respects the sentiments and principles of his southern ancestors, nor the southern people, except the niggers, or negroes, or whatever he chooses to denominate them. We are sorry, but what is done, is done," the writer for the paper lamented.⁵⁸

In regard to Booker T. Washington, the *Port Gibson Reveille* opined that he "degraded himself as much as did Roosevelt." The publication advised Washington and other blacks "that if the negro as a race wants the respect of the Caucasian, as well as respect for himself, he should spurn social equality as much as does the white man." This Mississippi newspaperman felt the races had distinctive traits that make it impossible to associate on equal terms, and any white man who would dare associate with blacks, or any blacks who would associate with such a white man, should be considered to be lower than the average person of his race.⁵⁹

The *Clarion-Ledger* published nearly two dozen excerpts from other Mississippi papers regarding the Roosevelt–Washington dinner. The *Yazoo Sentinel* did not mince words in voicing the opinion that "the entire South has been nauseated by the news that comes from Washington. Roosevelt ... invited a nigger to his home and sat down to dine with him at his table on terms of social equality." Other papers also felt compelled to cast the incident as a pursuit of "social equality." "The negro race has not benefited in the least, but the white man's decency has been wantonly insulted," the *New Albany Gazette* opined. "Not that Booker Washington is not a decent and deserving negro, but that social equality between the negro and the white man is an impossibility." This

⁵⁸ *Southern Reporter*, October 25, 1901.

⁵⁹ *Port Gibson Reveille*, October 24, 1901.

writer concluded that regardless of Washington's accomplishments, in the end he was "no better, socially, than the blackest negro in New Albany." Similarly, the *Brandon News* warned that "trouble will come out of this indiscreet act, for other negroes will expect such courtesies and failing to receive them will raise 'Caine' [sic]. The President, though a 'Rough Rider,' cannot override public sentiment on social equality."⁶⁰

Some Mississippi newspapers even published comments from other states to show consensus over this dinner. The *Lawrence County Press* quoted the Reverend Doctor McHwaine, president of Old Hampden Sydney College and a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention: "If Roosevelt, or any other kind of 'velt' wishes to live with niggers, I can't help it, but he's got no business as President to be guilty of any such criminal folly. It's an outrage on official decency. It's contemptible ... If he prefers niggers, nothing I could say could help him. I'm a white man, you know."⁶¹

On October 25, 1901, the *Aberdeen Examiner* published an African American's response to the dinner incident. This story is unique because it was published in a white Mississippi newspaper, whereas most blacks who commented on the affair had their stories published in northern newspapers where fear of reprisal was not as acute. Avowed Democrat Reverend Stanley P. Mitchell of Lexington, Kentucky, referred to as one of the most intelligent black men in the South by the *Examiner*, and president of the National Industrial Council, which fought against lynching, discrimination in transportation, and voter disfranchisement, criticized the Tuskegee leader for accepting Roosevelt's invitation. "Prof. Washington has in my opinion made a great mistake," the writer began. Reverend Mitchell wrote that when Washington received the invitation he should have come up with an excuse so he could not have attended. But since he did not, Mitchell asserted that the Tuskegean had "incited old antagonisms that were passing away."⁶²

⁶⁰ *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, October 31, 1901.

⁶¹ *Lawrence County Press*, October 24, 1901.

⁶² *Aberdeen Examiner*, October 25, 1901. For more information on Stanley P. Mitchell see Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slaves Reparations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 156, 276, n.14, 277, n.18. See also the "Notable Kentucky African Americans Database" located at the University of Kentucky Libraries website at: https://www.uky.edu/Libraries/NKAA/record.php?note_id=2444. Born in Kentucky in 1871, Mitchell was a civil rights activist, minister, newspaper editor, and political party organizer. Mitchell bolted from the Democrat party and founded the National Civil Liberty Party in 1903, a third-party movement, to challenge the nation's

Reverend Mitchell also felt that Washington had made life more difficult for progressive blacks because whites would now look upon them with “distrust and suspicion.” Mitchell believed Washington’s acceptance of the invitation would over the long term weaken his influence with leaders of his own race, “who have no thought or desire for social equality between whites and blacks, but are striving to create within their own ranks dignified, moral, industrial and property holding class, with which affinity and association shall be gratifying and satisfying.”⁶³

It is interesting, though not surprising, that the *Examiner* chose to publish this story considering that Reverend Mitchell did not live in Mississippi; however, running the piece served the purposes of the newspaper by showing that blacks, even in the South, were not monolithic in their support of Washington. The letter also shows that blacks realized that in order to survive in the South, they had to accommodate themselves to the norms of social and racial etiquette and not incite any anger, fear, or notion on the part of whites that blacks were desirous of social equality. It is ironic that, just like Mitchell, the Tuskegee leader had made this same point about social equality during his Atlanta address a few years earlier.

Eventually these criticisms turned to talk of violence, with Mississippians predicting that “the feasting of Booker Washington by the President will be the cause of many darkies getting into trouble”⁶⁴ Others thought the dinner “will simply result in the death of a score or more Negroes, who, emboldened by the mad act of a fool President will presume to make demands that will be answered with pistol shots. And the blood of these misguided creatures will be on Roosevelt’s hands.”⁶⁵ Finally, another person wrote that “the action of President Roosevelt in entertaining that nigger will necessitate our killing a thousand niggers in the South before they will learn their places again.”⁶⁶ According

two-party system in the upcoming presidential campaign. Mitchell died young in 1908. For information on the National Civil Liberty Party see Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 242.

⁶³ Stephen Cresswell, *Rednecks, Redeemers, and Race: Mississippi after Reconstruction, 1877-1917* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 69-70.

⁶⁴ *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, October 24, 1901.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, November 7, 1901. The threats against Washington were very real as he came to know. In fact, some whites in Louisiana hired a black man to assassinate Washington. When the would-be assassin arrived at Tuskegee he suffered an injury while jumping off



Booker T. Washington at his desk.

to historian Willard Gatewood, for a number of years after 1901, racial disturbances in general were traced back to the dinner incident on the grounds that the meal had created discontent and restlessness among African Americans.⁶⁷

When asked about the violent denunciation of Roosevelt throughout the southern press over the dinner, Washington tried to quiet the controversy: "I think the newspapers of the South do not voice the opinion of the southern people. However, they are hurting the entire South more than they are hurting President Roosevelt." He continued, "They represent a transient emotional sentiment on the part of a class of the white people of the South, but such feelings do not indicate the general feeling and opinion of Southern people." Washington remained vague about who exactly attended the dinner, only stating that "there were two or three other guests with us at the dinner" and explained that the

the train. While there he learned that Washington was out of town. However, the man received such good care at the Tuskegee Institute hospital over several weeks that he felt guilty and confessed his mission. See Scott and Stowe, *Booker T. Washington*, 117-18.

⁶⁷ Gatewood, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 36-37. See also *The Greenwood Commonwealth*, January 31, 1903, and *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, April 17, 1904.

dinner “was a private affair.” Nonetheless, he reiterated that he had known Roosevelt for years and had consulted with him on race matters many times.⁶⁸

Moreover, some years later when Washington wrote about this matter in his book *My Larger Education* (1911), he confessed that he had grave misgivings about accepting Roosevelt’s invitation because he understood the potential fallout that could occur if news of the dinner ever became public. “I felt I must consider seriously the question whether I should allow myself to be drawn into a kind of activity that I had definitely determined to keep away from,” he reflected. “But here was a letter which, it seemed to me, I could not lightly put aside, no matter what my personal wishes or feelings might be.” Considering those facts, and weighing the impact, he decided to attend the dinner.⁶⁹

It is clear that throughout Mississippi its white citizens were virtually unanimous in condemning the Roosevelt and Washington dinner. They felt that Roosevelt had greatly insulted them and that Washington had deceived them. Many white Mississippians never forgave Roosevelt for this offense, and they never fully trusted Washington the same way, even though many seem to have gotten over the matter. The President later regretted having invited Washington to the White House, and he never invited him or any other African American there for dinner again, but Washington continued to serve as Roosevelt’s southern presidential advisor until he left office.⁷⁰ For Washington, he learned how remarkably fast white public opinion could turn against him based on the decisions he made. The reception he received in Mississippi prior to the meal at the White House was generally cordial. After the dinner, criticism against him in Mississippi newspapers mounted, and he remained cognizant of the impact of the incident.

History proved Reverend Stanley Mitchell incorrect in his claim that Washington’s influence would be weakened among African Americans; in fact, it grew stronger. This can be seen through the praise showered on the Tuskegean in a number of black-controlled publications like the

⁶⁸ *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 21, 1901.

⁶⁹ Washington, *My Larger Education*, 150-51.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *A Chief Lieutenant*, 131; Gatewood, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 50, 59-60. When Washington toured Mississippi in 1908, white people came out in huge numbers at all venues to hear, see, and meet him. See David H. Jackson, Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 55-75; Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*, 318.

Colored American, the *Washington Bee*, the *Cleveland Gazette*, and the *Indianapolis Freeman* to name just a few. Indeed, Washington received praise from blacks for the dinner and afterwards, "more blacks were now willing to acknowledge Washington as the leader of their choice, even though initially it had been white favor that had thrust him upon them," said historian Louis Harlan.⁷¹

As time passed, it appears that Mississippi whites were able to put the event behind them. This is best illustrated by the support and endorsements Washington received when he toured the state in 1908. Under the guidance of his chief lieutenant in Mississippi Charles Banks, president of the Mississippi State Negro Business League, Washington and an entourage of black leaders traveled to Holly Springs, Utica, Jackson, Natchez, Vicksburg, Greenville, and Mound Bayou from October 5 to October 10. Both races were eager to see him, and it is estimated that Washington spoke to anywhere from forty thousand to eighty thousand people, including both blacks and whites at practically every venue during his tour. He was praised throughout the press and so encouraged by the success of his Mississippi visit that the Tuskegee leader traveled through nine other southern states before he died.⁷² Thus it seems that by 1908 his dinner at the White House, while surely not forgotten, had caused little harm to his overall legacy in the Magnolia State.

This research has proven conclusively that Mississippi whites were no different than other southern whites in terms of their condemnation of Booker T. Washington and President Theodore Roosevelt for having dinner at the White House, along with Roosevelt's family. While white southerners embraced the same racial and social customs overall, an examination of Mississippi newspapers reveals that there was some distinction in terms of how the antipathy toward Washington and Roosevelt varied and how some responses, albeit still critical of both men, were milder than others, even in the Mississippi press. Although the black response was not homogeneous, most commentators praised the Tuskegee leader. Ultimately, this entire situation demonstrated the very oppressive conditions blacks lived under in the South, specifically

⁷¹ [Washington, D.C.] *Colored American*, October 26, 1901; *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 21, 1901; Harlan, *Making of a Black Leader*, 304; Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 5-6.

⁷² For best example see, Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy*, 53-75; see also Jackson, *A Chief Lieutenant of the Tuskegee Machine*.

in Mississippi, and why they were expected to abide by strict rules that guided their manners, dress, etiquette, and virtually every other aspect of their lives.

That is why John McCain's reference to the progress of this nation during his concession speech was profound especially for those who understood the absolute outrage generated over President Roosevelt, a white man, inviting Booker T. Washington, an African American, to the White House for a meal. As the senator noted, "America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time" and the election of President Barack Obama, an African American like Booker T. Washington, demonstrates the tremendous measure of progress and growth that has taken place through consistent struggle in the century since the White House dinner in 1901.⁷³

⁷³ *New York Times*, November 4, 2008.