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"It Was Still No South to Us": African American Civil Servants at the Fin de Siècle

Eric S. Yellin

University of Richmond, eyellin@richmond.edu

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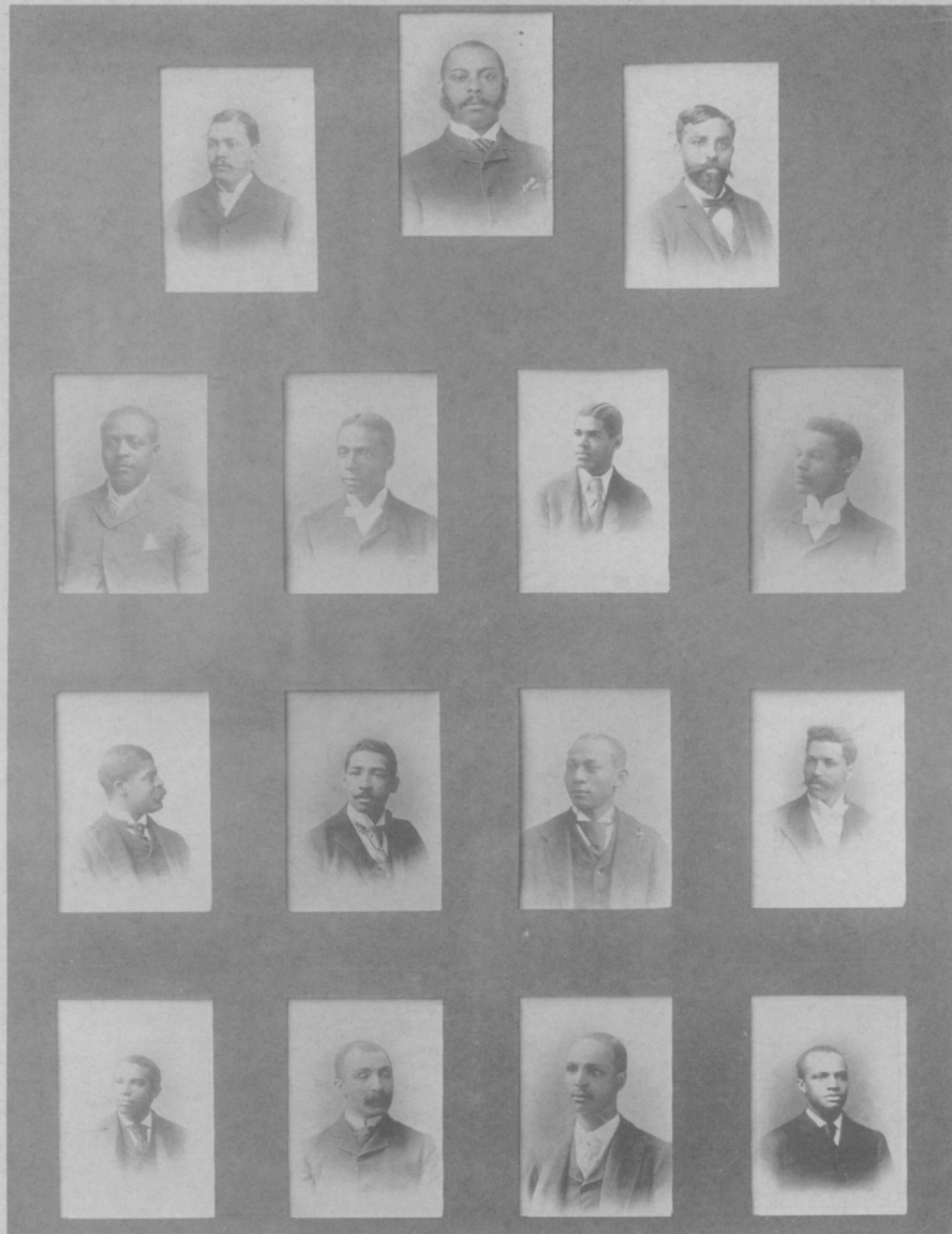


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GOVERNMENT CLERKS . . .

Have received appointment as Clerks in Civil Service
Departments United States Government through
Competitive Examinations .

before 1906

“It Was Still No South to Us”

African American Civil Servants at the Fin de Siècle

by Eric S. Yellin

*“As long as I have been colored I have heard
of Washington Society.”*

— Langston Hughes¹

If Washingtonians know anything about black civil servants of the early twentieth century, it is that they faced discrimination under President Woodrow Wilson. Beginning in 1913, Wilson’s Democratic administration dismantled a biracial, Republican-led coalition that had struggled since Reconstruction to make government offices places of racial egalitarianism. During Wilson’s presidency, federal officials imposed “segregation” (actually exclusion), rearranged the political patronage system, and undercut black ambition.

Opposite: By the early 1900s, over three hundred black men and women were working as civil service clerks in Washington. W. E. B. Du Bois featured some of them with his “Exhibit of American Negroes” at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Library of Congress.

Eric S. Yellin, assistant professor of history at the University of Richmond, is completing a book about African American federal employees in Washington, D.C., at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Wilson administration’s policies were a disaster for black civil servants, who responded with one of the first national civil rights campaigns in U.S. history. But to fully grapple with the meaning of federal segregation, we need a richer understanding of life and work in black Washington before Wilson.

The Democrats who imposed segregation under Wilson did so because of the challenge presented by black civil servants. In the decades prior to Wilson’s presidency, Republican administrations had employed African Americans as part of their party’s efforts at racial uplift. Despite the limitations of increasing racism and the imperfections of the new civil service system, black civil servants took advantage of all the capital had to offer. Most importantly, it offered decent employment and economic mobility to Americans who could navigate a hiring process that combined meritocratic examinations with political patronage and personal connections. Those black men and women who sought social and economic mobility through federal employment are the focus of this article. Black Washington contained exceptional contrasts between its famous “colored aristocrats” and the laboring and underemployed masses, yet it was the



The Treasury Department employed the most African Americans in Washington, and most in that department made the nation's currency in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Library of Congress.

city's middle strivers, the white-collar clerks, who best indicated the promise of the capital city. Though their numbers were always small, they were a visible embodiment of hope for black Americans—and a threat to white supremacy.

As the twentieth century opened, Washington had only recently come into its own as a city. The mud-filled streets mocked by Charles Dickens and Henry Adams had given way to asphalt boulevards and elegant parks. In the years after the Civil War, a flood of new residents, black and white, had come seeking government employment and to take part in the ascendant American state. Prosecution of a war and management of a huge army had swollen the government and employed new

wage workers, especially women. In the early 1860s, the D.C. population doubled, and it never shrank back to its pre-war size.² The provincial and largely undistinguished District had finally taken in enough people to build itself into a metropolitan capital.

Yet unlike other American cities, it had not been revolutionized by industry. It was a city of clerks: white-collar and professional workers with, as historian Sharon Harley has written, “a supporting cast of unskilled domestics and laborers.”³ Government clerks could hardly afford the high culture the capital now offered, but their stable families and professional demeanor contributed to the progressive air of the city, and their steady salaries began to support new real estate and retail markets. The presence of rising black men and women in

these markets well into the twentieth century made Washington unique.⁴

Indeed, thousands of working- and middle-class as well as upper-class African Americans were enjoying the newly vibrant capital as the twentieth century approached. Though they correctly decried the District's loss of the franchise in 1878 as racially motivated, black boosters continued to proclaim Washington a place of real opportunity for African Americans.⁵ By 1891 black men and women constituted 10 percent of the federal workforce.⁶ Thousands of black women had come to the city seeking good public schools for their children and decent-paying work in government offices and in the homes of well-off white statesmen. White women benefited far more from white-collar work in the expanding government, but federal agencies like the Freedmen's Hospital, the Government Printing Office, and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing offered the prospect of steady pay for black women from all over the country.⁷

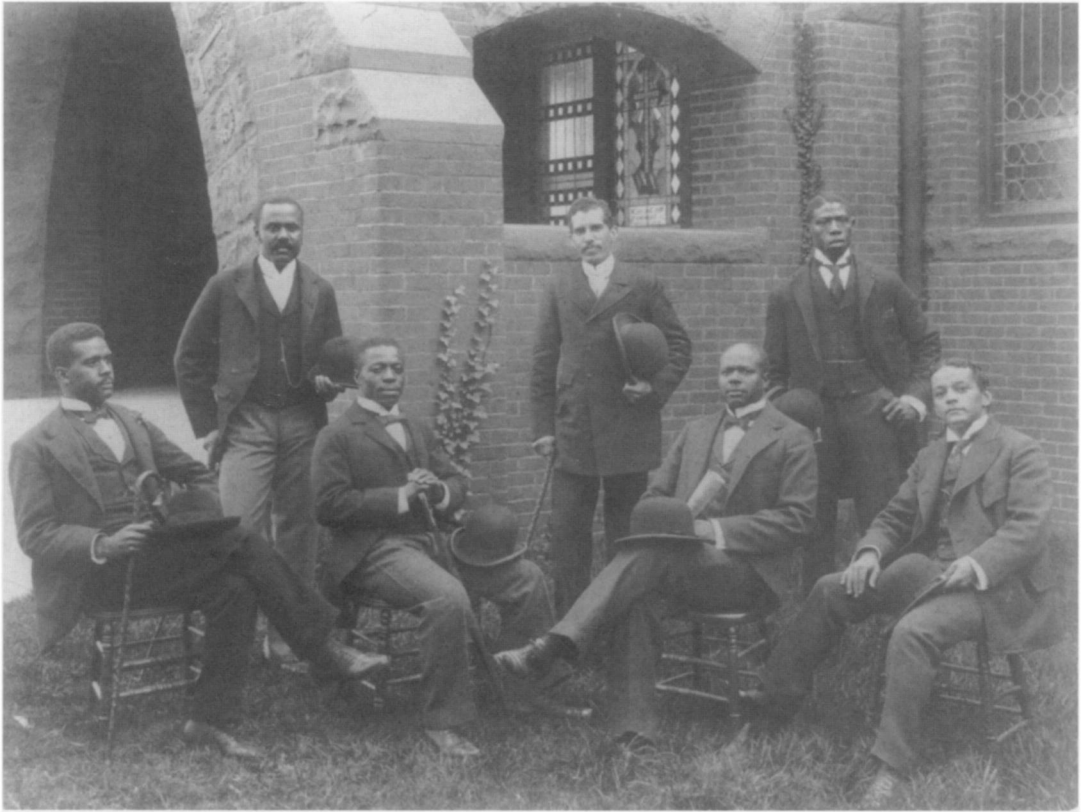
The city was also home to some of the nation's most elite black Americans, including former Mississippi senator Blanche K. Bruce, North Carolina author Anna Julia Cooper, and former Louisiana governor P. B. S. Pinchback.⁸ Accomplished men and women whose promenades down Connecticut Avenue on bright Sunday afternoons announced their power and affluence, they built hotels, restaurants, and dynamic social and political clubs. They erected schools that exemplified the best modern techniques in education. Congress had created the Washington public school system in 1864, and even after students were segregated, African Americans maintained substantial control over and funding for their part of the system. The black elite largely paid for the public schools that attracted African Americans of all classes to the city.⁹ The M Street High School offered black children a superior secondary education; teachers with degrees from Harvard, Dartmouth, and Oberlin taught students who went on to Amherst, Brown, and Yale, or to

the capital's Howard University, the "capstone of Negro education." Doctors, lawyers, economists, and social workers poured out of Howard's classrooms, many to stay on, living and working in Washington.¹⁰

Elite black men and women might sit in integrated audiences at the Belasco Theatre or participate in debates at the Bethel Literary and Historical Society, the intellectual home of W. E. B. Du Bois's "Talented Tenth." They might gather with black government workers, politicians, and businessmen at Martin's Café, a black-run restaurant, to participate in the meetings of the city's famous Mu-So-Lit Club. Newspapers across the country carried daily news from that great black society in Washington, with its china and crystal banquets and cultural clubs.¹¹ This black bourgeoisie was more prominent and more remarked upon by black and white Americans alike than any other group of African Americans anywhere, and its prominence lasted well into the "nadir" of black history at the turn of the twentieth century. Describing the famous Washington "Negro Society" in 1901, Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote, "Here come together the flower of colored citizenship from all parts of the country." The result was grand: "The breeziness of the West here meets the refinement of the East, the warmth and grace of the South, the culture and fine reserve of the North."¹²

Black Washington at the turn of the twentieth century embodied the last vestiges of the racial egalitarianism that flowered briefly after the Civil War, when Washington served as a laboratory for government-sponsored civil rights measures. The experiment had begun with the payment of nearly \$1 million dollars in 1862 to masters for the freedom of their slaves and continued with the extension of voting rights to black residents in 1866 and civil rights legislation in 1870.¹³

The depression of the mid-1870s and attendant labor troubles turned northern white interest away from black rights. In the absence of federal oversight, a white oligarchy reemerged



Founded in 1867, Howard University represented the pinnacle of black education in 1900, producing thousands of black doctors, lawyers, and educators. Many entered government service. Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

to take control over the South over the next twenty years. As federal troops withdrew, bigoted white southerners triumphed.¹⁴ Although many of the District's experiments failed when the federal government officially abandoned Reconstruction in 1877, government departments still offered more promise for black Americans than the rest of the South—and perhaps much of the North. African American politicians retreated to the nation's capital. Among them were former congressmen as well as minor politicians, many of whom became federal civil servants. They worked hard to maintain a political voice in Washington. In the first decade of the twentieth century, black Republicans would hold the offices of assistant

attorney general, register of the treasury, U.S. district attorney in the District of Columbia, and D.C. municipal judge.¹⁵

Though Washington offered terrible examples of black poverty and segregation, it stood out for its lack of *legalized* segregation and racial violence. As one migrant remembered, “Washington wasn’t South. It’s the capital, and you had more chances for things. Jim Crow was there, but it was still no South to us.”¹⁶ As an example, a bill proposed by Congressman “Cotton Tom” Heflin of Alabama to segregate the city’s street cars in 1908 was soundly defeated. Despite the support of southern congressmen, including Texas Democrat Albert Burleson, who would later serve as Woodrow Wil-

son's postmaster general, Heflin's amendment to a Street Railway Bill had the House in an uproar, as speaker after speaker rose to denounce the attempt to bring Jim Crow to the capital. The amendment was crushed 140 to 59, and Washington remained the southernmost city in which black and white people mingled freely on public transportation. Alexandria, just on the other side of the Potomac River, removed black riders to segregated cars.¹⁷

Washington was not the only city with a prosperous and powerful black community, but Wilmington, Atlanta, and Richmond among others ultimately fell under the oppression of white state legislatures and violent coups. Congress, which ruled the District, was simply too divided, too filled with intransigence to force through anything so demanding as segregation. Congress always contained enough northerners and Republicans, even after the Democratic triumph of 1910, to ensure that bills to segregate Washington never became law and to shield black civic participation against mob violence.¹⁸

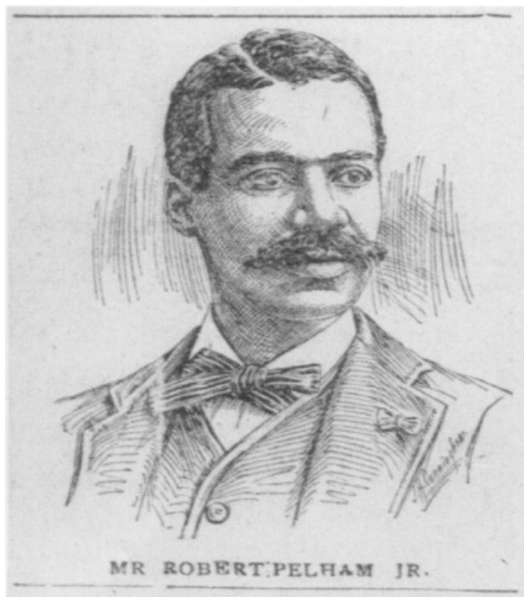
Perhaps most importantly for working- and middle-class African Americans, Washington at the turn of the twentieth century was also distinguished by its integrated government offices. Black men and women had been serving in the federal government since 1864, when President Abraham Lincoln asked Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase to appoint Solomon Johnson, Lincoln's barber, to a messenger position. Johnson quickly earned several promotions and worked his way up to a \$1,400 clerkship in the Third Auditor's Division, and remained at Treasury until his death in 1885.¹⁹ During his career, 620 black men and women joined him in Washington's various federal offices.²⁰

The establishment of the civil service system in 1883 greatly democratized access to government employment, and black Americans leapt at the opportunity. Through the civil service exams as well as the continued importance of Republican political patronage, the number of



Judson W. Lyons of Georgia was one of several African Americans who served as register of the treasury during Republican administrations. Doubters wrote to the department asking if it was really true that a black person held so important a post. Ohio Historical Society.

African American civil servants working in the capital tripled, with another 12,000 working around the country.²¹ Educated African Americans from all over the country could take the civil service examinations and land mid-level jobs in Washington's federal departments. The continued importance of African Americans in the Republican Party gave the party an interest in offering access to information about exams and job openings. The GOP was still the party for black men, and its emphasis on black opportunity eased the way to jobs and promotions. Neither a high examination score nor a patronage connection alone was enough to launch a civil service career, but the combination proved productive time and again for black men and women at the turn of the twentieth century.



Petersburg, Virginia, native Robert Pelham earned a law degree from Howard University in 1904 and worked as a high-level clerk in the Census Bureau for over twenty years. He was also a member of the District's prestigious American Negro Academy. From Colored American, February 21, 1903.

Federal employment usually required a move to D.C., which could be difficult, particularly for those coming from the country. Historian Elizabeth Clark-Lewis has documented the daily struggles of women who moved to the capital in this period. The city's busy streets and chaotic Eastern and Central markets were a far cry from the austere tenant farming of the deep South. As one of her subjects put it: "You can't grow a good potato out of bad ground, and dis sho is bad ground."²² For others, it was simply the distance from home and family that added stress. Explaining his exhaustion to a white supervisor, watchman Jesse Porter remarked, "I am 1500 miles from home, for the so[le] purpose of discharging my duty as a watchman." He had exhausted himself trying to find a place to live, and despite the bewildering city and the confusing regulations of his job in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing,

he was doing his best. "I've gotten rid of my belongings with family on the road to come to prove myself faithful," Porter declared.²³

Despite the hardships, many African Americans found great opportunities for self-advancement in federal employment. White-collar jobs at the turn of the twentieth century paid around 2.5 times as much as blue-collar work.²⁴ Black clerks were financially far better off than most African American workers. Census clerk William Jennifer typified the sense of promise. He had used his Howard University education, his qualifying score on the civil service examination, and his connections to the Republican Party to leave Milford, Texas, behind. In 1900 at age 30, he joined the ranks of black white-collar workers in Washington. Despite his concerns about racism among his supervisors and his supervisors' concerns about his efficiency reports, Jennifer's progress reports improved. In early 1913, Jennifer's reviewer announced triumphantly that "during the past two years his work has been thoroughly satisfactory" and recommended a promotion to \$1,200 a year.²⁵

Others found even more to celebrate in Washington. Robert Pelham had moved to Washington at about the same time Jennifer had and had also taken up work in the Census Bureau. Born in Petersburg, Virginia, Pelham came to the city with a career in journalism and Republican politics behind him. His starting salary at the Census Bureau was \$1,200, an income that men like Jennifer could attain only over long careers. Pelham went further and earned a law degree from Howard University in 1904. Despite increasing discrimination in the 1910s, he parlayed his education and hard work into a position of authority in the bureau and, by the time he retired in 1929, the impressive salary of \$2,400 a year.²⁶ Pelham also joined Washington's elite black society. The census clerk was granted membership in the exclusive American Negro Academy, even though some of the greater lights of the organization found him "merely bright."

That Pelham's career suggests that in Washington hard work could overcome only moderate ability is remarkable in and of itself. Most black Americans at the turn of the twentieth century lived lives that fell far short of their capacities. Perhaps only in Washington could a black man known as "merely bright" achieve so much.²⁷

Some African Americans found that Washington and government employment opened opportunities to participate in important work. Ocea Taylor, a clerk in the Census Bureau, came to Washington from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to attend Howard University around 1900. President of the literary society at Howard, Taylor took his B.A. in 1906 and bachelor of laws in 1908. He came to government employment bearing a strong letter of recommendation from Kelly Miller, the distinguished Howard University philosophy professor, but a brief trial in the Coast and Geodetic Survey Office in the Commerce and Labor Department proved disappointing.²⁸ Taylor maintained that coloring buoys was beneath him, especially since he had been certified for the civil service as a clerk. His failure to gain promotion there was, he said, a "manifest injustice," though he made no mention of race as a factor.²⁹ He was not to suffer long, though, for he soon managed a transfer to the Division of Population in the Census Bureau, where he was enthusiastically recommended for more specialized work. By 1910, Taylor had risen to become the only African American working as a special agent in that year's census for the District, and he continued to receive glowing endorsements from his superiors.³⁰ Taylor also found time to collaborate on a newspaper called the *Washington American*, published weekly for a black readership.³¹ Although his work there brought charges of political activity, which was prohibited by civil service rules, Taylor received the continued support of his bosses, including E. Dana Durand, director of the census. Ocea Taylor had become a person of some importance.³²

By the twentieth century, some black government workers came from established Washington families. Thomas H. R. Clarke, whose career troubles would later exemplify the racism of the Wilson administration in the 1910s, was the third member of his family to work for the federal government. The son of Cornelius and Emily Clarke, Thomas had attended the District's public schools, graduated from the M Street High School, and fought in the Spanish-American War. He returned to Washington "Lieutenant Clarke," and soon married a woman named Lucille from a good family in Detroit. In 1901, he took up work as an assistant messenger in the War Department for \$720 a year. A month later, he was transferred to the Treasury Department.³³ Clarke managed to earn a law degree from Howard in 1904, after which he flew through the ranks of the Treasury Department, doubling his salary to \$1,400 by 1910. Clarke worked almost exclusively for prominent black Republicans in the office of the register of the treasury, and through powerful men like Judson Lyons, William T. Vernon, and James Napier, he became a well-known figure in the local Republican Party.

White boosters sometimes called Washington a "colored man's paradise," but this was going too far.³⁴ Historian Sharon Harley notes that the heady days of egalitarian ideals in the 1860s faded quickly, giving way to outright discrimination and petty harassment throughout everyday life.³⁵ Domestic servants, nearly always black women, spent long days washing clothes and cleaning kitchens for little money. These women, working in other people's homes and living in the alleyways behind, became emblematic of the hardships of urban labor and poverty at the turn of the century. Thousands of black southerners had moved to cities like Washington, Richmond, and Atlanta only to find themselves facing a different form of the destitution they had endured as sharecroppers.



Although Washington appeared to be a city of clerks and paperwork, federal offices required thousands of laborers to keep the government running. Most African Americans held blue-collar and unskilled positions in D.C. Library of Congress.

Government work at the lowest levels did not pay well (or even consistently), and supporting a family on a laborer's salary of \$360 a year was next to impossible. For most black families, just surviving on low wages in a city with a high cost of living was a kind of success. A 1911 article in the *Evening Star* estimated the cost of living for a family of four in Washington to be about \$2,000 a year. Many government clerks were living quite well on less money, but the article's bias was in favor of raising salaries for civil servants. Nonetheless, the amount does suggest something about what it cost to be middle-class by Victorian standards—including such luxuries as life in-

surance, magazine subscriptions, servants, and outside laundry.³⁶ Most black Washingtonians came nowhere close to this sum.

Moreover, the Civil Service was not blind to race. Black clerks were often denied jobs and respect. Treasury Department employee forms had no place to mark race prior to 1904, but the word "Colored" or simply "Col." can be found handwritten on the forms of most black employees, and such racial designation could prevent promotion. Even under the best of circumstances, racial marking was everywhere. A recommendation arguing his case stated that one clerk, Robert Coleman, "is a young colored man but very intelligent and capable."³⁷



It was not unusual to find black and white civil servants working side-by-side in government offices at the turn of the twentieth century. Source: Library of Congress.

The fact that some white Republican administrators continued to mentor and treat black civil servants equally at the turn of the twentieth century sometimes led to real conflict, especially in the South. In July 1898, Ernest Dillon of the Eclipse Printing Company in Atlanta scolded F. A. Vanderlip, assistant secretary of the treasury, for sending the wrong man to help with a government printing order. “Which is worse,” he asked rhetorically, “to carry a letter of introduction to a ‘coon’ or to have one present a letter to you?” Dillon continued, “When yesterday morning a huge footed, horny fisted, lantern jawed and bullet headed nigger presented to me his appointment as my assistant, I lost several ounces of

respect for the powers that be.”³⁸ The Treasury Department regularly received inquiries asking whether several important offices, like the register of the treasury or the D.C. recorder of deeds, were *really* held by black men. Motivated by indignation or curiosity (and sometimes the need to settle a bet), these letters suggested that racial attitudes in Washington were strange to Americans elsewhere.³⁹

Within government offices in Washington, discrimination was generally more subtle. Black clerks complained of unfairness even before the 1910s, despite the relative egalitarianism practiced in much of the government, and they were frequently right about obstacles they encountered. Darwin D. Moore was a clerk in

the Census Bureau, who unlike Ocea Taylor, was denied the opportunity to conduct field work despite numerous requests.⁴⁰ Moore's career and education were not so distinguished as Taylor's, though he described himself as "polite, active, attentive, and respectful." Born in Missouri in 1862, Moore came to Washington via Cheyenne, Wyoming, and began work as an assistant messenger at the age of 37.⁴¹ He had attended high school, and, according to his supervisors, he was likeable, "being a man of pleasing address."⁴² Moore quickly earned promotion to clerk, and by 1903 he had been promoted to a \$1,200-a-year position.⁴³ In 1907, Wyoming Senator Warren France forwarded Moore's wish to be sent into the field to gather statistics for the bureau. Director Simon North replied that he would be very glad to grant it.⁴⁴

Two weeks later, North wrote again to Senator Francis, explaining that he had been mistaken. "My attention has just been called to the fact that Mr. Darwin D. Moore, a clerk in this office, whose detail to field work you requested, and which request I was glad to accede to in my letter of February 21, is a colored man," North explained. "We have a number of colored men in the office equally as efficient as Mr. Moore, who are anxious to go into the field." But, he confessed, "there are many reasons why it does not seem desirable to send certain of these men, and yet I can not send one without subjecting myself to the charge of discrimination." What were these "reasons?" Was it because Moore wanted to be detailed on the 'Marriage and Divorce' survey and his approaching white women for personal information was unacceptable to the white authorities? North never explained. "Personally," he added, "I have no prejudice against the colored clerk, and I try to treat all of these employees in this office with the same consideration that is given to the white clerks." Yet, the director declared, "experience has shown . . . that it is not desirable to detail them to field work."⁴⁵ Moore claimed to accept this situation, but

his continued applications for field work indicated his great disappointment. Despite many more requests, Moore was never sent out into the field.⁴⁶

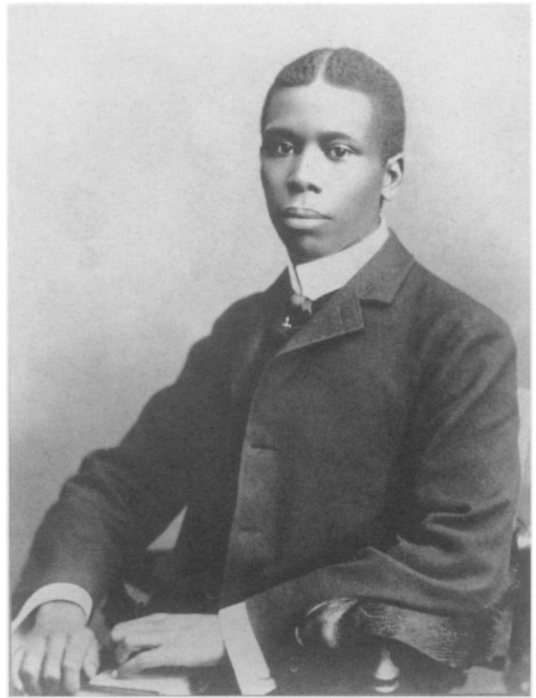
Success invited discrimination, and as the number of black clerks multiplied, so too did racist hostility. The trouble Moore experienced became more common as the twentieth century wore on, until by 1911 the opportunities once so apparent in the civil service could no longer be described as unlimited. That year, *The Crisis* noted that despite—or because of—the obvious success of many African American government workers, racism in Washington was increasing under President William Howard Taft. "Once [the anti-Negro campaign] howled at and contended against Dirt and Poverty; Bad Manners and innate and eternal Inferiority," the magazine editorialized. "Today it contends against human beings, even though they are clean and thrifty and polite and can demonstrate their ability."⁴⁷ Though the greatest struggles for black government workers would occur under the Wilson administration (1913–1920), the signs of a fragility of the so-called "colored man's paradise" were evident earlier.

Consciousness of class was also a distinguishing feature of a black community that included some of the richest African Americans and alleyways overflowing with the very poor. Indeed, part of distinguishing oneself as middle- or upper-class was the refusal to associate with people socially, occupationally, or economically inferior. In this, black Washingtonians resembled white elites around the country.⁴⁸ Concerning black society in Washington, Paul Laurence Dunbar noted in 1901 that among the better-off, "some of us wince a wee bit when we are all thrown into the lump as the peasant or serving class. In aims and hopes for our race, it is true, we are all at one but it must be understood, when we come to consider the social life, that the girls who cook in your kitchens and the men who serve in your dining rooms do not dance in our parlors."⁴⁹

This was a distinction, asserted Dunbar, that wealthier African Americans very much wanted white people to understand.

The bohemian poet Langston Hughes complained that black Washington society traded on family connections and meaningless social distinctions. Hughes hated the almost desperate drive for social and economic mobility among the city's black elites. "In no other city were there so many splendid homes, so many cars, so many A.B. degrees or so many persons with 'family background,'" Hughes remarked. But there was something dishonest or inauthentic in it. "I found that their ideals seemed most Nordic and un-Negro and that they appeared to be moving away from the masses of the race rather than holding an identity among them." One who looked beyond this "society" would find many people living well despite being outside its exclusive borders. "Seventh street was always teemingly alive with dark working people who hadn't yet acquired 'culture' and the manners of stage ambassadors, pinks and blacks and yellows were still friends without apologies." In the socialist magazine *Opportunity*, Hughes reminded his audience that "the dignity of one's family background doesn't keep a fellow who's penniless from getting hungry."⁵⁰

Hughes, writing in 1927, may have been describing a community damaged by the racial discrimination unleashed in the 1910s, but many who wrote earlier touched upon similar themes. Another scion of a great political family, Jean Toomer, felt compelled to tell about the seedier side of Washington, which often meant portraying the urban poverty he observed on 7th Street. Albert Rice, also a native-born Washingtonian and graduate of Dunbar High School, would later describe the city as a "center of Babbitts, both black and white."⁵¹ The fact that Washington seemed to offer more opportunity always made it a magnet for black people seeking to build better lives, and the very notion of upward mobility brought with it a constant concern about status. These



Paul Laurence Dunbar was the capital's great poet and novelist and helped to make Washington a thriving center of black culture well before the famous "renaissance" in Harlem. Smithsonian Institution.

struggles for distinction inevitably resulted in class awareness among many African Americans in the capital, an aspect of the city's history that many have found distasteful.

Just as their achievements and ambitions made black Washingtonians vital parts of the capital, racism and fear kept those achievements constantly within view. Racism does not create secret cities, it creates color-line obsession.⁵² Evidence of that obsession is everywhere in the historical record, from newspaper reports in the mainstream press of "near race riots" and black crime, to wealthier black Washingtonians' perceived need to explicitly distinguish themselves from the more benighted black classes with which they were associated simply because of race.⁵³

De facto segregation existed in Washington even without congressional mandate. D.C. res-



Opened in 1912, the 12th Street YMCA was one of many centers of African American civic life in Washington that relied on middle-class government clerks for membership and funding. Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

idents were more likely to live on streets and in neighborhoods of just one racial group as the twentieth century began than they had been before. Moreover, even though the 300 or so black white-collar government clerks walked and rode streetcars with their peers as they commuted to work, it is likely that residential segregation was reinforced by a kind of temporal segregation, since most black and white citizens made their ways to work at different times. “There is one time of day when colored folk have almost exclusive use of the street cars,” noted Belle La Follette, wife of the Wisconsin senator, in 1913. “In my early morning walks I notice as the cars stop the shovellers, masons, carpenters, cooks, laundresses, housemaids, nurses, get off and go in differ-

ent directions to begin their day’s work.” This movement of the city’s workers through the streets, like red blood cells flowing through arteries giving life to the capital’s organs, amazed La Follette. “What would happen if they all went to Africa? Not only our household machinery, but almost every kind of business that is in any way dependent upon manual labor would come to a standstill.”⁵⁴ She was right, of course, and whether they acknowledged it or not, Washington’s white Americans were well aware that black people were essential to what many considered to be *their* capital.

Though white and black residents generally lived apart after the 1890s, Washington nonetheless represented far more potential for social mobility than most other American cities

at the turn of the twentieth century. One way to understand the city is by making a distinction between interracial society and interracial opportunity. No city in the United States after 1900 lacked a color line. Boston had circles of black and white intellectuals—many of whom were associated with Harvard University and descendants of abolitionists—who met regularly for social and political meetings, but residential segregation and unequal social relations generally were the rule.⁵⁵ Interracial opportunity, as it existed in Washington, meant that whites and blacks both could be upwardly mobile. Government jobs and the failure to institute legalized segregation meant that opportunities for black people in Washington did not disappear with Reconstruction—ambitious and intelligent black men continued to hold positions of responsibility and power long afterward. Black women in D.C. lacked the opportunities of the young, middle-class white women who came to the city for clerical work, but in terms of pay and working conditions they were far better off than black women in other parts of the country, even when laboring in the homes of white people.⁵⁶ Even with racism manifest throughout Washington, black men and women continued to move to the city in the belief that they could advance their careers, earn good money, and invest in property. As the twentieth century advanced, black men and women were less and less likely to socialize and break bread with whites. But for many black migrants in this period, being able to buy bread at all was a step up.

The financial stability of federal clerkships—and the attendant industries built to support this developing middle class—created expectations for a better life among many black Washingtonians. Some could even claim to own portions of the nation's capital. Throughout the rest of the United States, black men and women usually worked on land that someone else owned, and assets were generally limited to the barest essentials of life. One-

room cabins of rotten wood crowding the black sides of towns and dotting the southern rural landscape were the most common signs of black “property,” though even these were often the property of white landowners. Black families with *wealth*, the stable capital necessary for economic security, were rare. It was not for lack of hard work and initiative that wealth remained a far off dream for most African Americans. Cycles of debt, white land monopoly, racial violence, and plain robbery trapped most black Americans.⁵⁷ There were exceptions, of course. A tiny minority of African Americans owned homes and land all over the South, from New Orleans to Charleston, but nowhere was that minority so well represented as in Washington. There one stood the greatest chance of escaping the penury associated with blackness in the United States.⁵⁸

The Hood family typified a form of economic success for black Washingtonians. In 1911, city postal clerk Henry Hood was supporting two daughters and his wife Emma on \$1,100 a year, close to the average for permanent civil service employees. They were renting a house on 10th and Q Streets, NW, and apparently doing well enough that Emma Hood offered no occupation or source of income to census takers in 1910. Married black women in this period were far more likely than white women to be in the workforce, and for all the difficulties inherent in working at home, Emma's occupational status indicated a major economic advancement.⁵⁹ The wives of government clerks, even some earning less than Henry Hood, regularly listed no occupation.⁶⁰ Even more important than the opportunity to live as a single-income nuclear family, though, was the fact that government salaries at the clerk level were relatively stable. “In a black community plagued by insecurity,” historian Jacqueline Moore reminds us, “a steady job could qualify one for elite status.”⁶¹ Week to week and month to month, the family could count on Henry's decent wages.

According to one 1912 directory, 1,400 of

**Number of Colored Officers, Clerks and other Employees in the
Service of the United States Government**

	No.	Salary
Diplomatic and Consular Service.....	16	\$ 38,410
Departmental Service, Washington, D. C.:		
State.....	26	19,360
Treasury.....	926	588,801
War.....	176	130,380
Navy.....	74	52,610
Post Office.....	187	118,173
Interior.....	593	358,112
Justice.....	43	26,640
Agriculture.....	164	89,816
Commerce and Labor.....	139	94,800
Washington Navy Yard.....	189	94,000
Government Printing Office.....	364	228,454
Interstate Commerce Commission.....	41	22,080
United States Capitol.....	115	73,100
Library of Congress.....	46	24,920
Washington, D. C., City Post Office.....	171	174,600
District of Columbia Government, including unskilled laborers.....	2,413	1,479,000
Miscellaneous.....	194	104,114
Departmental Service at large:		
State (Diplomatic and Consular).....	16	38,410
Treasury.....	1,082	743,373
War.....	2,342	1,075,320
Post Office.....	3,599	2,807,134
Interior.....	31	25,738
Agriculture.....	102	53,217
Commerce and Labor.....	64	42,612
United States Army, Officers.....	11	29,295
United States Army, enlisted men.....	4,416	1,133,766
United States Navy Yards and stations.....	2,146	1,210,070
Miscellaneous, including unclassified.....	775	581,515
Total.....	22,440	\$12,456,760

With the support of the Tuskegee Institute, sociologist Monroe Work edited the yearly edition of the Negro Year Book to catalog the achievements of African Americans. The 1913 edition counted thousands of federal employees in Washington.

the roughly 95,000 black women and men in Washington held steady government jobs. More than three hundred held white-collar clerical positions, which generally paid between \$1,000 and \$1,600 a year.⁶² Government salaries were in many ways stagnant, having been set by mid-nineteenth-century lawmakers and not touched again until 1920.⁶³ Nevertheless, they were still relatively high when compared with wages elsewhere. At the turn of the twentieth century, government workers generally earned nearly twice as much as most Americans, let alone most African Americans and were also extremely visible symbols of black social mobility.⁶⁴

Those who kept track of black government employment often recorded both the number of African American government workers and the total salary they earned. Monroe Work's *Negro Year Book* in 1912 put the number of blacks in departmental service at over 2,800 with a gross salary of \$1,263,985. Those working outside Washington earned another \$7 million.⁶⁵ Similar figures appeared each year in Work's publication, though the numbers were often rough and unreliable, since it was politically advantageous for the Republican Party (and Work's employer, the Tuskegee Institute) to exaggerate its patronage power among African Americans. Still, black Americans saw something more than just politics in the numbers. Steady salaries laid the foundation for the next generation's success. Treasury employee Shelby Davidson moved from Lexington, Kentucky, for a Howard University education and began his career as an assistant messenger earning \$720 a year in 1893. By 1911, he was a well-regarded clerk, lawyer, and inventor of accounting machinery, earning \$1,600 a year.⁶⁶ His salary paid for his home and supported his wife, Leonora, and two children, Eugene and Ophelia.⁶⁷ Thanks to sufficient funds to keep the Davidson children out of the workforce and in school, Ophelia became a teacher at the District's Armstrong High School, and Eugene earned his bachelor's degree from Harvard and

a law degree from Howard. In addition to running a successful real estate business with his father, Eugene served in Franklin Roosevelt's administration and as president of the D.C. branch of the NAACP.⁶⁸

The decent pay earned by civil servants was well known, especially in Washington, since federal salaries were public information. Nonetheless, as historian Cindy Aron notes, federal employees seemed to be constantly short on cash. To some extent this shortage was the result of attempting to live middle-class lives in an expensive city while supporting relatives in Washington and elsewhere.⁶⁹ The fact that so many male employees owed money to the Saks & Company department store indicates that up-to-date clothing and home furnishings were common trappings for up-and-coming urbanites, and they could drain even a decent salary. Financial needs of other sorts came up too, such as Treasury clerk William Haynes's poker debts. Haynes claimed that he could not meet his obligations because his only recourse was to pay "in the same manner as lost and at the ability of the losers" and the department had already forbidden him from playing any more poker. But he would be glad to try his best to erase the debts if the department wanted him to take up the game again.⁷⁰

That creditors so regularly contacted employee supervisors indicates the public nature of civil service employment. A theme running through many debt claims was that the employee was making so much money that not paying was almost a crime. In 1897, Caroline E. Lewis claimed that she had invested money with Richard W. Tompkins, a clerk in the Second Auditor's Division of the Treasury Department. Tompkins had subsequently lost the money, and, although there was no specific contractual requirement that he do so, Lewis believed Tompkins was morally obligated to return it. "In view of the fact that I am a poor woman, having no income at present, and need my money, and that [Tompkins] is receiving a salary of \$1400 a year," she told Sec-

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Men's Mackintoshes.....	\$5.00
Men's Canes, silver trimmed.....	\$75c
Men's regular \$1 Scarfs.....	\$69c
Men's regular 50c Silk Scarfs.....	35c
Men's Pure Linen Handkerchiefs.....	12 1/2c
Men's Linen Initial Handkerchiefs.....	25
Men's Silk Oxford Mufflers.....	50
Men's Full Dress Protectors.....	95c
Men's Street Gloves (Dogskin and Mocha)...	\$1.00
Men's Lined Dogskin Gloves.....	\$1.00
Men's Silk Suspenders.....	50c
Men's Silk Suspenders, with silver buckles...	\$1.50
Men's Slippers.....	\$1.45
Men's Military Brushes, each.....	\$1.00
Men's Full Dress Cases.....	\$1.25
Men's Pocket-book.....	50c
Men's Smoking Sets.....	\$1.75
Fur Caps.....	\$1.50
Mens Fur Gloves.....	\$2.50
Men's Bath Robes.....	\$4.75
Men's Fob Chains, with fancy charms.....	\$1.00
Men's Leather Cigar and Cigarette Cases.....	50
Men's Collar and Cuffs Boxes.....	50
Men's Traveling Cases, Furnished.....	\$2.00
Men's Grain Leather Club Bags..	\$1.50
Men's Solid Gold Cuff Buttons.....	\$1.25
Men's Poker Sets.....	\$2.50
Men's Sweaters.....	\$1.00
Men's Shaving Set.....	\$1.00
Men's Boxing Gloves.....	\$1.50
Choice of Mens Smoking Jackets, worth up to \$7.50 for	3.48
Choice of Men's Smoking Jackets, worth up to \$20 for	9.75

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retary of the Treasury Lyman Gage, "I think he could easily pay me \$10 a month without hardship to himself."⁷¹

Supervisors sometimes defended employees against frivolous debt claims, and it seems employees rarely lost their jobs because of personal indebtedness.⁷² Trying to collect a claim against the perpetually overextended Tompkins, one creditor explained to a chief clerk that "it is a notorious fact among business men of Washington that a large percentage of the employees under Government try to avoid the payment of their honest debts" by pleas of physical injuries or illness. Hampering creditors further was "the fact that the Government has recognized their salaries as a vested right," he continued. "These people are a disgrace to the public service and it is high time that they should be made to pay their debts or in lieu thereof be removed and their places given to honest people."⁷³ For his part, Tompkins claimed to have been something of a victim of his own financial success and Washington's expanding economy. "I am anxious to be free from debt for it is the worse slavery one can endure," he wrote his supervisor in 1902. "Eight years ago I owned my home, was free from debt, and had a small balance in the bank. Had I let real estate speculations alone, I would have acted wisely."⁷⁴

Tompkins was not alone in having both won and lost in Washington's volatile real estate market. Like many, he had been involved in the first bank in the country controlled and operated by African Americans. The Capital Savings Bank was founded in 1888 in Washington's downtown business district on the corner of 6th and F Streets, NW. Its board of directors included numerous federal employees, including Charles R. Douglass, son of Frederick Douglass and a clerk in the Census Bureau,

former congressman and army paymaster John R. Lynch, and customs collector Whitefield McKinlay. Less prominent civil servants like Tompkins had also invested in it.

By 1889, the bank had received \$117,000 in deposits and within five years of opening had taken in over \$300,000 and was paying investors handsomely.⁷⁵ Though the Capital Savings Bank failed, apparently because of mismanagement, its successor, the Industrial Savings Bank founded in 1913, proved far more stable. Nearly felled by financial panic during the Great Depression, the bank was saved in 1934 by former Navy Department clerk Jesse Mitchell and continues to operate in Washington on the corner of 11th and U Streets.⁷⁶ That Washington's economy was volatile did not make it unique in turn-of-the-century America. That it included so many black investors did.

Many government employees' most important investments were their homes. Especially after job security was more assured by the establishment of the civil service system in 1883, government employees began to pour more capital into Washington real estate.⁷⁷ Fewer than 25 percent of African Americans throughout the United States owned their homes, and most federal employees rented rather than owned.⁷⁸ But when Washington began to be a center for black economic opportunity in the decades following the Civil War, it saw a 300 percent rise in the number of blacks who owned at least \$2,000 worth of real estate, and a 551 percent increase in the value of their property. As a result, writes historian Loren Schweninger, "during the postwar years opportunities for economic advancement were probably better in the nation's capital than in any city in the South."⁷⁹

Even black clerks who rented invested their hard-earned wages in making their residences comfortable and their furnishings respectable. For many rising black families, historian Michelle Mitchell has shown, their homes repre-

Upwardly mobile black civil servants were regular shoppers at the upscale Saks & Company department store, which advertised in black-owned newspapers. Washington Bee, December 22, 1900.



Anchored by Howard University to the northeast, the U Street corridor would become the center of black Washington's merchant and entertainment life in the early twentieth century. Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

sented not only their own success but that of “the Race” as a whole. That so many African Americans resided in deteriorating houses, including those in Washington’s alleys, frustrated black middle-class reformers,⁸⁰ who expected the homes of those earning decent wages to provide a better example. Federal clerks had a particular responsibility to let their homes serve as measures of progress for black America.

Mapping the 1912 addresses of some fourteen hundred African American federal workers, clerks and laborers reveals that black civil servants lived in nearly every established neighborhood of the city and in all four quadrants, though the greatest concentration was along the U Street corridor.⁸¹ Most significantly, it shows that black clerks lived near working-class African Americans, either because of residential restriction or out of a desire to live in majority-black enclaves where they could freely attend theaters and eat at restaurants without encoun-

tering racist white people.⁸² Federal employees formed the backbone of the U Street corridor and were greatly responsible for the neighborhood’s economic and social vibrancy in the first half of the twentieth century.

Constance Green’s *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital* remains the most comprehensive study of black Washington. Although it was groundbreaking in 1967, today it is dated and incomplete. For one thing, it relies on poorly documented sources and unverified newspaper rumors, often fanned by Republican agitprop, to tell the story of black federal employment. Green rarely searched deep enough in the evidence to tell something of the lives and experiences of individual African Americans. Famous and extraordinary figures such as the Terrell and Bruce families must stand in for the whole of the black community—which is

a bit like asking the Kennedys to tell the story of Irish Americans in Boston.

The book's title reveals its deepest flaw: there has never been anything secret about D.C.'s black community. Green's purpose was to show that white residents largely ignored their black neighbors. Although there is no question that, especially after 1910, white Washingtonians followed the rest of the country in holding increasingly negative views of blacks, African Americans were never secret dwellers in the District. Black workers were essential to its homes, shops, freight yards, and, of course, its government offices. Moreover, whites were all too aware of their dependence on black men and women. Racism does not breed isolation or secrets—it leads to hostility and exploitation. The term “secret city” ignores the true intention of segregation, which is to render black people subordinate and useful, not invisible. White supremacists were not opposed to seeing black people; they were opposed to seeing black people as equals.

Despite the permanent shadow of white condescension and animosity, Washington at the turn of the twentieth century was an unusually promising city for African Americans. Indeed, in an era of extreme racial violence, it was an extraordinary one. In government offices they could find white-collar employment, work in harmony with or even earn leadership positions over white workers, and use skills acquired through college education.⁸³ Opportunities to work and to prove self-worth were central to the dignity of black federal employees. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling in 1896 and the clear indifference of most white Americans to the indignities of segregation had shown many African Americans that the Constitution could not protect them. But while federal employees knew that their citizenship alone could not protect them from discrimination, they believed that their jobs could. They saw their civil service positions as entitling them to respect and fair treatment as employees, while their earnings—often double

those of blue-collar workers—would ward off the hunger that most black Americans knew so well. The social and economic value of that differential was incalculable.⁸⁴

Opportunities for black federal employees depended on clear racial identification. At a time when most whites were suspicious of black people, administrators who viewed themselves as egalitarians and wanted to help the careers of black workers usually did so with an eye toward race, not in racial blindness. They regularly took the circumstances of black workers into account, as one Treasury Department supervisor did when he remarked on the work of a black employee in the Internal Revenue office. “Were he a white man he would probably be more severely criticized,” wrote the division chief. “Taking all things into consideration, however, I am of the opinion that his appointment at the expiration of his probationary term would not be prejudicial to the interest of the service.”⁸⁵ The service, this and other administrators believed, had an interest in seeing black employees succeed and move up.

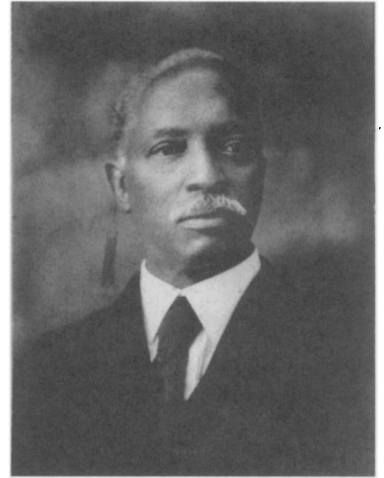
Thus, even before segregationists in the Wilson administration took control of the federal government in 1913, a racial regime was already operating in Washington. It was a regime supported by political connections and the memory of Reconstruction-era promises made and abandoned. It was a stunning contrast to the violence and oppressive segregation in other parts of the country, especially the South. Knowing the hardships faced by African Americans nationwide, black federal employees were happy to be exceptions.



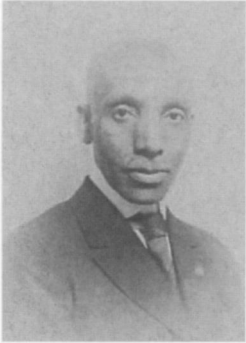
William Cobran, Clerk, General and Office, 1904-1937



Charles W. Edelin, Clerk, Washington City Post Office, 1891-1933



David Lane, Clerk, Pension Bureau, 1890-1929



Grant Greenfield, Clerk, Washington City Post Office, 1903-1928

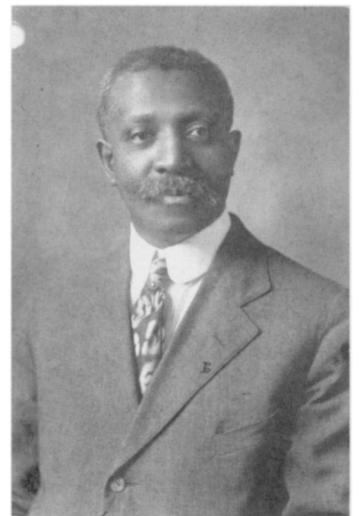
These photographs from the Civilian Personnel Records of the National Archives and Records Administration's National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis depict men and women who worked in Washington, D.C., at the turn of the twentieth century. Though the NAACP charged that photographs were intended to help administrators discriminate against African American applicants and employees, the dignity of the images seems to transcend their bureaucratic and potentially racist origins.



Philip Shippen, Clerk, Washington City Post Office, 1887-1928



Laura Joiner, Copyist, General Land Office, 1890-1933



Philip Shippen, Clerk, Pension Bureau, 1882-1932

 NOTES

The author wishes to acknowledge the help of Lisa Boykin, Nell Irvin Painter, Nicole Sackley, Zachary Schrag, and the staff of the National Personnel Records Center.

1. Langston Hughes, "Our Wonderful Society: Washington," *Opportunity* 5 (August 1927): 226.
2. Kathryn Schneider Smith, "Introduction," in *Washington at Home: An Illustrated History of Neighborhoods in the Nation's Capital*, Kathryn Schneider Smith, ed. (Northridge, Calif.: Windsor Publications, 1988), 11; Lois Horton, "The Days of Jubilee: Black Migration during the Civil War and Reconstruction," in *Washington Odyssey: A Multicultural History of the Nation's Capital*, Francine C. Cary, ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1996), 65.
3. Sharon Harley, "For the Good of Family and Race: Gender, Work, and Domestic Roles in the Black Community, 1880–1930," *Signs* 15 (Winter 1990): 339.
4. Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: A History of the Capital, 1800–1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 1:80; Alan Lessoff, *the Nation and Its City: Politics, "Corruption," and Progress in Washington, D.C., 1861–1902* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 19.
5. Katherine Masur, "Reconstructing the Nation's Capital: The Politics of Race and Citizenship in the District of Columbia, 1862–1878" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2001) 338–89; Lessoff, *Nation and Its City*, 101–29.
6. Smith, "Introduction," 13.
7. Sharon Harley, "Black Women in a Southern City: Washington, D.C., 1890–1920," in *Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South*, Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila L. Skemp, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), 63.
8. For Blanche K. Bruce's stunning career and family history, see Lawrence Otis Graham, *The Senator and the Socialite: The True Story of America's First Black Dynasty* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: the Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 38; Green, *Washington*, 101–31; Lorenzo Johnston and Myra Callis Greene, *The Employment of Negroes in the District of Columbia* (Washington: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1931), 59.
9. Belle C. La Follette, "Colored Folk of Washington," *La Follette's Magazine*, August 5, 1911, 10–11; Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's Capital, 1880–1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 22, 87.
10. Green, *Washington*, 2:116; Henry S. Robinson, "The M Street High School, 1891–1916," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 51 (1988): 119; Moore, *Leading the Race*, 118; Masur, "Reconstructing," 366.
11. The club's name was short for Music-Social-Literary. Alfred A. Moss, *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 268–69; Moore, *Leading the Race*, 16; "Race Discrimination: Reported at Theatre and Church," *Washington Bee*, March 29, 1913, 1; Gatewood, *Aristocrats*, 48.
12. Rayford Logan's important history of African American life at the turn of the twentieth century originally carried the subtitle "The Nadir, 1877–1901." Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro, from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier, 1969); Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Negro Society in Washington," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 14, 1901, 9.
13. Lessoff, *Nation and Its City*, 40; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 372; Horton, "Days of Jubilee," 67, 72.
14. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 279.
15. Laurence J. W. Hayes, "The Negro Feder-

al Government Worker: A Study of His Classification Status in the District of Columbia, 1883–1938” (M.A. thesis, Howard University, 1941), 123, 42n16.

16. Velma Davis quoted in Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, “For a Real Better Life’: Voices of African American Women Migrants, 1900–1930,” in *Washington Odyssey*, 99.

17. Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 126; “Color Line Drawn; Mr. Heflin Wants ‘Jim Crow’ Law on Cars Here,” *Washington Post*, February 23, 1908, 6; Chapin Brinsmade to Archibald Grimke, July 8, 1914, Folder 500, Box 39-25, Archibald Grimke Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Collection, Howard University, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter MSRC).

18. Green, *Washington*, 2:217–18; Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), especially chapters 4 and 5; Jane E. Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 79; Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 98–99.

19. Solomon Johnson to William Windom, May 26, 1881; memo to Treasury Department, date unknown, both in Personnel Folders of Notable Treasury Employees, 1822–1940, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, National Archives at College Park (hereafter RG 56).

20. Hayes, “Negro Federal Government Worker,” 25.

21. Monroe Work’s *Negro Year Book* lists the number of departmental workers as 2,800, while *Sherman’s Directory and Ready Reference of the Colored Population in the District of Columbia* for the same year lists 1,800 employees. I have chosen the lower number because the *Sherman’s* gives names, while Work may have overestimated his numbers. Monroe N. Work, *Negro Year Book, an Annual En-*

cyclopedia of the Negro, 1912 (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Negro Year Book Publishing, 1912), 71–72; *Sherman’s Directory and Ready Reference of the Colored Population in the District of Columbia*, (Washington: Sherman Directory, 1913), 388–417.

22. Clark-Lewis, “For a Real Better Life,” 100.

23. Jesse J. Porter to Bureau of Engraving and Printing Director, April 2, 1907, Employee Folder No. GU76203, National Archives and Records Administration, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Mo. (Hereafter NPRC). Personnel files for government employees in this period were generally made up of two- or three-sentence letters stating changes in status or pay, charts tracking employment history, and civil service applications. In order to piece together a narrative, I have usually been forced to use many of these very short letters, taking small pieces of information from each, so I have cited the folder rather than individual documents.

24. Jürgen Kocka, *White Collar Workers in America 1890–1940: A Social-Political story in International Perspective* (London: Sage, 1980), 176.

25. Director of the Census Memorandum, June 29, 1909, Employee Folder No. BU014974, NPRC; Coulter to Chief Clerk, April 24, 1913, Employee Folder No. BU014974, NPRC.

26. Division of Appointments Chief to Robert A. Pelham, February 1, 1929, Employee Folder No. n/a, NPRC.

27. Pelham, Personal Information Sheet, Department of Commerce and Labor, June 30, 1904, Employee File No. n/a, NPRC; For Pelham and the American Negro Academy, see Moss, *American Negro Academy*, 222–24.

28. “Freshman Won the Prize: Colored Student Aably Opposed Reduction of Representation,” *Washington Post*, April 14, 1905, 4; “Outlines Ideal Life: President Shows Graduates the Paths to Follow,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 1906, 2; Kelly Miller to Whitfield McKinlay, January 28, 1908, box 2, reel 1, Carter G. Woodson Collection of Negro Papers and Related Documents, Library of Congress.

29. Ocea Taylor to Commerce and Labor Secretary, February 5, 1908, Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC.

30. "Census Puzzle Here: Washington Presents Problem on Question of Residence," *Washington Post*, April 14, 1910, 2; W. S. Willoughby to Secretary of Commerce and Labor, April 12, 1910, Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC; Joseph A. Hill to Voler V. Viles, June 21, 1910, Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC; Hill to Memorandum, December 20, 1911, Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC.

31. Taylor to Hill, n.d., Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC.

32. Taylor's name showed up regularly in mainstream Washington newspapers. Dr. Robert W. Brown to Walter Lowrie Fisher, March 23, 1911, Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC; Calvin Chase to E. Dana Durand, October 23, 1911, Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC; Durand to Chase, n.d., Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC; E. Durand to Secretary of Commerce and Labor, March 19, 1912, Employee Folder No. BU016338, NPRC.

33. Lyman Gage to Thomas H. R. Clarke, February 9, 1901, Employee Folder No. GU75746; Clarke to Appointment Division, January 14, 1901, Employee Questionnaire, Employee Folder No. GU75746; Information on marriage comes from deposition by Lucille P. Clarke included in letter from her lawyer to the Treasury Department: Hosea B. Moulton to Lyman Gage, March 19, 1901, Employee Folder No. GU75746, NPRC.

34. Green, *Washington*, 2:130.

35. Harley, "Black Women in a Southern City," 59.

36. "Pay of the Clerks: Commission at Work to Ascertain the Average Salary; Cost of Living Today," *Washington Star*, September 21, 1911, 4.

37. Robert E. Coleman to Hon. Charles Neill, December 20, 1910 (received); G. W. W. Hangar to George C. Havenner, January 6, 1911, both in folder 21, box 21, Correspondence Regarding Job Applications, 1905–1919, Records of the Department of Commerce and Labor, Record Group 257, National Archives at College Park.

38. Ernest J. Dillon to F. A. Vanderlip, July 6, 1898, folder 208, box 1, Correspondence of the Appointments Division, 1874–1912, RG 56.

39. Division of Appointments Chief to John Z. Crook, July 15, 1904, folder 208, box 1, Records of the Department of the Treasury, Division of Appointments; Fred S. Hazard to Ellis H. Roberts, September 14, 1905, folder 208, box 2, Correspondence of the Appointments Division, 1874–1912; Lewis H. Blair to Secretary of the Treasury, October 25, 1910, folder 207, box 6, Correspondence of the Division of Appointments; all in RG 56.

40. Darwin D. Moore to S. N. D. North, July 31, 1907, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC.

41. Moore to W. R. Merriam, March 8, 1899, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC. 2. F. Mondell to Merriam, March 16, 1899, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC; Francis E. Warren to Merriam, March 11, 1899, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC.

43. William C. Hunt to Merriam, March 24, 1900, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC; Census Director to Warren, May 16, 1903, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC.

44. Warren to William S. Rossiter, February 11, 1907, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC; North to Warren, February 21, 1907, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC.

45. North to Warren, March 8, 1907, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC.

46. When Moore died suddenly early one morning in July 1921, his supervisor eulogized him as having been "a faithful employee of the Population Division"; William C. Hunt to Appointment Clerk, March 12, 1907, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC; Moore to North, October 19, 1907, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC; Edward Kirch to Bureau of the Census Chief Clerk, July 30, 1921, Employee Folder No. BU015522, NPRC.

47. "Civil Service," *The Crisis*, May 1911, 21.

48. Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

49. Dunbar, "Negro Society in Washington," 9.

50. Hughes, "Our Wonderful Society," 226–27.

51. Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923; repr., New York:

W. W. Norton, 1988), 41; Ronald M. Johnson, "Those Who Stayed: Washington Black Writers in the 1920s," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 50 (1980): 494.

52. The "Secret City" was Pulitzer-Prize-winning historian Constance Green's term for black Washington.

53. "One Victim of Race Riot," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1910, 11.

54. Belle C. La Follette, "The Color Line," *La Follette's Magazine*, August 23, 1913, 3.

55. Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Archibald Grimké: Portrait of a Black Independent* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 80.

56. Harley, "Black Women in a Southern City," 74.

57. Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 114–16, 121.

58. Robert C. Kenzer, *Enterprising Southerners: Black Economic Success in North Carolina, 1865–1915* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 9–34; Loren Schwenger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790–1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 203–4.

59. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 112.

60. In 1920, Emma Hood listed an occupation, laundress, for the first time, indicating the hardship of her husband's dismissal from government work in 1914. Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, District of Columbia, ED 5A; Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, ED 215; Merritt O. Chance to Civil Service Commission, March 20, 1915, Employee Folder No. BU 023491, NPRC.

61. Moore, *Leading the Race*, 132–33.

62. *Sherman's Directory*, 388–417.

63. Public Personnel Association. Committee on Position-Classification and Pay Plans in the Public Service and Ismar Baruch, *Position-Classification in the Public Service* (Chicago: Civil Service Assembly of the United States and Canada, 1941), 6, 14–15.

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65. Work, *Negro Year Book, 1912*, 71–72.

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68. Lewis Newton Walker, Jr., "The Struggles and Attempts to Establish Branch Autonomy and Hegemony: A History of the District of Columbia Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1912–1942" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1979), 174–75.

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70. William H. Haynes to Internal Revenue Bureau Chief Clerk, August 15, 1903, Employee Folder No. GU75945, NPRC.

71. Caroline Lewis to Lyman Gage, July 26, 1897, Employee Folder No. GU76338, NPRC; Caroline Lewis to Lyman Gage, February 14, 1898, Employee Folder No. GU76338, NPRC.

72. James L. Wilmeth to Saks and Company, June 6, 1913, Employee Folder No. GU076265, NPRC.

73. Charles Shepard to Wallace H. Hills, May 24, 1901, Employee Folder No. GU76338, NPRC.

74. Richard W. Tompkins to E. P. Seeds, November 6, 1902, Employee Folder No. GU76338, NPRC.

75. Schwenger, *Black Property*, 222; Charles R. Douglass and others to Theodore Roosevelt,

- June 17, 1903, Employee Folder No. GU76338, NPRC; M. Sammye Miller, "An Early Venture in Black Capitalism: The Capital Savings Bank in the District of Columbia, 1888–1902," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 50 (1980): 362–63; "The Capital Savings Bank," *Washington Bee*, January 24, 1903, 1; Moore, *Leading the Race*, 138–39..
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77. Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen*, 23.
78. Smith, "Introduction," 12; Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 150.
79. Schweninger, *Black Property*, 203–4.
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81. More specifically, the concentration was north of O Street, south of W Street, and bounded on the east and west by 16th Street and New Jersey Avenue, respectively.
82. Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, Inc., 1940), 113–19; Johnson, "LeDroit Park," *Washington at Home*, 139–47.
83. Green, *Washington*, 2:109.
84. Kocka, *White Collar Workers*, 176.
85. A. H. Holt to Walter Evans, March 27, 1884, Employee Folder No. GU75945, NPRC.