

INTRODUCTION

DURING THE PERIOD covered by this volume, from January 1909 to March 1911, Booker T. Washington remained the most powerful figure in black America. The inauguration of William Howard Taft as President of the United States early in 1909, however, somewhat weakened Washington's political alliance, and later in the same year the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People brought together the black opponents of Washington's racial leadership and northern white liberals who had earlier supported him. Washington's credibility as a racial peacemaker also suffered as race riots, lynchings, and discriminatory laws punctuated the troubled race relations of the segregation era.

Though his public utterances remained unfailingly optimistic, Washington spent much of his energies on rear-guard action against change. He declined Oswald Garrison Villard's invitation to the conference which formed the NAACP, but received assurances that the white liberals would prevent the efforts of Du Bois, Trotter, and other blacks to use the NAACP to attack him. Washington's friend Robert R. Moton undertook behind the scenes to reconcile the two black factions, but these efforts came to naught because of a public attack on Washington by Du Bois and other blacks using stationery of the National Negro Committee, the original name of the NAACP. Washington showed his irreconcilability by opposing appointment of Du Bois to the faculty of Howard University, hounding Professor William Pickens of Talladega College for signing the National Negro Committee appeal, and encouraging newspapers to publish scandalous articles on white officers of the