

*The BOOKER T. WASHINGTON Papers*

To N. Clark Smith

[Tuskegee, Ala.] June Fifth, 1913

Dear Capt. Smith: Let me make one or two suggestions regarding the band, and I do so for very definite reasons.

First, I advise and urge that you leave out the singing on the part of the students. The singing is disappointing and not good; it is very rare that anybody can sing and play an instrument. The singing of the students does not represent the best that we can do. It places us at a disadvantage. Please leave that out. Please leave out the greater part of the singing on the part of the students.

Second, you will note by the enclosed article from the Advertiser that the critic who heard the band in Montgomery brought out just what I tell you, and that is, the band is at its best when playing Negro airs. I hope you will stick to that very largely.

I do not think it does you or the institution any good to be advertised as the greatest colored band master. I think you are, and others think so, but it is a great deal better to let your work prove that you are the greatest than for you to say so in your printed advertisements. I think it best in the future to leave that off. It is better for the people to be disappointed by getting more than they expected. The more modest we make the advertisements the better.

I have not heard from you or any one since I wrote you regarding Malden, West Virginia. Please let me know whether you can go there on the 30th or 31st. It is only five miles from Charleston and Mr. Stevenson will know how to get there and back. I do not want to disappoint the Malden people.

I might add, that going to extremes in the matter of advertisement is not in keeping with the policy and character of the school. Modesty and conservatism win in the long run.

One other thing: the artificial song that is attempted to be created in connection with the playing of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" did not appear to me to add a thing to the playing but rather detracted. It did not come in naturally but rather grated upon the ear. Yours very truly,

Booker T. Washington

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