

INTRODUCTION

WITH THIS VOLUME the editors complete a labor of fifteen years to trace Booker T. Washington's passage through life. Washington's end sharply contrasted with his humble beginning on the dirt floor of a backwoods Virginia slave cabin. When he died in 1915, he received a hero's funeral, with obituary editorials from the press of the whole nation and letters of condolence from the high and mighty. They proclaimed him the black leader best attuned to the needs and demands of his age. Unfortunately for his historical reputation, however, the age to which he was so finely attuned, the decades of his power over the black community, was a time of proscription, hardship, and discouragement for black people. Furthermore, even while he lived, the changing times were rendering his outlook and his methods obsolete. The Wilson administration's control of national politics not only ended the political influence of the Tuskegee Machine but began policies of racial extremism that caused the rapid growth of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its civil rights approach. The Great Migration that began in 1915, the year of Washington's death, swelled the black population of the cities and the North, where Washington's hold had always been tenuous.

Washington made what adjustments he could to the new age that was dawning. The new urban-industrial society, with its emphasis on technology and large-scale organization, rendered the artisan skills taught at Tuskegee somewhat anachronistic, though it should not be forgotten that the majority of blacks continued for decades to remain in the South and on the land. The National Negro Business League's promotion of small-scale black entrepreneurship, on the other hand, benefited from a trend toward racial solidarity and segregated busi-