

Abstract

Title of Thesis: Roscoe Conkling Bruce and the District
of Columbia's Public Schools, 1906 to
1921

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Roscoe Conkling Bruce presided over the District of Columbia's black public schools from 1906 to 1921. His administration has provided a microcosm of the African-American struggle against segregation. Bruce's decisions and actions produced a clamor from a divided black community. The debate focused upon the direction of education for African-Americans yet failed to produce a consensus. The divided public both hindered and scarred Bruce's administration.

Bruce owed his position to the influence of Booker T. Washington. Washington desired to extend his hegemony over blacks and education and Bruce as head of the black public schools would solidify the Tuskegee's influence in the District. Bruce had worked with Washington at Tuskegee and echoed the Wizard's views on industrial education. However, the support of Washington was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, his political

machine provided resources and support not available to most blacks; on the other hand, this support pigeonholed Bruce into a reliance upon Washington since the opposition to Washington extended to encompass Bruce. The assistant superintendent lacked the strength to stand alone against his detractors.

The opposition, led by W. Calvin Chase, editor of the Washington Bee, sniped and fought with Bruce throughout his tenure with the District's schools. Curriculum, hiring and firing, as well as Bruce's personal life were used adroitly by Chase to help topple Bruce. Nevertheless, the unwavering support of Washington and a white-dominated school board allowed Bruce to continue as assistant superintendent despite the strident attacks of Chase and others.

The death of Washington in 1915 left the Tuskegee machine in the District of Columbia in disarray. In addition, the long struggle to protect Bruce had wearied the resolve of the school board to continue the defense. The above reasons, combined with the follies of an obscure Dutch anthropologist, brought about the fall of Bruce.

Professor Herman M. Bernolet Moens, a Dutch ethnologist, had received permission to photograph the District's black schoolchildren. These photographs were to be used in the comparison of the races. The actual reason for Moens' research outraged the citizens of the

District and a two year investigation culminated in the resignation of Bruce.

Roscoe Conkling Bruce and the District of Columbia's
Public Schools, 1906 to 1921

by

Douglas Eugene Pielmeier

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DEDICATION

to Sister Generosa
and the
School Sisters of Notre Dame

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Chapter 1: The Road to the District

Roscoe Conkling Bruce, like his mentor Booker T. Washington, walked the fine line between the races during segregation. From 1906 to 1921, Bruce presided over the District of Columbia's black public schools. During this period his actions and policies created vociferous debate and opposition among an influential segment of the black community. Discord marked Bruce's tenure with the schools and a divided black community argued and fought over the direction of education as well as the goals to be achieved through it.

As Assistant Superintendent for the District of Columbia's black schools, Bruce wielded enormous power, determining curriculum and hiring. African-Americans focused heavily on education as a way to better their position within the strictures of a white-dominated society. Since segregation limited career choice, African-Americans flocked to education as a field where advancement was possible. A teaching position conferred instant status, and the black community zealously pursued this plum. Although numerous crises and scandals marred Bruce's tenure in the District, it provides a microcosm of African-American culture under Jim Crow and the barriers blacks had to face in the pursuit of the American dream.

Bruce's father, Blanche K. Bruce, successfully made the transition from slavery to freedom, bestowing upon his son all the benefits of a well-born upbringing. Blanche K. Bruce was the son of a slave and a white man. He had a special relationship with his master, who may have been his father. Their relationship mitigated the hardships of slavery, Bruce was educated by a tutor next to the master's white children. Though born in slavery, Bruce had become a man of considerable means by the mid-1870s. His manners and tastes reflected those of a polished Victorian gentleman.¹ Active in Reconstruction Republican politics, he reached the pinnacle of black society when he was elected to represent Mississippi as a United States Senator in 1874.

The senator married the former Josephine Beall Willson in June, 1870. She was the daughter of a prominent black dentist from Cleveland, Ohio. The Willson family held a respected place in Cleveland society and resembled closely upper class whites of the city. Their life style, education, income, and even

¹Willard B. Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), 4-5.

color placed them nearer whites than most blacks.² The union of Josephine and Blanche solidified their position in black society and attracted a good deal of publicity throughout the country. Josephine's arrival in Washington was much anticipated; the press worried over her acceptance by the Washington political community and took care to mention her beauty and accomplishments. Fear that she would be shunned by whites and treated as a social outcast in official circles because of her race proved largely unfounded. Mrs. Bruce drew accolades for her social skills and aplomb. These skills were much less in demand after Bruce left the Senate.

The Bruces remained in Washington at their home on R Street, N.W., and the elder Bruce secured a succession of Republican patronage jobs; he also stumped effectively for Republican candidates across the country. Booker T. Washington, head of Tuskegee Institute, lobbied successfully President-elect William McKinley on behalf of Blanche K. Bruce. Bruce received the office Register of the Treasury, the highest post in government service traditionally reserved for African-

²Ibid.

Americans.³ The Tuskegeean obliged the Bruces several times during his lifetime with a means to a living.

The Bruces maintained a plantation of several thousand acres in Mississippi, yet the District of Columbia continued to be their primary home. The Bruces' only child, Roscoe Conkling, was born on April 21, 1879 in the District. He was named for Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York, who accompanied Bruce to be sworn in after the senior senator from Mississippi refused to do so.⁴

The Bruces raised Roscoe befitting their social status in the genteel fashion of the times. The black aristocracy separated themselves from the majority of African-Americans in order to better their individual chances for integration into white society. Black aristocrats established specific criteria that had to be

³Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington, The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 258.

⁴Senator Bruce remembered his swearing in: "Mr. Alcorn made no motion to escort me but was buried behind a newspaper and I concluded I would go it alone....I had got about halfway up the aisle when a tall gentleman stepped up to me and said: 'Excuse me, Mr. Bruce, I did not until this moment see that you were without escort. Permit me. My name is Conkling,' and he linked his arm in mine and we marched up to the desk together." Quoted in Washington Star, January 9, 1971; clippings file, Martin Luther King Library, Washingtoniana Room, Washington, D.C.

met to be included in their circle. Genealogy was the quintessential standard for admittance followed closely by education, character, refinement, and place of residence. Purity of speech, appearance, and occupation were employed as litmus tests to screen out unwanted intruders. They eschewed publicity and displays of emotion; instead, they embraced privacy and self-restraint.

Even with their handicaps, both external and self-imposed, the black aristocrats devoted themselves to the furtherance of the race. They worked at uplifting the race through education as well as advancing their personal desire for integration. In short, a hierarchy of class divided African-Americans and imported different paths of advancement dependent upon class.⁵

Within the cloistered and contradictory world of upper-class blacks, Roscoe adopted the ways and manners of both his family and social class. He benefitted from his family's social and economic standing, gaining entrance to top schools. He graduated from the premier black high school in the country, the M Street School in

⁵Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color, 149-209; Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., "The Genteel Tradition: Black, Beautiful, and Breaking Down," Reviews in American History, vol. 19, no. 3 (September 1991), 379-384.

the District of Columbia. After M Street, he left the District for New England to attend the Phillips Academy.

A studious child, Bruce wrote letters from Phillips Exeter to his parents emphasizing his attention to scholarship. The son spoke of the "nocturnal grind" and said "[t]here is nothing new up here in the woods Grind, grind, grind is still the order of the day.⁶ He kept a strict accounting of the funds sent by his parents and even offered to find a job to offset tuition and personal expenses.

Nevertheless, like most children away from home, Bruce complained of homesickness,

There are moments when I feel like a "lily baby" lost in an unfriendly world far from home. I feel that way tonight. I wish that for a moment I could be with you and Mother at home. But my jail-sentence doesn't expire for ten weeks--ten, long, dreary weeks.⁷

His extracurricular activities included debate and the school newspaper. Following graduation he matriculated at Harvard in 1898.

⁶Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Blanche K. Bruce, undated [1897] (10-1, 1), April 18, 1897 (10-1, 2), Roscoe Conkling Bruce Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; hereinafter noted as RCB Papers, with container and folder number in parentheses.

⁷Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Blanche K. Bruce, April 18, 1897 (10-1, 2), RCB Papers.

The elective system at Harvard allowed Bruce wide latitude in pursuing a course of study, yet he often complained of the heavy course load.⁸ The District of Columbia's school board later commented:

Interested chiefly in the humanities, Bruce studied at Harvard economics, philosophy (including ethics and psychology), French, German, English, history, and during his final year educational theory, practice, and the history of education. He gave no attention to mathematics, to science, or the classics.⁹

His skill as an orator won praise and many of his speeches were published. He was president of the Sophomore Debating Club and for two terms president of the University Debating Club. He held a Phi Beta Kappa key and graduated magna cum laude in 1902.

While at Phillips and Harvard, Bruce courted Clara Burrill, who had attended the M Street School with Bruce and then entered Radcliffe. "She was, according to one observer, 'quite as cultured as [Bruce],'"¹⁰ and a

⁸See letters in RCB Papers (10-1, 5-24).

⁹"Results of an Investigation, authorized by the Board of Education, into the Educational and Administrative Efficiency of Roscoe Conkling Bruce, Assistant Superintendent (1907-1919) of the Colored Schools of the District of Columbia," October 8, 1919 (Sumner School Archives, Washington, D.C.), 7; hereinafter noted as the Majority Report.

¹⁰Gatewood, 144.

fine match for the aristocratic Bruces. When a rival suitor assailed Bruce's sweetheart with lies and half-truths, attempting to disrupt the romance, Bruce wrote Miss Burrill, ". . . I think he realizes a man of my type would hardly hesitate to give a man of his type a sound thrashing."¹¹ The romance endured and they were married on June 3, 1903. The Bruces had three children: Clara Josephine, Roscoe Conkling, Jr., and Burrill Kelso.

Bruce's switch to education can be attributed to the influence of Booker T. Washington.¹² His mother, Josephine, had accepted the position of Lady Principal at Tuskegee in the fall of 1899. The Bruces maintained cordial personal relations with Booker T. Washington, yet never embraced his educational philosophy. The Bruces believed firmly in eventual integration and black

¹¹Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Clara Burrill Bruce, November 26, 1902 (10-1, 24), RCB Papers.

¹²Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, June 22, 1901 (13), Booker T. Washington Papers (Special Collections, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland); photocopies of manuscripts from the Library of Congress' collection and held at the University of Maryland, College Park are cited with the container number in parentheses and hereinafter noted as the BTW[MD] Papers.

equality with whites, especially that of upper-class blacks.¹³

The death of her husband in 1898 had placed Josephine in financial straits; income from her position as Lady Principal at Tuskegee allowed R.C. Bruce to finish his studies at Harvard, and the family to maintain its reputation and standing among the black elite. While visiting his mother at Tuskegee during the summer previous to his senior year at Harvard, Bruce favorably impressed Booker T. Washington and secured a position at Tuskegee as head of the Academic Department. Washington demoted James Dickens McCall to open the position for Bruce.¹⁴ Bruce began the preparation for work at Tuskegee and Washington while still attending Harvard. He traveled to Hampton Institute "with a view of seeing the work there;"¹⁵ indeed, Bruce coaxed

¹³Gatewood, 141.

¹⁴Booker T. Washington to James Dickens McCall, January 21, 1902; Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds. The Booker T. Washington Papers (14 vols., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972-1988), vol. 6, 376; hereinafter noted as the BTW Papers.

¹⁵Booker T. Washington to Hollis Burke Frissell, February 1, 1902, BTW Papers, vol. 6, 387.

several other black Harvard graduates to Alabama, upgrading the Tuskegee faculty in the process.¹⁶

Washington's tutelage shaped and solidified Bruce's views on education. He echoed Washington's views on industrial and vocational training for blacks; however, Bruce never completely accepted the Tuskegee way. Bruce's black upper class upbringing and his experiences in the white world caused him to think differently than Washington, yet he vigorously implemented the Wizard's policies nonetheless. Vocational training would provide the skills necessary for blacks to develop economic independence, while working within the boundaries of segregation. Both men maintained that raising the economic level of African-Americans was crucial for bettering their standing in society. The means to achieve this independence, according to Bruce, was vocational education. The place to implement this program was at the secondary and college levels.

Bruce spent four years at Tuskegee with Washington, heading and reorganizing the Academic Department. The actual power of Bruce was limited by Washington, who demanded that Tuskegee's faculty and students comply with his vision for the school. In addition to heading

¹⁶Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, February 22, 1902, BTW Papers, vol. 6, 408-410.

the Academic Department, Bruce traveled throughout the south visiting schools, both public and private, looking to improve upon and expand the Tuskegee system.

Bruce studied the educational system and compared it to the social condition of the African-American. He reported to Washington that "in addition to the increasingly severe competition of the whites, and to the race prejudice, the Negro contractor lacks, in the first place, clear technical insight, and, in the second place cash capital."¹⁷ In this same letter, Bruce found that the "exceptional Negro is doing well....He is living in a comfortable house, his home life is pure and good, his children are being educated. The pity of it all is the fact that the classes are so few, and the masses so many."¹⁸ The Tuskegee mission was to raise the economic level of blacks, in the process instilling race pride and proper morals. Washington emphasized industrial training because he felt it best suited the masses; moreover, industrial training was palatable to both southern whites and northern philanthropists upon whom Washington depended for support, political and financial. During Bruce's tenure at Tuskegee,

¹⁷Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, April 18, 1903 (15), BTW[MD] Papers.

¹⁸Ibid.

Washington shifted resources away from academics to improve the industrial aspect of the curriculum.

A letter from Bruce to the faculty quoted Washington in implementing the shift to vocational education, "Tuskegee should aim, he says, to be 'a first class industrial school rather than a second class academic'.... Every Academic teacher is appreciably to diminish the amount of time required of his students for the preparation of his subjects. This arrangement goes into effect at once."¹⁹ Academic work suffered through the advancement of industrial courses. Members of the Academic Department expressed dismay and dissatisfaction with this lessened devotion to academics.

One member of the faculty, John W. Hubert, blustered that the present standards were already at the minimum and that "[he] cannot see how our students are to measure up intellectually with students from hundreds of other reputable institutions....It is not to the best interests of Tuskegee Institute to put her stamp upon superficiality in any department of the work she is

¹⁹Roscoe Conkling Bruce to the Academic Faculty of Tuskegee Institute (emphasis in original), January 10, 1905 (19), BTW[MD] Papers.

doing."²⁰ Leslie P. Hill, one of the Harvard graduates recruited by Bruce, begged "permission to suggest that this means a positive crippling of the work in the our department....and I much fear that the result of our endeavor which according to your notice is already suspected of being 'second class' will be more nearly so in reality."²¹ Even though members of the Academic Department protested, the wishes of Washington were law; the changes were made.

The process employed at Tuskegee, called "correlating" or "dovetailing," blurred the division between vocational and standard courses and was the essence of Washington's educational philosophy. Industrial and academic courses would fit together like a dovetail joint in carpentry. Academic courses were used to promote industrial education; practical training replaced abstract principles in academic classes. For example, a poem submitted in English class would extol the virtues of labor or in mathematics students would

²⁰John W. Hubert to Roscoe Conkling Bruce, January 12, 1905 (19), BTW[MD] Papers.

²¹Leslie P. Hill to Roscoe Conkling Bruce, January 14, 1905 (19), BTW[MD] Papers.

solve carpentry problems.²² However, "dovetailing" increased longstanding tension between the industrial and academic faculty at Tuskegee. Tension had existed between the industrial and academic faculty almost from Tuskegee's inception. The college-educated academic faculty felt a sense of superiority to the industrial faculty, most of whom had little formal learning. The two sides squabbled continually over the allocation of resources and the division of the students' time.

Washington had selected Bruce with the intention that Bruce would alleviate faculty tension and improve the standards of the academic department. Washington wanted to have college graduates on the faculty but refused to alter the industrial character of Tuskegee. The industrial component endured as the axis upon which the school turned. The majority of students remained enrolled in the lower classes providing labor in lieu of tuition and most of them never graduated. It was at Washington's insistence that Tuskegee lingered as a secondary school geared more towards the southern farmer than the urban northern black.²³

²²Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington, The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 149-151.

²³Ibid., 144-150.

Bruce had early success in maintaining harmony among the faculty, and he implemented "dovetailing" with vigor. Yet over time, Bruce became convinced that "dovetailing" eroded the academic component of the school.²⁴ Bruce lamented the encroachment upon academic studies by the industrial department in a letter to Washington in April, 1906. In strong language, Bruce criticized the decreased emphasis on academics. The time allotted for academics was "wholly inadequate for the work laid down for the grades." The continued emphasis on the industries was due to the school's increasing demand for student labor, and Bruce believed that the Registrar assigned "green students to trades and industries chiefly in accordance with the demands of labor...and that the education of the pupil [was] largely sacrificed to the demands of productive labor."²⁵

Washington moved quickly to assuage Bruce and stated that "many of the criticisms and suggestions...are in the proper direction, and need immediate and radical attention." The Wizard spoke of the "duty of any institution to look at the race for

²⁴Gatewood, 144.

²⁵Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, April 12, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

whom it is working...and then bend its energies to the changing of the conditions that surround that particular race in the environment in which it happens to find itself."²⁶ Washington believed that the Tuskegee way was correct, divided between the industrial and academic. Available resources and the current environment demanded, in Washington's opinion, a continuation of emphasis upon industrial studies. In answering Bruce's criticisms Washington maneuvered deftly. The Tuskegeean accepted Bruce's charges but did not promise specific remedies. The industrial nature of the school remained in place until after Washington's death.

Bruce's experiences at Tuskegee caused him to rethink his adherence to Washington's dogma. Bruce had outlined his views in Service by the Educated Negro, a commencement address at his alma mater, M Street School in the District of Columbia:

The educated teacher...aims at raising somewhat the level of life in the community. The program of study is an instrument for that end. A school unresponsive to the needs of actual life is a school preparing for Utopia.²⁷

²⁶Booker T. Washington to Roscoe Conkling Bruce, April 14, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

²⁷Roscoe Conkling Bruce, Service by the Educated Negro: Address of Roscoe Conkling Bruce of Tuskegee (continued...)

Despite the melding of views, Bruce trumpeted a corollary to the Washington doctrine. Washington was ambiguous on higher education for blacks and often jibed at the accoutrements of the intellectuals; however, he declared,

I would say to the black boy what I would say to the white boy, Get all the mental development that your time and pocketbook will allow of, --the more, the better...for we need professional men and women...The professional class will be helped in so far as the rank and file have an industrial foundation, so that they can pay for professional service.²⁸

This educational division according to class and merit was often lost in the world's stereotype of Washington. Bruce believed industrial education was acceptable for lower-class black masses yet inappropriate for elite blacks. A classical preparatory education better suited the aspirations and needs of upper-class blacks. Notwithstanding the constant barrier of segregation, elite blacks still looked toward integration and believed a classical education prepared them best for assimilation.²⁹ Bruce found benefits both from the

²⁷(...continued)
Institute at the Commencement Exercises of the M Street High School, Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, Washington, D.C., June 16, 1903 (Tuskegee, Alabama, 1903), 7.

²⁸Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 176.

²⁹Gatewood, 146.

policies of Washington and the continuation of a college preparatory curriculum. The ambitious choice, maintaining two programs with separate criteria, proved difficult for Bruce to manage at Tuskegee.

In a speech in Birmingham in 1905, Bruce expounded on the need for industrial education.

Competition of white labor...is felt with increased severity by the negro race. This competition exhibits its most conspicuous effects in cities....All this hints darkly of what may come in the near future....³⁰

African-Americans were limited in occupation because of segregation; furthermore, competition with whites often placed blacks in the menial jobs. The lower standard of living contributed to the higher crime and death rates of blacks in the cities. Education, training, and improved moral development were the answers to combat the poverty and criminality of certain elements of the black community.

The Washington Bee took umbrage at this "[i]ndictment against the Negro,"³¹ and in an editorial lambasted Bruce as an apologist calling him "the offspring of a generation that always regarded the white race as possessing superior intellect and

³⁰The Washington Bee, January 28, 1905; hereinafter noted as the Bee.

³¹Ibid.

manhood."³² The newspaper believed Bruce wanted blacks to remain in the South and that Bruce had lumped all northern blacks together as criminals. Bruce's message was not so narrow; rather, blacks, especially the urban masses, needed knowledge and training to carve a niche for themselves in the job market.

In August, 1905, Bruce informed Washington of his desire to leave Tuskegee for a possible position with the District of Columbia's schools. He cited as reasons for the move:

1. The happiness of my family-- Tuskegee is isolated and travel is costly.
2. My health cannot long sustain the amount of indoor work and the hours entailed by my present position. The other position incurs only nine months' work, and night work is optional.
3. With better facilities for study, I should have every day and night much more leisure for recreation, for my own intellectual development, and for serious literary production.
4. I could make and save more money.
5. The city Negro population offers practically a new field for applying that philosophy of education which I have learned at Tuskegee; and, therefore, a highly significant and useful career.³³

³²Ibid.

³³Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, August 26, 1905 (20), BTW[MD] Papers.

Bruce did not confront directly his differences with Washington over educational policy. The position with the District's schools did not materialize and Bruce remained at Tuskegee.

The following spring, Bruce outlined in a letter to Washington his displeasure over the continued emphasis on industrial courses. Teachers within the Academic Department felt that their marks "'don't count' and often fall into the vicious habit of giving 'mercy marks.'"³⁴ The current system of "correlating" did not imbue the students with sufficient skill in the basic courses. Bruce went on to express dissatisfaction with the quality of teachers at the school, because wages were low and top teachers were not willing to come to Tuskegee. Finally, he decried the lack of freedom in his position as head of the Academic Department; he wanted more discretion in the hiring of teachers.

The differences in opinion between Bruce and Washington did not affect their friendship or professional relationship. Washington used his influence and helped secure a position for Bruce in the District's schools. Their attention turned to the District of Columbia and a possible position for Bruce.

³⁴Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, April 12, 1906 (21) BTW[MD] Papers.

Washington maneuvered skillfully in placing Bruce with the District's schools. A Washington Star article quoted a District school principal who said that Washington

...has absolutely no desire to interfere with the appointments made by the school board in Washington for any of the positions. Vacancies in the supervising corps, principals or teachers would not tempt Mr. Washington to promote the interest of his friends, whose candidature, like all others, must be judged absolutely on merit.³⁵

Washington worked with Mary Church Terrell, a District school board member and African-American, to lobby behind-the-scenes for the appointment of Bruce. The Wizard wrote to Mary Terrell's husband, Judge Robert H. Terrell, in the summer of 1906,

...if Mrs. Terrell in her official capacity as a Trustee were to write and ask me my opinion as to the fitness of Mr. A for a certain position in the department of education in which she had control, I cannot see how I could be acting with ordinary courtesy to refuse to give my opinion concerning the fitness of A. for the said position...As to the general principle of giving one's opinion when requested by the proper authority, I cannot see where I have made any mistake.³⁶

Washington wanted to distance himself from the fray in the District while at the same time determining who got the positions. W.E.B. Du Bois, the leader of the

³⁵Washington Star, September, 5, 1905.

³⁶Booker T. Washington to Robert H. Terrell, July 16, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

anti-Washington movement, desired a position in the District's schools. Du Bois was moving "heaven and earth" to be appointed assistant superintendent. Washington in alliance with Mrs. Terrell thwarted Du Bois' candidacy and prevented the Atlanta doctor from moving north.³⁷

Bruce put in writing to the Tuskegeean his hope for an important administrative post with the District, "I am hoping that you will see your way clear to recommend me heartily for such promotion."³⁸ The letters Washington sent to the superintendent of schools and a member of the school board had the desired effect. Bruce received notification of a supervising principal position in September 1906.³⁹

³⁷E.J. Scott to James A. Cobb, August 21, 1906, Cobb to Scott, September 3, 1906, Scott to Cobb, September 7, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

³⁸Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, August 8, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

³⁹Booker T. Washington to Rear Admiral George W. Baird, August 20, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers; same letter sent to Dr. William E. Chancellor, Superintendent of the District's schools. Also see E.J. Scott to James A. Cobb, September 7, 1906, R.C. Bruce to Scott, August 22, 1906, Chancellor to Washington, August 29, 1906, and Washington to Chancellor, September 4, 1906, *ibid*.

Chapter 2: School and Community

Schools for blacks had existed in the District of Columbia as early as 1807, when a school for free blacks opened.¹ Formal and informal schools operated without government aid, depending for survival solely on contributions by benevolent societies and individuals. During the Civil War, the federal government enacted a law that created separate schools for blacks in the District. Congress in 1862 called into existence a board of three African-American trustees who served under the Secretary of the Interior; moreover, the act levied a tax on the property of African-Americans to provide support for the schools. Funds collected did not meet the needs however, and in 1876 Congress required the municipal governments of Washington and Georgetown to set aside a proportionate part of their funds for the education of the African-American population. The black schools retained their autonomy from local jurisdictions

¹Information on the organization of the public schools found in "Report of the Public School System of the District of Columbia by the Bureau of Efficiency 1928," United States Congress, Government Printing Office, 1928, 177-181.

because their management was lodged in the Department of the Interior.²

The independence of the African-American schools ended with the Organic Act of 1900 when Congress undertook an exhaustive inquiry into the organization and management of all public schools in the District. The search for efficiency paced the Progressives, and they streamlined the various administrations between and among the black and white public schools. The three independent school boards which had operated in the District: one for city whites, one for blacks, and a third for the rural region of the District were now under one board. Congress created a single board of seven members appointed by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. The board had complete jurisdiction over all administrative matters connected with the public schools except expenditures which were under the charge of the Commissioners. The board could appoint a superintendent and two assistant superintendents to supervise the segregated system.

Not satisfied with the fruit of their labors, Congress amended the 1900 act with the Organic Act of 1906, which expanded the school board to nine members

²Ibid., 179.

and set standards for membership on the board. The Organic Act of 1906 divided power between the board and the superintendent of schools. The board gained control over expenditures and determined general policy. The superintendent maintained a seat on the board but not the right to vote. Furthermore, the superintendent had jurisdiction on all personnel matters. The board did have the "right to remove the superintendent at any time for adequate cause affecting his character and efficiency as superintendent."³

The centralization of administration and power subordinated the black schools beneath a white-dominated school board. The Progressive impulse obliterated nearly one hundred years of autonomy for the District's African-American schools. The extensive powers accorded to the superintendent allowed him great leeway in the daily running of the schools and the implementation of policy.

The Assistant Superintendent for the black schools was the liaison between the black schools and the superintendent. He had to move fluidly between the often contrasting views and competing goals of blacks and whites. This position required discretion and

³Ibid., 181.

aplomb to communicate policy and decisions without being labeled a tool of the mostly white board. Bruce's elitist social views and educational policy exacerbated and hampered the lines of communication with blacks. His effectiveness and acceptance by District blacks was further damaged by Bruce's ties to white members of the school board.

A number of African-Americans believed that an industrial education curriculum endorsed segregation and limited the opportunity for direct competition with whites. They believed blacks were only to be educated in fields which would not directly compete with whites, and they were to serve their own community. A large proportion of African-Americans opposed the artificial ceiling imposed by segregation and the accommodation of black leadership to Jim Crow. W.E.B. Du Bois led the voices against the accommodationist philosophy of Booker T. Washington. The previously cordial relations between the two men ended with Du Bois' criticism of Washington in The Souls of Black Folk, published in 1903. Washington's "programme of industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights"⁴ outraged Du Bois. Du

⁴W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (reprint edition, New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 30.

Bois demanded equal rights, both political and civil, for blacks. "[The black man] simply [wished] to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face."⁵

Du Bois' criticisms attacked the tactics of Washington in combatting segregation. The accommodationism of Washington limited African-Americans, especially the intellectuals, in pursuing advancement in society. Black intellectuals, said Du Bois, should use their skills to raise up the race with the future goal of equality with whites. Social and political rights should not be sacrificed for a full stomach. Du Bois charged that "refusing to give this Talented Tenth the key to knowledge, can any sane man imagine that they will lightly lay aside their yearning and contentedly become hewers of wood and drawers of water?"⁶

Many in the District's black community followed either Washington or Du Bois and divisiveness plagued the community. The power and influence of Washington in distributing political patronage allowed him to

⁵Ibid., 3.

⁶Ibid., 74.

establish a powerful machine in the District, yet Du Bois' followers remained vocal and unbowed. Anyone who operated within the District's black schools had to contend with these competing factions. A portion of the black community had organized in 1905 and succeeded in rebuffing an attempt by whites to lower the curriculum of the black classical high school on M Street.⁷

The M Street High School controversy in 1905 divided the entire Washington community. Percy M. Hughes, the white director of Washington's high schools, attempted to "give the pupils of this school [M Street] a course of study equal to their abilities."⁸ Both Hughes and A.T. Stuart, the superintendent of schools, considered their efforts to increase vocational training in the school as elevating the standards of black education. The M Street school already had vocational courses, yet they were secondary to the college preparatory ones. Anna J. Cooper, the principal of M Street, balked against lowering the curriculum; the faculty divided on the question and the battle was joined.

⁷Louise Daniel Hutchinson, Anna J. Cooper, A Voice From the South (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), 67-84.

⁸Ibid., 67.

The school had an impressive history of sending some of its graduates on to Harvard, Brown, Oberlin, Yale, Amherst, Dartmouth, and Radcliffe.⁹ The faculty at the turn of the century was described as dedicated and stimulating. Two thirds of the teachers had degrees from top-flight colleges and universities, not counting the five who had graduated from Howard. White high school students in the District did not have the benefit of comparable talent.¹⁰ Cooper succeeded in maintaining the college preparatory curriculum, but alienated members of the administration who now began to attack her personally. Percy M. Hughes, the white assistant superintendent, brought allegations and formal charges against Mrs. Cooper. The formal charges were inefficiency and the inability to maintain good order and decorum. Rumors circulated linking Mrs. Cooper romantically with her foster son, John Love, Jr. who was also a teacher at M Street.¹¹

The school board dragged its collective feet for months while the conflict unfolded in the press. The

⁹Ibid., 67.

¹⁰Constance M. Green, The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 137.

¹¹Ibid., 75.

battle between Hughes and Cooper turned on the question of white over black. A black subordinate was not to be disloyal to a white superior. Anna Cooper was termed disloyal because of her determination to maintain a college preparatory curriculum in spite of the urging of her white superiors to lower the curriculum. Nevertheless, the school board recommended the retention of Cooper as principal and "that in her official conduct, she shall recognize the authority of her superior officer, the Director of High Schools, and confirm in her official conduct in all respects to the rules of the Board of Education....The Board also believes that it is a false and hurtful manifestation of sympathy towards any class of pupil...to lower the standards" by which a student can be advanced.¹²

The Organic Act of 1906 provided the board with an alternative to the current stalemate. Congress granted the board wide discretionary powers over hiring; in

¹²Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, October 30, 1905. Cooper's foster son also retained his position; "...a special committee appointed to investigate the conduct of Mr. J.L. Love, submitted a report exonerating Mr. Love and stated in conclusion that 'while the committee does not feel at all justified in recommending that the Board deal summarily with Mr. Love that he can be admonished to be so circumspect as to his conduct in the future that there can be no possible grounds for the continuation of the damaging rumors that have gathered around and about him.'" (Ibid., May 9, 1906.)

addition, a new board was appointed by the judges of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. The new board members were: Rear Admiral George W. Baird, USN (ret.); Emma M. Brewer, John F. Cook, William V. Cox, James F. Oyster, Mary Church Terrell, Dr. Barton W. Everman, Justina R. Hill, and Oliver M. Atwood.¹³ The African-American members were Terrell, Atwood, and Cook; Terrell was the only one to have previously been a board member. The board used its increased authority and chose not to rehire Cooper, notwithstanding her twenty years in the District's schools and a merit promotion to her credit.¹⁴ Rumors ran rampant as to who the successor to Mrs. Cooper would be. Attention turned to Tuskegee and Booker T. Washington.

Washington had occasion to speak at the combined commencement ceremony of the District's black high schools, M Street and Armstrong,¹⁵ on June 16, 1905. He briefly touched upon the Cooper controversy, telling the community to rise above its differences and to

¹³Bee, July 7, 1906.

¹⁴John Love, Jr. also was not rehired; Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, September 14, 1906. Both Cooper and her foster son, Love, protested their dismissals, yet neither were reinstated.

¹⁵Armstrong Manual Training School was a vocational high school founded in 1902.

assume the national prominence afforded by its location in the nation's capital. The address also touted Bruce as a fine product of the District's schools, and the possibilities available to African-Americans if they invested in education.¹⁶ Some interpreted the high praise for Bruce as a campaign for Bruce to succeed Cooper as principal of M Street.

Washington worked covertly to place Bruce within the District's schools. He had sent letters of endorsement of Bruce to Admiral Baird and William Chancellor, the superintendent.¹⁷ Chancellor replied to Washington, "I have received numerous letters about Roscoe Conkling Bruce, and...shall nominate him as supervising principal of a district, controlling one quarter of the colored schools."¹⁸ Bruce was appointed a supervising principal on September 1, 1906. The supervising principal worked directly under and reported to the assistant superintendent in charge of the black schools. The following May, Bruce was

¹⁶BTW Papers, vol. 8, 305.

¹⁷Booker T. Washington to Rear Admiral George W. Baird [ret.] and William E. Chancellor, August 20, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

¹⁸William E. Chancellor to Booker T. Washington, August 29, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

promoted to the assistant superintendent position, succeeding W.S. Montgomery.

The community activism regarding the M Street controversy extended to encompass the Armstrong Manual High School. The principal of Armstrong, W.B. Evans, wrote to Washington asking for support against the black members of the board.¹⁹ Evans' adherence to industrial education had left his reappointment in doubt. R.R. Moton, of Hampton Institute, believed the "feelings against him [Evans] in Washington is largely due to his attitude towards industrial education, and I hate to see so good a man made a martyr for a cause that it (sic) so worthy."²⁰ Notwithstanding the pessimistic attitude of Evans, he was reappointed to the principalship at Armstrong.

The black community, centered around Howard University, had strong sentiment against industrial education. They wanted to maintain the success of the M Street school which sent a number of its students every year to Howard; furthermore, the children of some of the faculty at Howard attended M Street. The abolition of

¹⁹W.B. Evans to Booker T. Washington, September 6, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

²⁰R.R. Moton to E.J. Scott, September 7, 1906 (21), BTW[MD] Papers.

the college preparatory curriculum at M Street would hurt Howard both professionally and personally. Industrial education was a double-edged sword to the black community. On the one hand, it contributed to the uplift of the race, instilling race pride and fostering the development of an independent black artisan class. On the other hand, the skills learned in the current courses being taught did not prepare the black masses for a role in the machine age. The skills were more suited to the pre-industrial period than the current period of large corporations and a viable labor force. Furthermore, whites subverted the positive aspects of industrial training, emphasizing the subordinate role for blacks which grew out of their outdated training unsuited for the current age.

Middle-class blacks closed off from entry into the black aristocracy agitated for education which would prepare their children to succeed. Aristocrats wanted a college preparatory education for themselves and industrial training for the masses. Segregation magnified the desires of blacks and the fervor with which they pursued their myriad agendas. Classes, sub-classes, cliques, and individuals aspired to advance. At times, behavior degenerated into a mad scramble for a piece of the American dream. Against this backdrop of

community scrutiny and strongly held opinions, Bruce undertook the running of the District's black public schools.

Outsiders to white society, blacks mirrored white society in their social development. The District's African-American community, similar to black communities throughout the United States, had three tiers: the aristocrats, the middle class, including merchants and artisans, and the masses. The class structure resembled a pyramid, extremely narrow at the top, a small mid-section, and a broad base. The majority of educated blacks strove to distance themselves from the pedestrian members of their race, creating elaborate breastworks until the arrival of integration and their rightful place in society. These educated blacks argued and fought among themselves over status and class all the while occupying the bottom rung of American society.²¹

The aristocrats defined themselves relative to the white majority of America in terms of culture, lineage, and prestige. They traced their families back to either

²¹ The discussion of the District's African-American community is drawn principally from Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color, 39-68; Green, The Secret City, 136-182; E. Franklin Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United States (New York: The Free Press, 1957), 10-14, 42-76; Kenneth L. Kusmer, A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 91-156.

an antebellum free status or to a significant family history. They insulated themselves from the rest of the black community vainglorious in the accomplishments of their forebears. The black aristocracy emphasized education, good manners, and marriage within their group. They never succeeded in removing themselves from the rest of black society. The aristocrats remained lumped painfully by white America with the rest of the race.

The aristocrats and middle class frowned upon the masses. They cited their lack of skills, high unemployment, crime, and unsanitary living conditions as reasons to separate themselves from their less fortunate brethren. Sharpened class distinctions reassured upper class blacks of their own position in society and distanced them from the masses. To attain the cherished goal of integration, distance from the masses was necessary. W.E.B. Du Bois counselled the talented tenth on the importance of the black aristocrat: "A rising race must be aristocratic; the good cannot consort with the bad--nor even the best with the less good."²²

²²W.E.B. Du Bois, The Black North in 1901: A Social Study (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 46, quoted in Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color, 23.

The District of Columbia was the center of the black aristocracy. The availability of government and educational positions commensurate with their education drew them to the city. In addition, cultural and social opportunities were readily available in the nation's capital. Washington social life offered chances to mingle with a wide variety of blacks who shared similar values and expectations from life. Upper class families intermarried and created networks across the country. These networks fostered the aspirations of the family, providing support and guidance.

These aristocrats dominated the choice positions within the District's school system as well as the best government jobs reserved for blacks. Upper class blacks spoke of noblesse oblige, yet in operation, they were assailed from both sides. Blacks criticized these efforts as not enough while whites were condescending in their appraisal. Furthermore, the family networks were rampant with competition and jealousy. They splintered into fractious groups narrowing the already limited avenues for advancement.

The uplift of the lower classes undertaken by the bourgeoisie was more than they could deliver. The ever-increasing District population compounded the many and complex problems of the black community. The educated

segment of the black population did not possess the resources to meet the demands of the community. Too much of their time was consumed in personal battles meeting the daily requirements of propelling themselves forward.²³

The social facade created by the bourgeoisie to attain status separated them from other blacks. Whites refused the majority of blacks entry into their dominant culture. Isolated from blacks and rejected by whites, educated blacks displayed considerable confusion and conflict. Individuals pondered, switched ideologies, and fought for advancement both racially and individually within a larger society that rejected blacks categorically.²⁴

As a member of the black aristocracy, Bruce succumbed to their foibles; he believed in industrial education for the masses, yet clung to assimilation as a goal of the wellborn and the skilled. He attempted as assistant superintendent to serve all classes of the fractious community. The press played a dominant role in the public's perception of Bruce's educational

²³Gatewood, 50.

²⁴Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie, 28.

policies, and frequently enticed the various cliques into boisterous and damaging actions.

The Washington Bee, the primary newspaper for African-Americans in the District of Columbia, and its editor, W. Calvin Chase, at first championed Bruce as a leader and called for him to come north:

Let us be charitable and throw around him [Bruce] the tender arms of encouragement and see if this young Aeschines is not greater than the opponents of Negro progress.²⁵

Moreover, upon the promotion of Bruce to Assistant Superintendent, Chase commented, "[N]o better appointment could have been made, and no other would have given me the satisfaction that this one will give."²⁶ Despite this praise, Bruce should have been wary of Chase and his uneven reporting. His was a anti-Booker newspaper²⁷ and the Bee's motto, "Honey for Friends, Stings for Enemies," was equally applicable to Chase. The curmudgeonly editor was known for his

²⁵Bee, January 27, 1906.

²⁶Ibid., June 1, 1907.

²⁷Chase had decried Washington's Atlanta Compromise, "[Washington] said something that was death to the Afro-American and elevating to the white people." Editorial in the Washington Bee, November 2, 1895; quoted in Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington, The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 225.

vitriolic attacks on anyone in the black community who progressed above his associates.²⁸

Notwithstanding social and educational distinctions, Chase never quite reached the highest levels of the District's black community. He displayed little ideological consistency; instead, his views focused on individuals and Washington's black aristocracy. He switched without compunction between unstinting praise and withering denunciation.²⁹ Chase never completely displaced his views on the future of African-Americans; rather, he focused primarily on selling newspapers. He utilized gossip and scathing condemnations of individuals to accomplish this feat. However, his constant need for money to continue publication created favorable circumstances for the recipients of Chase's invective to quiet or at least lessen the sting.

Booker T. Washington fed upon Chase's need for money to secure favorable press coverage from the Bee. Through the use of a spy, Melvin J. Chisum, who worked as a reporter for Chase, and intermediaries, Washington provided money to Chase in exchange for several pro-

²⁸Green, 143.

²⁹Ibid.

Washington editorials. Chisum successfully trapped the irascible editor but only to a degree. Chase did not sympathize with Washington's policies yet needed the Tuskegeean's money for survival; Chase was loyal to Washington only when paid. The initial bribe of Chase by Washington coincided with the editor's endorsement of Bruce.³⁰

The personal shortcomings of Bruce and Chase heightened the exchanges between the two men. Protagonist and antagonist, their sparring laid bare the limitations of each other. The good will of Chase quickly turned to an acerbic indictment of Bruce.

³⁰Louis R. Harlan, "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," Journal of Southern History, XXXVII (August 1971), 411; information on Washington and Chase drawn from *ibid.*, 410-411. See Bee, January 27, 1906.

Chapter 3: The Distancing of Bruce From the Community

Bruce's initial foray into the District's administrative policies tarnished his reputation and highlighted the intense competition for teaching positions. Complainants were common in the schools and railed against favoritism in the selection of teachers. Bruce immediately entered the fray and refused to rehire a District teacher, Mrs. Mary Syphax Gibson, a member of the old and prominent Syphax family. The ensuing battle undermined his ability to implement his educational programs, accentuated his leadership defects, and exposed the difficulties inherent in the assistant superintendent position.

The refusal stemmed from an alleged payment of \$50.00 by Mrs. Gibson to Chase. The money was for Chase to use his influence and secure a teaching position for her. Bruce carried the charges to Superintendent Chancellor, who upheld the dismissal. Chase utilized the Bee and promptly attacked Bruce. This drama played itself out in the Bee through the remainder of 1907.

The myriad cries of he said, she said called to mind petulant children and almost drowned out

comprehension; however, a reconstruction of events and accusations proves beneficial.¹

Gibson's version, sworn before a notary public, stated that the origins of the conflict with Bruce began during the winter of 1906-07. Bruce had held the position of supervising principal and oversaw one fourth of the black public schools. Mrs. Gibson had inquired about a librarian position and had asked for Bruce's support. Bruce's immediate predecessor as Assistant Superintendent and current superior, W.S. Montgomery did not favor Gibson; therefore, Bruce withheld his support. She then spoke to Bruce concerning the possible influence of Chase in securing a position for her. Gibson recounted the events before the Board of Education on October 24, 1907.² She surmised the cost of speaking to Chase, since he was an attorney and his time valuable, to be \$50.00. This was a considerable sum, since the weekly salary of a teacher averaged only \$18.00. Bruce advised her to refrain from speaking to Chase. Gibson complied with Bruce's suggestion. Her testimony concluded with the statement that she had not

¹Bee, October 12, 1907. The recounting of the Gibson affair is found in the Bee, October 12, 1907 through January 18, 1908.

²Ibid., November 2, 1907.

spoken to Chase for a period of years, a dubious statement given the size of the District's black community and its social mores.

After Gibson complained to the Board of Education, Bruce wrote Chancellor and outlined Gibson's case. Bruce determined that anyone involved in bribery should not teach in the public schools, and Chancellor concurred. Chase denounced the "malicious aspersions" of Bruce and called for an investigation and subsequent removal of Bruce from the schools.

This first salvo soured the good will Chase had felt toward Bruce, and the hostilities increased circulation. The editor of the Bee brought forth other charges against Bruce in an attempt to muddy Bruce. Charges included improper hiring and firing as well as graft. Chase returned Bruce's "cowardly attack" in kind. He used the Bee adroitly to influence public opinion against Bruce. This exchange marked the beginning of fifteen years of battle between the two men.

The official investigation began on October 23, 1907, and school board members Cox, Hoover, Horner, and Oyster made up the special committee appointed for the Bruce-Chase affair. Washington sent words of encouragement to his friend and former apprentice,

You will have to learn to stand such criticism. One of the first things for a public man to do is to learn to throw off his responsibilities--to leave care of that character in his office and not let himself be worried by criticism...through the public press.³

The support of Washington helped gird Bruce for the investigation and the venom of the Bee. The Bee characterized the actions of Bruce at the investigation as those of a frightened man, a dejected and pitiful spectacle who did not look his accused in the face. He did not reply to the emotional words and gestures of Mrs. Gibson.⁴ The newspaper accounts continued and weighed ever more heavily in favor of Chase and Gibson.

At the investigation, Principal Evans testified that he had made the appointment of Gibson unsolicited; furthermore, he found her both competent and worthy. Gibson cited personal differences with Bruce stemming from time spent at Tuskegee⁵ as reasons for her dismissal but did not elaborate. Chase introduced other actions of Bruce, attempting to attack his credibility. The board then closed the investigation stating that it would report its findings at a later date.

³Booker T. Washington to Roscoe Conkling Bruce, October 21, 1907 (23), BTW[MD] Papers.

⁴Bee, November 2, 1907.

⁵This statement contradicts Gibson's sworn testimony in the Bee, October 12, 1907, 1.

Bruce approached Captain James F. Oyster, a Board of Education member, after the conclusion of the formal investigation. The Assistant Superintendent placed the onus squarely on Chancellor. According to a report in the Bee, the Superintendent was responsible for the "libelous letter" against Chase; Chancellor had instructed Bruce to write it. Chase seized on the admission of Bruce, calling him an "errand boy [sic] and slave of Chancellor, a servile and pliant tool."⁶ These charges colored the judgment of the black community. The words of Chase attached a stigma to Bruce, that of a servant of the Board, which would remain throughout his tenure with the District schools. Washington again entered the fracas, sending a confidential letter to Chase.⁷ In guarded language, Washington asked Chase to tone down his virulent attacks and to re-focus his attention on the public schools, not on individual personalities. Chase complied for little more than a fortnight. The Thanksgiving holiday presented him with inspiration and he belittled Bruce as

⁶Bee, November 2, 1907.

⁷Booker T. Washington to W. Calvin Chase, November 4, 1907 (23), BTW[MD] Papers.

a "schoolboy, who has not relieved himself of the fur that comes on a young chicken...."⁸

The plea to Oyster deflected a portion of the enmity directed at Bruce. The Board brought formal charges against Chancellor of incompetency, insubordination, and conduct unbecoming a superintendent. The Board had appointed a special committee to investigate Bruce, but it was Chancellor who was now in the lion's jaws. The new year brought a dismissal of Chancellor.

Mary Church Terrell, a black Board of Education member, lobbied the other members of the Board for leniency toward Bruce. Mrs. Terrell and her husband Robert were long-time friends of Washington and had been instrumental in bringing Bruce to the District. The Board heeded her counsel and decided to retain Bruce in his capacity as Assistant Superintendent.

Chase continued his invective with strident editorials and articles in the Bee. He portrayed Bruce as a lackey of the white hierarchy; he widened his scope further to include Mrs. Terrell. These epithets were a crushing condemnation for Bruce; they eroded his credibility when he needed it most. Caught between the

⁸Bee, November 23, 1907.

separate worlds of black and white, Bruce pursued his policy of industrial education for the majority of blacks. However, his policies suffered from the publicity generated by the Gibson affair. The community judged Bruce under the harsh glare of Chase's spotlight.

The official battle between Bruce and Chase turned on the word of Bruce and the power of the Board of Education. The Board, through the efforts of Mary Church Terrell, backed Bruce; otherwise, they would have to admit that hiring him had been a mistake. Weathering the storm, Bruce drew closer to the Board and its influence. At the same time, he moved away from a large portion of the black community. The rigid line of Jim Crow separated the races, and Bruce was the go-between in District education. Blacks had to work with and through Bruce for the advancement of their careers and their educational policies. Bruce had access to whites, yet blacks lacked confidence in him. His entrance into the maelstrom of District politics carried a backlash of bad press and publicity. The stinging words of Chase lingered longer than the ruling of the Board. The pressing problem of Gibson completed, Bruce returned to the daily bickering of the District's black community.

Segregation pigeonholed blacks and forced their attention inward. Education captured and held their

aspirations as an avenue for advancement outside the purview of most whites. The District of Columbia's schools for blacks far outpaced those available in other cities. Administrators and teachers of extraordinary talent clamored to work in the District's schools. Competition for positions was fierce and often turned bitter. Teachers recruited and backed family and friends, hoping that they would land a position. The community regarded the District's schools, especially M Street, as a bastion of the black upper class. Members of the upper class had the benefit of excellent education, yet had problems locating work suited to their training in larger society. The prevalence of elites within the schools gave the appearance that the black public schools were the preserve of the black aristocracy.⁹ Challengers to the system cited nepotism and favoritism in the assignment of positions. Bruce, like most black administrators, was accused of favoritism. It was an ongoing nuisance rather than an isolated crisis.

Mr. A.T. Stuart, a Board of Education member, replaced the deposed Chancellor as Superintendent of Schools. The sniping of Chase continued, then

⁹Gatewood, 259.

diminished, and Bruce settled into his new position. The school year ended and another began. Once again, Chase railed at the public schools; nevertheless, Bruce escaped his wrath. Chase even commended Bruce for his understanding of the problems of M Street. Chase characterized the faculty of M Street as

Divided into cliques, lost to every sense of their grave responsibility, lost to every thought of unity of plan and purpose, selfish, suspicious, envious, and intolerant of each other....¹⁰

Often a supervising principal was perceived to be at the center of these cliques. Supervising principals were in charge of one quarter of the black public schools and in this position they had the opportunity to consolidate their power and prepare for advancement. Supervising principals wrote the efficiency reports and recommended teachers for promotion and demotion, an effective tool to maintain the loyalty of the teachers.

Bruce's leadership style allowed the supervisors to impose upon him and maintain their fiefdoms. He rendered aloof guidance to his subordinates; furthermore, he concerned himself more with his superiors than with his inferiors. While a better leader might not have been able to eradicate the cliques, he might have limited their reach. A hands-on approach and

¹⁰Bee, September 26, 1908.

open avenues of communication would have lessened the power of the cliques. However, Bruce continued his emphasis on industrial education and disregarded the rumblings among the teachers.

The Boston Guardian, whose militant editor William Monroe Trotter was a staunch critic of Washington, accused Bruce of supporting the Armstrong School to the detriment of M Street.¹¹ An attack against a lieutenant of Washington was an attack against Tuskegeeism, and Trotter spared no targets in his battles with Washington. Armstrong had opened in 1902 as an experiment in industrial education. Bruce had concluded that manual arts training was best for the black masses, and he had lobbied for a new manual training center and an extension of the Armstrong school.¹² He stated to Washington succinctly his opinion of technical education:

The Negro peasant is wholly unprepared for the complications, the competitions, for the moral stress of city life, and little or no provision is made to train in the arts and industries by which he might sustain himself. Memphis, Atlanta, Washington, New Orleans, Louisville, Baltimore, St.

¹¹Boston Guardian, June 12, 1909.

¹²Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, March 30, 1909, BTW Papers, Library of Congress, microfilm reel number 32.

Louis, Philadelphia, and New York....It is certainly to the interest of these cities to place within reach of their Negro populations not only the usual facilities of good grammar schools and good high schools, but also adequate training directly for economic independence.¹³

Bruce further remarked that "if I have sound ideas upon the education and training of our people, I owe them primarily to the inspiration of your words and ideas and work."¹⁴ In a confidential letter to Washington, Bruce denied the charges of Trotter:

Of course, the editorial is based upon the absolutely false statements that have been bandied about....I expect Monroe Trotter and The Guardian to believe and give the widest possible circulation to anything and everything that may tend to discredit me and my work.¹⁵

Bruce fought to pursue both industrial and college preparatory education for District blacks. The criticism of Trotter and others sapped his support and inflamed his opposition.

The emphasis Bruce placed on industrial education combined with his leadership deficiencies to antagonize supporters of classical education and many District blacks. This potpourri of discontent led to crises over

¹³Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, July 24, 1909 (25), BTW[MD] Papers.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, August 3, 1909 (25), BTW[MD] Papers.

the reappointment of Bruce in 1909 and 1912. The first three years Bruce spent with the District's school system laid the groundwork for his repetitive crises. He alienated Chase as well as a portion of the black community during the Gibson affair. The School Board with its white majority retained Bruce and this support provided fuel for his opponents. Industrial education remained Bruce's prescription for the masses despite vociferous opposition.

A group of parents challenged the 1909 reappointment of Bruce and petitioned the Board to remove him from office. The Board characterized the charges brought against Bruce by the parents as dealing "mainly with educational policies, no action whatever need be taken...."¹⁶ The policies of Bruce had caused an uproar the previous year at M Street. Some teachers asked to be "relieved from participation in certain model and practice lessons."¹⁷ After a conference was called, the faculty "save one expressed themselves desirous to put aside personal preferences in the interest of the general welfare of the school."¹⁸ The

¹⁶Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, July 15, 1909.

¹⁷Ibid., January 22, 1908.

¹⁸Ibid.

charges dismissed by the Board were an outgrowth of Bruce's new policies directed at improving the schools. Nevertheless, the web of discontent surrounding Bruce was growing.

Various blacks both in and outside of the District continued to meddle in the affairs of the schools. Chase periodically published a harangue on the shortcomings of the schools and Bruce. The acerbic editor led the parade in exposing the limits of Bruce; he proposed dismissing Bruce as a panacea for the schools' ills. An open letter from the editor of the Bee mocked the leadership of Bruce,

Mr. Superintendent, no large body, civic or otherwise, can be successful unless there is confidence in the ability and integrity of those at its head. The lack of those pre-eminent elements for success is one main reason why the colored schools are trailing far behind the white schools.¹⁹

On the other hand, he praised the M Street the following week for its "excellent" condition.²⁰ The uneven and misleading words of Chase handcuffed the extension of Bruce's views and poisoned the educator's chances of implementing his two-tiered education policy.

¹⁹Bee, September 10, 1910.

²⁰Ibid., September 17, 1910.

Booker T. Washington acted to curb the incendiary District newspaper editor. The Tuskegeean wrote Bruce in early 1911,

It is important from my point of view that you have friendly support from colored newspapers as far as possible in Washington....No matter how weak we may consider that the individual character of a newspaper editor or owner is, the public seldom considers this phase....If the white officials in Washington see that you are continually attacked by colored papers they gradually make up their minds, unconsciously, perhaps, that you are lacking in influence and are without friends among your own race in Washington.²¹

The Wizard suggested Bruce speak with Ralph Tyler, a District resident and an active member of the Tuskegee machine. Washington and Tyler both had ample experience in "supporting" the African-American press in exchange for favorable coverage.²² Washington wrote Tyler in the summer and asked him to draft others to support the Bee. Chase was in great straits to pay his printer and monetary support by Washington's friends could make the

²¹Booker T. Washington to Roscoe Conkling Bruce, February 11, 1911, BTW Papers, vol. 10, 576-577.

²²See Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915, 90-92; "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," Journal of Southern History, XXXVII (August 1971); August Meier, "Booker T. Washington and the Negro Press: With Special Reference to the Colored American Magazine," Journal of Negro History, XXXVIII (January 1953), 67-90.

paper strong and helpful force.²³ In the same letter Washington continued,

If you think well of it, I wish you would see Mr. Bruce and find out if he can arrange to put Mr. Chase's son in the new Vocational School... You can tell Mr. Bruce it is my wish that Chase be given this position if he is competent. Certainly Mr. Bruce owes something to Chase's friends in this matter since Mr. Chase has let up in the matter of fighting him. Please let Chase know that I have written you about his son.²⁴

However, the black members of the school board joined the vocal community critics in 1911. The second appointment denouncement arose when black members of the Board united against Bruce in the fall of 1911. This action by the black members of the Board completed the alienation of Bruce from the rank and file in the African-American community.

William M. Davidson had replaced A.T. Stuart as superintendent of schools on June 26, 1911, and Mary Terrell was replaced on the board by Caroline W. Harris. Even though Terrell had cooled in her support of Bruce, she remained an effective ally of Washington who continued to support Bruce. The black Board members

²³Booker T. Washington to Ralph Waldo Tyler, July 2, 1911, BTW Papers, vol. 10, 260-261.

²⁴Ibid., 261.

still numbered three: Harris, William V. Tunnell, and Richard R. Horner, yet none were members of the Tuskegee machine nor fans of Bruce. The black board members had dreams of their own.

Horner, in unison with Harris and Tunnell, conspired to oust Bruce, and replace him with one from their clique. They did not have specific charges; rather, they questioned the legality of Bruce continuing in office. The new superintendent should have to reappoint Bruce since it was technically a new administration. Counsel for the board stated that Bruce could remain until Davidson dismissed him, and did not allow the powerplay by the black board members. The white board members all supported Bruce.

Washington mobilized the Tuskegee machine in an attempt to dilute the strength of the opposition. He requested Whitefield McKinlay, a District realtor, to impress upon Bruce

upon every occasion that he must in the future try to stand by himself in a larger degree than he has in the past and above all things, he ought to cultivate a spirit of loyalty to those who assist him....If things get serious against Bruce, I should not object going to the President....²⁵

²⁵Booker T. Washington to Whitefield McKinlay, September 11, 1911, BTW Papers, vol. 11, 303.

The Tuskegee followers read Bruce the riot act and pledged to stand by him to the last ditch. They expressed the belief that Bruce was coming around and would survive.²⁶ McKinlay rejoined that Bruce "will pull through mainly because the people who are fighting him are known to be activated by selfish motives...This fight will do Bruce a lot of good as he needs just such a lesson to teach that loyalty & truthfulness are valuable virtues."²⁷

The Washington Post reported that "it is conceded that Bruce is not being opposed on account of lack of ability....Bruce has incurred the enmity of the colored members of the board by reason of his alleged dictatorial methods."²⁸ Tyler believed the fight against Bruce was actually an attack on Washington. The opposition to Bruce hoped that by ousting him they could open a wedge in the Tuskegee machine.²⁹

²⁶James A. Cobb to E.J. Scott, September 20, 1911 (28), BTW[MD] Papers.

²⁷Whitefield McKinlay to Booker T. Washington, September 14, 1911, BTW Papers, vol. 11, 311.

²⁸The Washington Post, September 20, 1911, 1.

²⁹Ralph W. Tyler to Booker T. Washington, September 18, 1911 and Tyler to E.J. Scott, October 12, 1911 (28), BTW[MD] Papers.

Du Bois promoted the cause of the black board members. He spoke of the unsettling nature of the turmoil in the schools, yet added to it by declaring that "[m]ost people seem to think that Mr. Bruce will soon be displaced."³⁰ The black board members requested a special closed meeting on September 19, 1911 to present their demands. They were unsuccessful in their lobbying of the white members and the superintendent to render an immediate decision, although an investigation was launched. The closed session of the board received ample press coverage, and Chase led the defense of Bruce.

Chase chastised teachers and board members who wanted to dictate appointments and promotions. He directed an editorial to Tunnell, as the one black board member who possessed brains and education, to rise above and maintain an unselfish interest in the schools. He called upon Davidson to grant the assistant superintendent unlimited power over the black school.³¹ The editor divulged in a lengthy article the real animus behind the challenge, a powerplay by the

³⁰The Crisis, volume 3, number 1, November 1911, 11.

³¹Bee, September 23, 1911.

black members to create positions for themselves and their cohorts in the schools.³²

The stirring words of Chase and the power of the Tuskegee machine failed to quicken the painfully slow workings of the board. The board offered no action until prompted by Horner in February 1912. The five months of board inactivity did not necessitate a cease-fire with the press. Chase, invigorated by the flow of Tuskegee money, dashed off numerous attacks on the opponents of Bruce. Chase excoriated Tunnell in editorials throughout October.³³

Bruce decried the actions of the black board members who are "actively seeking my official scalp....if the day is to be saved, it will be necessary to invoke the most powerful aid in the most tactful way."³⁴ Washington continued his guidance and support to his liege. He wrote a letter of introduction to President Taft's secretary, Charles D. Hilles, in case

³²Bruce was to be replaced temporarily by Scott Montgomery, the brother-in-law of Caroline Harris. Tunnell would ascend to the assistant superintendency as soon as his board term expired. In addition, a number of lesser positions would be given to family members and would solidify their hold on the black school. See the Bee, September 23, 1911, 1.

³³Ibid., October 7, 1911, and October 14, 1911.

³⁴Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Booker T. Washington, January 9, 1912 (29), BTW[MD] Papers.

Bruce wanted to pursue the administration's influence and support. The Tuskegeean coddled the young educator and drew upon his vast resources to continue Bruce's prominent role in the District.

The superintendent determined all personnel decisions and Davidson reported to the board on March 20, 1912 that he had "come to the conclusion that no change should be made in [Bruce's] office."³⁵ Chase quoted Davidson that Bruce "had been found guiltless of the charges and that [Bruce] had been a model school official who has not had the cooperation of those under him. That Mr. Bruce will now be given the entire charge of the colored schools to manage them as they should be."³⁶ The board split along racial lines and voted 5-3 to retain Bruce, with the black members being the minority.

The schism of the board left the black members scrambling, yet they declared their intention to do what they could for the schools. The Bee pronounced "There is but one thing for the colored members to do, and that is to resign from the Board of Education, because their

³⁵Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, March 20, 1912.

³⁶Bee, March 9, 1912.

usefulness is at an end."³⁷ "Not one of them has displayed the ability and character most needed as representatives of the race. Not one of them has proven true to the best interests of the race."³⁸

Du Bois tried to thwart the vigor of the argument against the black board members by writing on their behalf:

Every colored member of the Board of Education in the District of Columbia voted to dismiss Roscoe Conkling Bruce...The white members voted to sustain him. It is suggested that this vote is indicative of the interests which Mr. Bruce serves.³⁹

None of the board members heeded the words of Chase and completed their full terms in office.⁴⁰ Their work could not undo the united front of the white board members behind Bruce.

Bruce was ensconced as assistant superintendent with the support of Washington and the white board majority. The grab for power by the black board members had failed. If anything, Bruce increased his power, yet

³⁷Ibid., March 23, 1912.

³⁸Ibid., March 30, 1912.

³⁹The Crisis, volume 4, number 1, May 1912, 9.

⁴⁰William Tunnell was replaced by John B. Lerner in July 1912; Richard R. Horner was replaced by C. is. Childs in July 1913; and Coralie Franklin Cook succeeded Caroline Harris in 1914.

the cost was fearful. He had alienated the growing middle-class represented by Du Bois and the board members. The most powerful clique in the District's schools could not unseat Bruce; nevertheless, he was wedded ever more closely with the white board members.

The wild card in the struggle between Bruce and the black community was Chase. He possessed the power to sway public opinion and favor certain factions. He continued his favorable coverage of Bruce and printed a comment of Captain Oyster, ex-president of the Board of Education, "Mr. Bruce is one of the few colored men in this country who is able to serve his people in the capacity he is now doing."⁴¹

Fresh from his victory and buoyed by the compliments, Bruce pushed forward with industrial education. Unlike Tuskegee, the District's schools did not utilize dovetailing. The academic day was divided between academic and trade work. Enrollment in the trade schools was up and becoming increasingly popular with students; thus proving their necessity.⁴²

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The assistant superintendent closed 1913 with a speech before the Colored Social Settlement, where he reiterated his accommodationist philosophy:

Our schools must not shut their eyes to the very educational material best fitted to develop in our children race pride, self-confidence, and a spirit of brave and noble emulation....The colored people will win increasing respect for themselves largely in the degree that we help one another.⁴³

However, the District schools taught trades which were being outpaced by industrial advancements. The skills gained by a student in carpentry, brickmasonry, or printing prepared them for lives as individualistic businessmen at the same time this training was becoming obsolete.⁴⁴ The industrial revolution needed a large, viable labor force. The majority of labor unions which harnessed this enormous power excluded blacks from their ranks. Therefore, the industrial training given blacks did not prepare them for the realities of the day. The lessons learned in industrial training subordinated blacks below the organizing white worker. Bruce

⁴³Remarks of Roscoe Conkling Bruce, Chairman of the Annual Meeting of the Colored Social Settlement, November 24, 1913, in the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, Washington, D.C.; quoted in the Bee, December 6, 1913.

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promulgated a philosophy of industrial training for the black masses which only cemented their rank in society.

Bruce answered the critics of industrial education in a speech during the commencement exercises of the class of 1914. He praised the dignity of labor and said that "[t]he most progressive of American municipalities stand committed not only to vocational training, but also to vocational guidance." The training would provide for the development of a black middle class and a successful black business community would contribute to a closed economy. In other words, the black community would patronize and support black businesses which in turn would promote racial uplift and solidarity. "[I]t means the development as far as that is practicable under the conditions of modern civilization of a separate social and economic life."⁴⁵

The acceptance by the assistant superintendent of the separation of the races was tempered by his membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Serving both industrial education and the NAACP, Bruce appeared to be serving opposite ideologies. Industrial education has been cited as ineffective training for the industrial

⁴⁵Bee, June 27, 1914.

age; nevertheless, the training process should have inculcated into the student the values of Yankee civilization.⁴⁶ The training would lift up the race, instilling proper morals and behavior in the masses. Bruce's philosophy divided along class lines, and he saw no contradiction in supporting different and at times opposing methods for the advancement of different segments of African-Americans.

In hindsight, technical education has been shown to be insufficient training; it failed in its primary goal of developing a separate artisan class of blacks. However, its ancillary goals of race pride, social uplift, and improved morals achieved moderate success. Bruce believed industrial education a benefit for blacks and continued to support it. Despite the best of intentions Bruce's views were based on the fallacy of social Darwinism. He attached an innate sense of superiority to the educational and economic advantages bestowed upon him by his parents and fashioned his own plan for the deliverance of blacks from the desert of segregation. The perpetual infighting within the schools coupled with fierce opposition to his policies hampered Bruce, occupied his time, and hindered him from

⁴⁶Meier, Negro Thought, 88.

completing his plan for the education of the District's youth.

While Bruce continued his Augean task of running the District's schools, he suffered damage to his already shaky reputation by the public defection of Ralph W. Tyler. Washington's former bagman to the black press had turned and publicly vilified the Wizard's prize pupil. Tyler wrote a scathing attack never naming the assistant superintendent, yet Bruce's identity was not in doubt. The broadside received front-page coverage in the Bee. The article entitled, "Picture For Youth," pronounced Bruce a failure while at Tuskegee:

His failures in this institution, this vinyard (sic) of usefulness, shortened by his apparent unfitness for the work there cut out...his friends still hopeful for him, still loyal to the name he bore, sought and gained for him a position, elsewhere, a position of responsibility and at a greatly increased salary--sought and gained for him in spite of his immature years and previous failure....With him, even the closest friends would admit Truth was but mere fiction....Still his fawning flattery, his outward appearing sincerity, his insidious form of bribery in the shape of social teas...attracted new moths to the flame that was sure to singe....⁴⁷

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The Bee followed Thompson's urging to identify the author as Tyler, yet issued this disclaimer:

The Bee doesn't propose to be responsible for the views of correspondents, and neither will it publish criticisms that are not legitimate and neither will personal spleens be allowed to be ventilated through its columns. Persons who have grievances must resort to other methods of ventilation.⁴⁹

If Chase had to follow his own dictum, he would be hard pressed to continue publishing his paper.

Bruce beseeched Fred Moore of the New York Age not to allow the "one great newspaper among us [to] become

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spokesman for the personal animosities of my critics here in Washington....I have been unjustly criticized by all sorts of newspapers...." The assistant superintendent declared his friendship with Tyler broken and reiterated his fealty to Washington. On the subject of his membership in the NAACP which Washington opposed, Bruce stated that

...entirely apart from the personality of Du Bois who is not my friend and from the unfortunate utterances of some of its members, is doing a work which must be done if you and I and our folks are to secure equality of industrial, civil, and political rights in this country. Any Negro who does not wish such a work all success has lost his mind. I am Mr. Washington's friend and admirer....⁵⁰

Tyler's public denunciation caused Bruce to scramble to mollify and retain his supporters. Bruce had to divert time and energy away from the schools to extinguish Tyler's brushfire, one of many fanned by the fickle Chase over the years. The inability to establish continuity in the schools plagued Bruce throughout his tenure.

Chase pursued Bruce doggedly at every turn, mingling dexterous praise with sinister invective. The editor took this opportunity to disparage Bruce and the schools which have been in a state bordering on

⁵⁰Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Fred R. Moore, March 20, 1914 (31), BTW[MD] Papers.

revolution. Chase trumpeted the familiar woes of cliques, strife, and anarchistic principles. These continuing problems, he said, have robbed the schools of their usefulness or have time and time again threatened to disrupt our schools and have beyond the shadow of a doubt robbed them of their usefulness.⁵¹ The solution to the ills of the schools was to be found in a strong man who was not afraid to take the middle of the road between existing factions. The assistant superintendent needed to recognize merit over family name or association. The schools had to place the students first.⁵² Chase put forth various scenarios and candidates to improve the schools, all the while escalating the fractious struggle in the schools.⁵³

The Bee's heavy-handed tactics precipitated a break between Chase and Bruce. Bruce dismissed Chase from his "kitchen cabinet" which the assistant superintendent utilized for advice relative to certain appointments and policies. Bruce even went so far as to intimate that

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the gentleman's room was better than Chase's company.⁵⁴

The vengeful editor used an assault against himself by a teacher of the M Street High School, A.N. Glenn, as a forum to belittle and embarrass Bruce. During testimony in the assault trial, Bruce spoke of his fear of Chase, who he felt to be a dangerous man. Chase used the large circulation of his paper to attack everybody. The attorney for Chase then produced a picture of Bruce which had been given by Bruce to Chase. its inscription read, "To the unique, the fearless, the relentless, W. Calvin Chase from Roscoe C. Bruce, August 1914....The packed courtroom roared with laughter and derision...."⁵⁵ The negative publicity generated by Chase was too much for the enfeebled Tuskegee machine to mitigate.

The Tuskegee Machine in Washington was in disarray. Tyler had bolted from Washington's camp and had openly attacked Bruce. The Wizard's health was failing after years of overwork; indeed, he would die before the year was out, in November 1915. Washington's agent on the

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Personal difficulties also had kept Bruce in the public eye and coincided with the loss of support. An unfortunate car accident in April, 1915 fueled the rumor mill. Bruce was traveling to a birthday party with his personal secretary, Fred D. Morgan, Jessie Wormley, a teacher in the schools, and her two sisters; Mrs. Bruce had declined an invitation to accompany them to the party. While Bruce was driving near Relay, Maryland, the front wheel came off the automobile throwing all five occupants from the car. Bruce was carried unconscious from the accident scene and taken to a Baltimore hospital. The remaining passengers received minor injuries.⁵⁷

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Chase stepped into the breach with a sanctimonious editorial. "It is the good man who doesn't rejoice at the afflictions of the fallen or the injured. People sometimes may be indiscreet and meet with an unavoidable accident."⁵⁸ His tirade against Bruce continued the following week as he demanded a change in the school's administration. Bruce set a poor example to the fifteen thousand students in the District's schools. "Is it an example that is to be handed down to future generations?"⁵⁹ The strain of yellow journalism employed by Chase to oust Bruce was unsuccessful. The Board of Education refused to investigate the car accident and remained silent throughout the proceedings.⁶⁰

Thompson of the Negro Press Bureau gave vent to the problems in the schools yet he was not as combative as Chase. He characterized the school situation as acute and spoke of the general dissatisfaction with the methods employed by Mr. Bruce in handling the schools. A lack of confidence in Bruce's administrative ability pervaded the entire school system and limited the

⁵⁸Bee, May 1, 1915.

⁵⁹Ibid., May 8, 1915.

⁶⁰Ibid., September 18, 1915.

efficiency of all connected with the work of intellectual uplift. The Bruce machine remained well oiled, with the influential families all having relatives and friends in the schools. People hesitated to speak out because they feared their relatives would lose their jobs in the schools. "Men of real class are slow to announce themselves as willing to take place on the Board, as it is a thankless job.... because of the divisions in local sentiment and the disinclination to go where trouble may await them.... What will the harvest be?"⁶¹

Bruce survived the slings and arrows of an aroused press only to be felled by illness in the summer of 1915. Spinal meningitis was the culprit and Bruce began a long recovery at his District home.⁶² Chase offered his own brand of sympathy towards the assistant superintendent. The editor stated that the Bee was of the opinion that Bruce was the most despised man in the city. His usefulness is impaired both officially and physically, cannot be denied, and he should be replaced.⁶³

⁶¹R.W. Thompson in the Indianapolis Freeman, reprinted in the Bee, May 29, 1915.

⁶²Bee, July 31, 1915 and August 7, 1915.

⁶³Bee, July 31, 1915.

The editor pushed for the removal of Bruce because he was unfit to be assistant superintendent.⁶⁴ Chase's pleas fell on the deaf ears of the school board. The demands of the black community were often given short shrift by the board, which worked to the advantage of Bruce. Bruce regained his health and retained his position.

1915 was the beginning of the end for Bruce. His support group had deserted him, and he had to battle a united black community led and cheered on by Chase. His leadership shortcomings had been exposed in the national press. The checks and balances upon his opposition had been lifted, and he bore the full brunt of their ire.

⁶⁴Bee, August 21, 1915, August 28, 1915, and September 18, 1915.

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⁵⁷Bee, May 1, 1915; Washington Star, April 23, 1915.

Chase stepped into the breach with a sanctimonious editorial. "It is the good man who doesn't rejoice at the afflictions of the fallen or the injured. People sometimes may be indiscreet and meet with an unavoidable accident."⁵⁸ His tirade against Bruce continued the following week as he demanded a change in the school's administration. Bruce set a poor example to the fifteen thousand students in the District's schools. "Is it an example that is to be handed down to future generations?"⁵⁹ The strain of yellow journalism employed by Chase to oust Bruce was unsuccessful. The Board of Education refused to investigate the car accident and remained silent throughout the proceedings.⁶⁰

Thompson of the Negro Press Bureau gave vent to the problems in the schools yet he was not as combative as Chase. He characterized the school situation as acute and spoke of the general dissatisfaction with the methods employed by Mr. Bruce in handling the schools. A lack of confidence in Bruce's administrative ability pervaded the entire school system and limited the

⁵⁸Bee, May 1, 1915.

⁵⁹Ibid., May 8, 1915.

⁶⁰Ibid., September 18, 1915.

efficiency of all connected with the work of intellectual uplift. The Bruce machine remained well oiled, with the influential families all having relatives and friends in the schools. People hesitated to speak out because they feared their relatives would lose their jobs in the schools. "Men of real class are slow to announce themselves as willing to take place on the Board, as it is a thankless job.... because of the divisions in local sentiment and the disinclination to go where trouble may await them.... What will the harvest be?"⁶¹

Bruce survived the slings and arrows of an aroused press only to be felled by illness in the summer of 1915. Spinal meningitis was the culprit and Bruce began a long recovery at his District home.⁶² Chase offered his own brand of sympathy towards the assistant superintendent. The editor stated that the Bee was of the opinion that Bruce was the most despised man in the city. His usefulness is impaired both officially and physically, cannot be denied, and he should be replaced.⁶³

⁶¹R.W. Thompson in the Indianapolis Freeman, reprinted in the Bee, May 29, 1915.

⁶²Bee, July 31, 1915 and August 7, 1915.

⁶³Bee, July 31, 1915.

The editor pushed for the removal of Bruce because he was unfit to be assistant superintendent.⁶⁴ Chase's pleas fell on the deaf ears of the school board. The demands of the black community were often given short shrift by the board, which worked to the advantage of Bruce. Bruce regained his health and retained his position.

1915 was the beginning of the end for Bruce. His support group had deserted him, and he had to battle a united black community led and cheered on by Chase. His leadership shortcomings had been exposed in the national press. The checks and balances upon his opposition had been lifted, and he bore the full brunt of their ire.

⁶⁴Bee, August 21, 1915, August 28, 1915, and September 18, 1915.

Chapter 4: The Fall From Grace

Bruce held sway over his detractors until an obscure Dutch anthropologist, Professor H. M. Bernelot Moens, put into motion a chain of events which toppled the assistant superintendent. Moens preyed upon the desire of upper class blacks to gain acceptance and entry into the white world to further his own libidinousness. The turmoil and furor created by Moens exposed the ills and excesses within the school system and the community. The scandalized black public vented its frustrations on the best-known punchinello of black Washington, Bruce.

A letter of introduction from Du Bois and a recommendation from the Dutch embassy eased Moens' entry into the District's black social circles in the fall of 1916. The anthropologist wanted to study blacks to prove the equality/sameness of the races. He immediately requested permission to photograph a number of the city's black school children. Moens needed the photographs in order to obtain comparative anthropological data between the races. In October, 1916, and again in May, 1917, Dr. John Van Schaick, Jr., then President of the Board of Education, formally granted Moens permission. The Board had previously refused offers to photograph the school children yet reassurance from the Dutch Minister resident

swayed Van Schaick.¹

The black community welcomed Moens, and he was introduced to the best families of Washington. The professor proposed to show that "white people had as much Negro blood in them as colored people," and "to correct the charge that colored people were inferior to white people."² Moens played on black society's avidity for acceptance into white society to further his research. Nevertheless, Moens' waltz through the black community hit a snag when Assistant Superintendent Bruce limited the privileges of the anthropologist.

Several months after the commencement of Moens' research, Bruce closed the Miner School to Moens, and the anthropologist was not to be admitted to any other school to examine children without a written order from the superintendent.³ The Bureau of Investigation in the Department of Justice mounted an investigation of Moens in the fall of 1917 with the full cooperation of both the Board of Education and the Superintendent. The federal

¹Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, January 24, 1906; Ibid., March 4, 1914; Majority Report, 12. The School Board had handled earlier requests to photograph the children with a simple dismissal; however, no mention or note had indicated a connection to anthropology.

²Bee, March 29, 1919; Ibid., April 5, 1919.

³Majority Report, 13.

authorities arrested Moens on October 25, 1918, at the home of a District teacher who was "deeply interested in his work," Charlotte Hunter. The charges against Moens were possession of obscene pictures and prints for the purpose of exhibiting the same.⁴

The arrest and trial shocked District blacks, for not one had registered a complaint to the authorities against the activities of Moens. The individuals and circumstances surrounding the case provided a feeding frenzy for Chase. The Moens affair afforded Chase an opportunity to strike at the upper class for their exclusionary practices and reiterate his demand for the removal of Bruce. The Bee's initial coverage of the trial ran under the incendiary headline, "Testimony Too Revolting to Publish....Prominent Young Colored Women in Naked Poses and Unnatural Acts...."⁵

The physical evidence against Moens consisted of eight pictures, all nudes, of black schoolchildren. The professor readily admitted his illicit relations with the underage Helen Saunders. In addition, Moens had maintained a personal relationship with Charlotte Hunter. She recruited females to pose for Moens and urged these

⁴267 Federal Reporter 318; Bee, March 29, 1919, April 5, 1919.

⁵Bee, March 29, 1919, 1.

women to help Moens in the interest of the race. Numerous women testified to Moens' anthropological practices, some of which consisted of dancing around in a nude state.

The anthropologist attempted to deflect his one-sided research by claiming to have photographed at least one male, yet he could not remember the subject's full name nor did he have any records of the encounter. The failure to maintain records plagued Moens' defense. He cited books he had read that supported his work and commented "that it was necessary to take different parts of the body in nude form to determine the racial distinction."⁶

The ethnologist's attempt to bolster his case backfired as the prosecution attacked his credibility. The prosecution peppered Moens with questions on his background and chosen profession. Moens failed to answer any question on his profession, nor could he discuss the books in his discipline to which he had called the attention of the prosecution. The anthropologist could not produce any records or written notes of his examinations, he had neglected to maintain them. An expert from the Smithsonian Institute discredited Moens' discussion of anthropology stating that Moens' book selections were "nude books" and not concerned with racial

⁶Bee, April 5, 1919.

differences. The jury retired and returned a verdict of guilty. A appeals court reversed and remanded the lower court's decision, but the damage had been done in the eyes of the public.⁷

The Bee scolded and mocked the sundry participants in the aftermath of the Moens fiasco for their "white fever."

Colored society should be renovated. These people should have had better sense than to believe the rot that was being poured in their ears....There are so many colored people who are anxious to be white....The great trouble has been the color line drawn in colored society. The half-whites want to be white, to enable them to get away from the common people....Let certain classes of colored people eliminate race prejudice, segregation, and discrimination among themselves.⁸

Chase demanded an investigation of the Moens affair by the School Board and the removal of all who had taken part.

The unrest caused by Moens proved a catalyst in the formation of the Parents' League. Mrs. C.M. Turner, wife of a prominent clergyman, and R.R. Horner, the former school board member, were the leaders behind the formation of the League. A good number of clergymen joined the League yet influential clergymen including Bishop I.N. Ross and Reverend Francis J. Grimke had nothing to do with the League. Chase played an active role in the League

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

with widespread and exaggerated coverage of its activities; furthermore, he attended and spoke at League activities.⁹ The League followed the example of Chase and attacked the opposition. They "encouraged popular gatherings and aroused these gatherings into some degree of fury against the school authorities, in particular against R.C. Bruce, by voicing all sorts of ugly rumors. While justice may have been the object of some portion of the League, the methods adopted to reach that desirable end could never meet with the approval of respectable and law-abiding citizens."¹⁰

Supporters of the Parents' League packed the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church on Tuesday, April 8. Horner and others addressed the crowd and denounced the moral laxities of some in the schools, especially Miss Hunter. Public meetings would be held every Tuesday until justice prevailed. The League assembled the following morning in front of Dunbar High School looking for Hunter; many entered the building to search for her. Principal Wilkinson restored order and dispersed the crowd.

Bruce traveled into the lion's den when he attended

⁹Chase grossly exaggerated the number of people associated with the League claiming 20,000 supporters. In truth, the followers of the League numbered approximately 2,000.

¹⁰Majority Report, 14-15.

a meeting of the League on April 15. Upon Bruce's entrance to the meeting "[h]isses came thick and fast from all parts of the house."¹¹ The assistant superintendent took a seat in the pulpit and did not speak before the League while Tanner stood like Ajax and railed against him. Hunter resigned at a special meeting of the Board in April, yet it failed to quell the tide of discontent and the League continued its invective. Their slogan remained "Bruce Must Go."¹²

"Driven to the conviction early in May, 1919, that [Bruce] should adopt a direct method of protest and effort against persons seeking to damage his reputation and character as a public official, the Assistant Superintendent took part in the formulation of the so-called 'slush fund' letter--a design originating from a group of teachers exasperated by violent attacks directed toward maligning them and their superior officer."¹³ The letter lamented the untrue and unjust propaganda leveled against the school system. The teachers must band together to rehabilitate their good name under the law and recover damages for an irreparable injury wrought. The

¹¹Bee, April 19, 1919, 1.

¹²Ibid., April 19, April 26, May 3, 1919.

¹³Majority Report, 14.

lawsuit would target certain newspapers and its correspondents and "all the officers, members, and associates of the so-called Parents' League...[and] seek damages in the sum of upward of \$100,000...." Each teacher should contribute \$2.00 to offset the expected legal bills.¹⁴

Bruce brought the petition to the attention of the Board of Education before its existence was known to the public. The Board reprimanded Bruce for his indiscretion, and he immediately ceased his efforts to solicit funds. The Assistant Corporation Counsel rendered an opinion, made public through the Board, that Bruce had violated no law through the "slush-fund" letter. Nevertheless, the Parents' League had received a copy of the letter which only provided more fuel for their unrelenting opposition to the assistant superintendent.

Horner, representing the League, went before the assembled Board on May 7, 1919 and requested the "constitutional right of presenting petitions signed by about ten thousand patrons of the colored schools for the removal of Assistant Superintendent Bruce on the averment that his usefulness at the head of public education in the colored schools is at an end." Henry E. Davis, counsel

¹⁴Bee, May 10, 1919, 1.

for Bruce, asked the critics of Bruce to place their accusations of Bruce into specific charges and the Board concurred.

George C. Smith, as chairman of the Public Schools Committee of the Central Northwest Citizens Association, filed formal charges against Bruce in early June alleging "moral, pedagogical, and administrative unfitness." A large company had assembled in the Board room in opposition to Bruce, and the President addressed them stating that the "formal charges presented against [Bruce] had been placed with the Corporation Counsel and that these charges were being considered by that official and that when a report thereon had been returned the Board would act in accordance with the recommendations made, uninfluenced by any public clamor."¹⁵

The Corporation Counsel returned an opinion that no legal action need be undertaken by the Board against Bruce. The charges filed against the assistant superintendent did not have legal standing. The Board found no grounds for the charges of moral turpitude in the evidence presented to the Board, limiting the charges to the efficiency and methods of Bruce. By limiting the charges, the Board allowed itself a large degree of

¹⁵Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, May 7, 1919; May 21, 1919; June 4, 1919; June 11, 1919.

discretion in judging the work of Bruce.

An editorial in the Bee asked rhetorically:

If the Assistant Superintendent is not responsible for the proper conduct of the colored schools, who is? Who is? By what authority did the alleged Scientist Moens take pictures of pupils in the colored schools? Did Mr. Bruce have knowledge of the conduct of this alleged scientist? If he did or did not should be sufficient reason alone to retire him from our schools....Is [the Parents' League] protest to be ignored because a few white men on the Board of Education want him?¹⁶

In July, 1919, the Board authorized a committee consisting of three Board of Education members "to take promptly such steps as they deem necessary to investigate the question of the administrative and educational efficiency of Roscoe C. Bruce...." The Board members assigned to the committee were Coralie Franklin Cook, H. Barrett Learned, and Fountain Peyton. Of the three, only Peyton was a staunch ally of the Parents' League.

The committee sent letters to forty-eight men and women associated with the schools requesting their appearance. The committee sought persons who "could be counted on for specific knowledge concerning a variety of matters pertaining to educational and administrative organization, and who were likely to have intelligent impressions, whether favorable or unfavorable, as to the

¹⁶Bee, June 28, 1919.

character and work" of Assistant Superintendent Bruce. They allowed the president of the Parents' League to name five representatives of the League to appear before the committee. Including Bruce, thirty-four out of the forty-eight testified before the committee. They amassed 739 pages of testimony, and the investigation continued on into the fall.¹⁷

The Board had closed the proceedings of the investigation to the public believing that the witnesses would be able to speak more freely outside the glare of public scrutiny. The Parents' League expressed dismay at the decision of the Board, and Dr. Tanner, a leader of the League, declared that he had "no faith in the committee....[and] a man who is to be investigated with closed doors is no man at all, and...he did not propose to be caught in such a trap."¹⁸ The Bee exclaimed that the League, plagued by infighting, had bungled the case against Bruce and that he would be exonerated.¹⁹

President Van Schiack placed the following resolution before the Board on October, 1:

Resolved, That we concur in the findings of the

¹⁷Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, June 30, 1919; July 30, 1919.

¹⁸Bee, August 9, 1919.

¹⁹Bee, August 30, 1919.

majority of the special committee appointed on July 30 to investigate the educational and administrative efficiency of Roscoe C. Bruce--that he is competent to fill the position of assistant superintendent of the colored schools of the District.²⁰

The resolution was adopted with Peyton the only vote in the negative.

The League was furious with the decision of the Board and demanded action, this time they would take their case to Congress. They would appeal "to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intention, do solemnly declare that for the welfare of the young colored boy and girl of this community, we shall never cease our efforts until [Bruce] is separated from the system."²¹

The Senate of the United States did select a committee of five senators to hold hearings on the public school system of the District of Columbia. The senators held hearings in March, 1920 and Coralie Cook represented the schools. The Senate took no official action, yet Senator William M. Calder (N.Y.) wrote to Superintendent Frank W. Ballou late in the year in support of Bruce. The Senator asked that Ballou do nothing in this matter

²⁰Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, October 1, 1919.

²¹Bee, October 4 and 11, 1919.

without his concurrence.²²

The three member committee assigned to investigate the assistant superintendent divided as chairman Learned and Cook supported Bruce while Peyton adamantly opposed the retention of the assistant superintendent. Learned and Cook submitted the majority report of the investigating committee to the Board on October 8, 1919. Peyton then submitted his own highly critical report of Bruce to the Board two weeks later stating that Bruce remained unfit for the position of assistant superintendent and demanding Bruce's immediate resignation.

The balanced report of Learned and Cook responded to the rumors and rumblings of discontent which had plagued Bruce's administration since he took office. They absolved Bruce of specific wrongdoing, clearing the assistant superintendent of the charges filed by the Parents' League. Yet in answering systematically the charges against the assistant superintendent, they acknowledged the shortcomings of Bruce. Their report

²²Hearings before the Select Committee of the United States Senate, Sixty-sixth Congress, Second Session, pursuant to S. Res. 310 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920). William M. Calder to Frank W. Ballou, December 20, 1920 (Sumner School Archives, Washington, D.C.). Ballou replaced Thurston as Superintendent of Schools in 1920.

encapsulated the problems associated with Bruce's administration of the schools. Their carefully worded criticisms marked the end of Bruce's effectiveness as assistant superintendent.

The pardon of Bruce began with the following statement which draws comparison to Cicero's orations against Cato,

In the light of the testimony, your committee discovers no ground for statements emanating from a variety of sources which would implicate the Assistant Superintendent as guilty of serious breaches of morality. We find no sound reasons for believing that he gambles, plays the races, or is a drinking man.²³

The report dredged up the Relay, Maryland incident in which Bruce and a number of his friends were injured in an automobile accident in 1915. The public examination of one's personal life was anathema to Bruce and members of the black aristocracy who guarded closely their privacy. Even though the committee found Bruce's character acceptable, the examination itself reduced the credibility of the assistant superintendent.

The committee reviewed Bruce's educational qualifications and experiences prior to his arriving in the District of Columbia in 1906. His time spent at Tuskegee had provided a variety of experiences in

²³Majority Report, 5.

educational work. "Inevitably during these years [at Tuskegee] he got away from the standards of traditional classical modes of education--his mind was aroused along lines of industrial and vocational training. Could he have had, it may be asked, a better basis at that time in his career for later educational and administrative work?"²⁴

Bruce carried forth the lessons of Tuskegee to the District implementing industrial education programs including making Armstrong a vocational secondary school. The Board backed Bruce's plans despite vocal opposition and later commented in their Majority Report that "results in educational policies reveal themselves slowly....And parents, unable to detect easily or promptly the advantages which they had hoped to see, are prone to condemn the schools and the authorities behind them. Nevertheless we believe that Mr. Bruce has worked systematically along lines of industrial training and education that are in accord with the more progressive ideals of the day."²⁵

Employment opportunities with the schools created ferocious and often contentious conditions among blacks in

²⁴Ibid., 7-8.

²⁵Ibid., 8-9.

the District. Bruce recruited well-trained teachers from "outside the immediate scope of Washington's training schools....Necessarily this policy reduces somewhat the opportunities of those trained here to obtain places in these schools." The discontent created by this policy focused on the assistant superintendent and the power he had over hiring and firing in the schools. "A more notable factor underlying the colored school situation [was] the narrow range in which ambitious teachers [were] placed."

Segregation forced over-qualified blacks to accept teaching positions for lack of more suitable employment. Inflation caused by World War I taxed the "all but stationary" income of the teachers. Competition, little room for advancement, segregation, monetary pressures, and the influx of teachers from outside the District combined to form a cauldron of disgruntled people. The criticism levelled at Bruce can be attributed to "such general factors." Moreover, the recommendations and changes instituted by Bruce were "usually contingent upon the judgement of his superiors."²⁶

The administrative fitness of Bruce received the harshest criticism from the Board. "Instances occur in

²⁶Ibid., 9-11.

the record where it could be shown...that Mr. Bruce, anxious to safeguard feelings, has been overcautious, slow, and quite too vague in making decisive statements." Bruce attempted to please everyone, which only aroused more criticism. He relied on diplomacy and tact in an effort to hide his lack of force.²⁷

The position of assistant superintendent required an individual capable of decisive, direct action. Bruce because of his upbringing and personality traits eschewed confrontation and waffled in a leadership position. He looked to and relied upon his superiors for guidance as well as decision-making. Bruce boasted of thrashing a rival,²⁸ yet he did not possess the rectitude necessary to lead the black public schools.

The report exposed the tangled morass of rumor, influence, and power known as the District's black public schools. Bruce sought the position of assistant superintendent with the help of Booker T. Washington. He came to the District with an agenda for industrial education. He remained steadfast and resolute yet failed to sway the black populace of the District. His support lessened through the years and plummeted after the death

²⁷Ibid., 11.

²⁸See chapter 1, footnote 11.

of Washington. The Moens controversy centered animus upon the assistant superintendent and he floundered in the aftermath. The lengthy investigation of Bruce by the Board cleared him, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. He continued as assistant superintendent and the League continued its opposition. The League's unrelenting mantra, "Bruce Must Go," forced the Board of Education to issue the following statement:

The Newly organized Board of Education puts itself on record at the start as satisfied with the character and the educational and administrative efficiency of Roscoe C. Bruce....Nothing has happened since [the investigation] to alter in any [way] the conviction there expressed that Mr. Bruce is capable in the handling of his difficult tasks...The New Superintendent of Schools [Frank W. Ballou], like all his predecessors, will have fair opportunity to pass judgement upon Mr. Bruce's work.²⁹

The Board did not move publicly on the Bruce matter and the League sent an obdurate letter to Superintendent Ballou. The League believed that the Bruce situation had been passed on to the new administration and that Ballou would have a resolution palatable to the League. The letter claimed that the action of the Board was a "gross injustice" and those who dared to speak out against Bruce have felt the "weight of his Avenging Hand." "We have

²⁹Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, July 1, 1920.

waited patiently on you in this matter, and now expect action, immediate action, and such action as would be forthcoming if Dr. Bruce were White, and the conditions affecting the White Children."³⁰

The Board's public silence on Bruce masked a concerted behind-the-scenes effort by Ballou to diffuse the power of the Parents' League. Ballou fretted over the consequences of any action on Bruce. If he cleared Bruce, it would strengthen suspicions that he had accepted the position as superintendent with the understanding that Bruce would remain in office. On the other hand, if the superintendent found evidence to reopen the case, it would discredit the present Board of Education which had twice in the past year "endorsed emphatically" the work of Bruce. Ballou doubted a pronouncement on Bruce would reestablish public confidence in Bruce. Finally, the superintendent desired that any course of action would "make it impossible for the Parents' League to glory in any possible embarrassment which may come to Mr. Bruce...."³¹

³⁰Charles P. Neill to H. B. Learned, September 18, 1920; F.S. Tanner to Frank W. Ballou, September 1, 1920 (emphasis in original) (Sumner School Archives, Washington, D.C.).

³¹"Tentative Conclusions Arrived at by the Superintendent in Relation to the case of Roscoe C. Bruce," September 17, 1920 (Sumner School Archives,

Ballou proposed three possible scenarios to resolve the Bruce crisis. One, Bruce should request an indefinite leave of absence in which his position would be held open for him. He would then file suit against the Parents' League for "libel, slander and for defamation of character." If Bruce won the case, then he would be reinstated. If he lost, then "it should be understood that his resignation would be filed with the Superintendent." Second, supporters of Bruce should form a Bruce League and organize their own mass meetings. Third, Bruce should ask for an indefinite leave of absence on the "grounds of need of rest as a result of the annoyance of the Parents' League without filing suit...."³²

Bruce did not take the advice of Ballou, and his administration stumbled into the next year. Professor Kelly Miller and Ballou held a conference in April. They spoke frankly on the Bruce situation. Miller advised Ballou that "any attempt to remove Mr. Bruce from the school service would result in a united effort on the part of the colored people" in support of Bruce. According to

Washington, D.C.).

³²"Memorandum for a Conference with Dr. Simon and Mr. Bruce," Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, July 1, 1920 (Sumner School Archives, Washington, D.C.).

Miller, the assistant superintendent's greatest fault was his "too great deference," and reliance upon the advice of others. Ballou replied that Bruce's "deference" should be described a "lack of proper moral courage...and an unwillingness to assume full responsibility for his own conduct."³³

Bruce felt "as he has often done in the past, that the situation was not particularly serious, that he had the respect of the large majority of the colored people...." He reiterated that he would not retire from the school system. The Board and Bruce were at odds. The longstanding feud between the school system and the League had frayed the Board's relationship with Bruce. The Board wanted an end to the public vilification of the schools, but Bruce failed to admit the seriousness of the situation.³⁴

Ballou submitted a report on the administration of the schools by Bruce to the Board on May 18, 1921.

After observation for a period of eight months, and as a result of most painstaking inquiry, I conclude that Roscoe C. Bruce does not possess the necessary academic and pedagogical qualifications to discharge

³³"Memorandum of Conference with Professor Kelly Miller," April 8, 1921 (Sumner School Archives, Washington, D.C.).

³⁴"Memorandum of a Conference with Mr. Bruce," April 15, 1921 (Sumner School Archives, Washington, D.C.).

satisfactorily the duties of Assistant Superintendent of Schools for colored children.

Whatever the reason may be, he lacks the necessary public confidence. His professional acts...have not been of a character to enable him to acquire and maintain that confidence which is indispensable to a man in his position.

His official staff does not have proper professional respect for him, nor for the office of Assistant Superintendent of Schools as administered by him.

I am of the further opinion that the past eight months have demonstrated conclusively that Mr. Bruce cannot become master of this important position.

Accordingly I recommend the passage of an order terminating at once the services of Roscoe C. Bruce as Assistant Superintendent for the Colored Schools.³⁵

Bruce requested an indefinite leave of absence from the schools the following day. "During the term of such leave, if I should desire to engage in any other gainful occupation, I request permission of the Board of Education to do so." Garnet C. Wilkinson replaced Bruce as Assistant Superintendent.³⁶ Bruce came to the District hailed as a young Aeschines, a leader of African-Americans. The next sixteen years brought a steady and inexorable erosion of support for Bruce. The Board supported Superintendent Ballou's decision and fired Bruce, ending his tumultuous tenure as assistant

³⁵Minutes of the District of Columbia School Board, May 18, 1921.

³⁶Minutes of the District of Columbia Board of Education, May 19, 1921.

superintendent.

Bruce while in high school wrote a prize-winning essay entitled, "Our Hero," on the leadership of Frederick Douglass. He wrote in part:

The men who have attained greatest honor in the world's history, have been those who have been bold enough to brave the criticism, the rebuke, aye, even the enmity of their associates in the advocacy of principles that they have believed to be just....They have been men of decision of character, men who loved the right, revered the truth, and cherished justice. Such men have been the milestones in the march of progress.³⁷

Bruce lacked these same qualities which he ascribed to Douglass. Bruce received an upbringing far-removed from the slavery of his father. He was the son of a United States Senator, was educated at Harvard, and was promoted and protected by Booker T. Washington. Still, the benefits of a privileged upbringing could not offset the personal deficiencies of Bruce. A golden boy in his time, Bruce failed to attain the high expectations of a black populace desperate for advancement and integration. They wanted more than Bruce was capable of; he did not possess the inner strength to succeed. The difficult position of Assistant Superintendent unveiled the real Bruce, an insecure man intent on the position, incapable of running the District's black public schools.

³⁷"Our Hero," (10-4) RCB Papers.

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PRIMARY SOURCES AND NEWSPAPERS

The most useful manuscript collection was the Booker T. Washington Papers, Library of Congress; the collection contains over one million items. The University of Maryland at College Park maintains photocopies of approximately 10% of the BTW Papers held at the Library of Congress. This extensive collection shed light on numerous individuals and is unmatched in detailing African-American life during the Age of Washington. At Howard University, I used the Roscoe Conkling Bruce Papers. The RCB Papers consist primarily of private letters to his parents and his wife. The personal letters offer insight into Bruce not available elsewhere. Richard Hurlbut at the Sumner School Archives gave graciously of his time and provided information on the District of Columbia's public schools. The archives contain invaluable information on the Bruce's administration. Helen Moss of the District of Columbia Board of Education granted access to the Minutes of the Board. The Minutes were perfunctory, lacking both detail and depth, especially when they dealt with the workings of the black

public schools. Nevertheless, they provided the framework of the narrative.

The Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, Washington, D.C. provided microfilm copies of the Washington Bee and the Washington Star. The Bee was the primary newspaper for the District's African-American population during Bruce's administration. Its' editor, W. Calvin Chase, provided extensive coverage of both the school system and the black community. The coverage was oftentimes slanted due to Chase's biases, yet his contribution to Washington history cannot be overlooked.

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