



This was also the period of the **Atlanta Compromise** which was to set the pattern for acceptable Black/white relationships over the next several decades. Its author was Booker T. Washington, then a relatively obscure principal of a relatively obscure Black training school, Tuskegee Institute. With a single speech delivered on September 18, 1895 at the Cotton State's Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, he was catapulted into national and international prominence as the anointed leader of his people. Putting aside, at least temporarily, any quest for social and political equality for the Black man, Washington told white America what it wanted to hear and was prepared to accept.

He told his Black brethren to "cast down your buckets where you are" and cultivate friendly relations with southern white

men. "Let us work to earn their respect," he urged, for "the wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extreme folly." And then the promise to Blacks and whites:

"In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

Thus the die was cast. Blacks were being told to put their dreams of political and social equality on the shelf. White America was elated. Washington had found the solution for the nation's race relations and for the next twenty years he would occupy a position of power and influence that was almost unassailable.

"The Boston Riot"

In the meantime, racial lines hardened. Lynchings continued

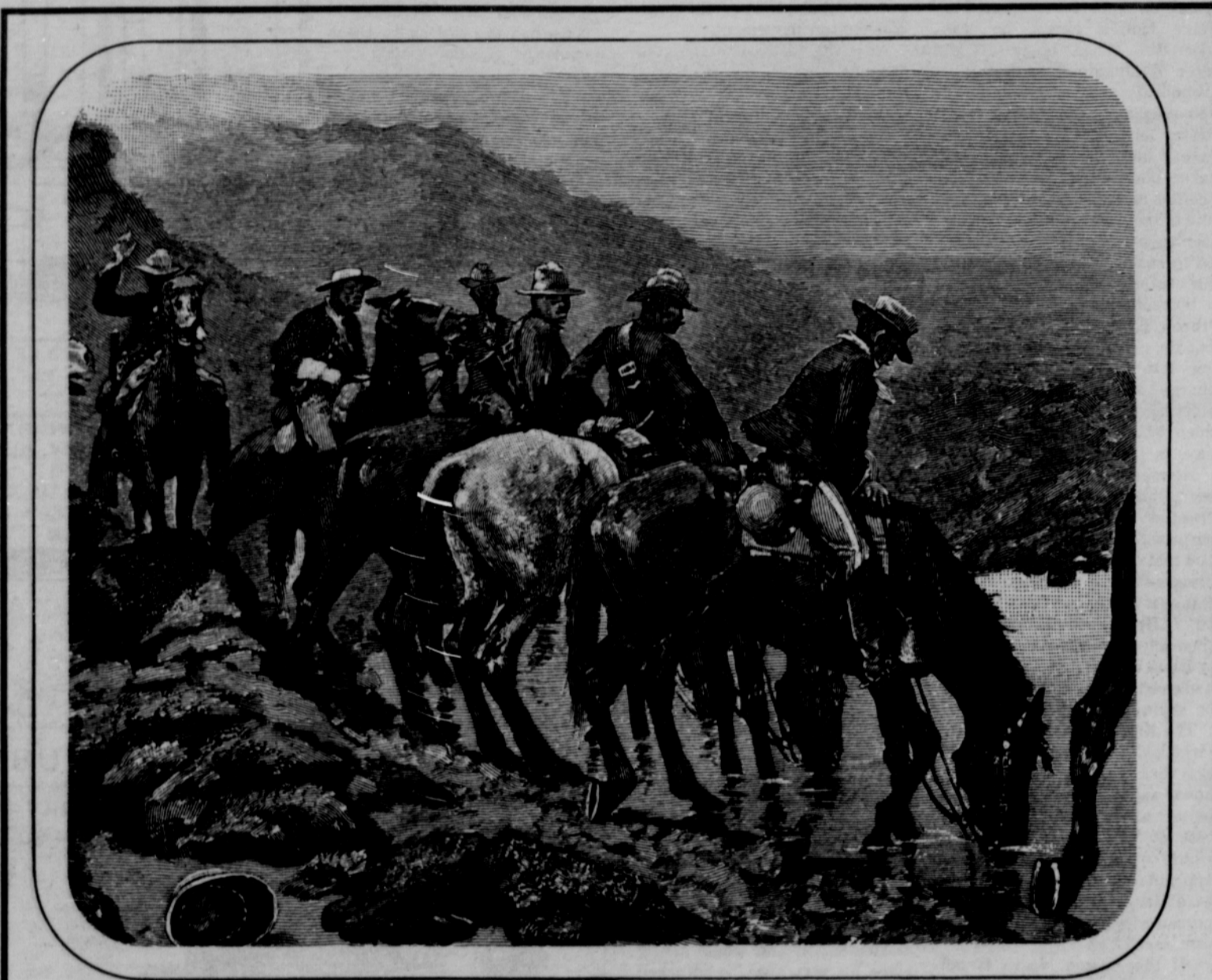
as the Black man was pushed further and further down the ladder. Not every Black agreed that Washington's road was the right one to follow and in Boston, a young man who graduated from Harvard the same year that Washington made his Atlanta speech, was beginning to feel the first stirring of a consuming passion that would come to dominate his life. He was William Monroe Trotter, one of the most neglected and least understood figures in the Black press. Born and reared in comfortable circumstances, Trotter, a Bostonian, was the first Black elected to Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard and graduated magna cum laude from that school. For several years after his graduation the brilliant Trotter seemed to drift but finally on November 9, 1901 he began his life's work, the editorship of **The Guardian** in Boston.

other groups gave financial support to the press; religious organizations entered the world of the press to advance their views; Blacks qualified to vote provided an audience for politically-sponsored publications, and the influence an editor was able to exert attracted people to the field. To these arguments should be added the fact that Blacks were beginning to move from the South to northern urban centers where they were concentrated in racially homogenous communities capable of supporting Black publications.

The increase in the number of Black papers coincided, however, with a decline in militant attitudes among those in the Black press. It was as if after years of fighting so relentlessly for the end of slavery, the Black press was not taking time to catch its breath before plunging ahead into the brave new world it helped to create and which seemed promised by the victory of the North over the South and the coming Reconstruction. In commenting on this period, the historian, Lerone Bennett, Jr., has written:

"After the Civil War, the influence of the Negro press diminished. There were, to be sure, vigorous Negro editors like T. Thomas Fortune and Calvin Chase, but the press, as a whole, was not as militant as the **North Star** and other periodicals of the abolitionist era."

Whatever hopes there were for the brave new world, faded under the harshness and pervasiveness of the racism the South turned loose on Blacks after the North, in the compromise of 1877, removed the Federal presence from the South. Former slavemasters were again free to do unto Blacks as they willed. Given the reality of America at that time -- the brutality of the South and the cold indifference of the North -- this perhaps was not the best of times for militancy. One editor who tried and failed was Ida B. Wells, a teacher and publisher of the **Memphis Free Speech**. In 1892 she saw her printing plant wrecked because she had published an article that suggested white capitalists had inspired the murder of three Black businessmen. She was forced to flee the city to save her life.



*We salute the contributions
of Black People
in the building of the nation*

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