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CALVIN COOLIDGE'S AFRO-AMERICAN CONNECTION

IN THE WAKE of President Warren G. Harding's death and the entry of Calvin Coolidge in the White House as chief executive in August, 1923, blacks, like the bulk of ordinary white Americans, were uncertain of what to expect. Nonetheless, those close to the prior presidential administration, whether black or white, had clear reason to believe that Coolidge was preeminently qualified to carry on in the fashion of his predecessor. They anticipated his continued implementation of Republican policies in accord with political promises which had led to the party's overwhelming electoral victory in 1920. Indeed, Harding's breaking of tradition to allow his Vice President Coolidge to sit with the presidential cabinet ensured that the new chief executive understood and was prepared administratively to deal with tariff issues, tax-reform legislation, measures for the reduction of the public debt, and the host of other political promises Republicans made in 1920. In 1924 Coolidge, however, had to win nomination and election to the office in his own right in order to continue the quest for legislation consonant with the Republican party political mandate received four years earlier.

In one sense, Coolidge's ascendancy to the executive office and his unfolding, staunch campaign for election to that post in 1924 were reminiscent of the political activities of Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. Roosevelt had aggressively demonstrated that an individual in the generally regarded "dead end" political job of vice president could inherit the chief executive post, wrest control of the party from its recognized leaders if need be, and make a gallant and successful bid to become president. Roosevelt became the first vice president to engineer such a feat, and managed to do so on the formation of a strong political coalition that involved both blacks and whites. Coolidge's task was not unlike that of Roosevelt, though he would have to duplicate such a feat in less than half the time Roosevelt had had at his disposal. Coolidge's assignment, however, was somewhat less difficult owing to his almost total agreement on economic and political principles with his predecessor, Harding. This was part of the attraction of Republicans to Coolidge. If the President had any major problem at all, it centered on possible political complications arising out of the alarming innuendoes concerning the corruption and scandal of the Harding administration. Such

rumors had the potential of undermining Coolidge's credibility and bid for the presidency in 1924 by associating him too much with the Harding administration.¹

Coolidge moved expeditiously and adroitly toward grappling with this problem and achieving his overall goal of election to the presidency. In the process he shrewdly sought political support from both blacks and whites in the South where Republican popularity would almost assuredly bring about national success for the party in 1924. In bidding for the political backing of white southerners, Coolidge appointed C. Bascom Slemp, former congressman from Virginia to the post as White House secretary in 1923, and also made another southerner, Clarence Sherill, his new military aide and superintendent of buildings and grounds in the District of Columbia. In the quest for the presidential nomination in 1924, he realized their value in the effort to obtain additional white southern support as quickly as possible. Slemp, in particular, did prove extremely useful to Coolidge in his bid for the nomination when the white southerner explained to a congressional committee the nature and extent of the Harding administration scandal. He was able to convince the Republican national convention to forego an earlier ruling that would have reduced significantly the number of delegates from Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina, states where the incumbent president anticipated major support. Slemp also impressed upon other white southern Republicans the importance of backing Coolidge for the presidential nomination. In bringing Slemp into the White House, Coolidge, in particular, had succeeded in increasing his stature among Southern whites. The President next turned to the Afro-American community, equally zealous in courting an important political friendship.²

In seeking the support of Afro-Americans, Coolidge understood the political implication of the demographic shift of some 400,000 to 1,000,000 blacks from the South in the years between 1910 and 1920 (something most white Republicans seemed to be oblivious or unwilling to grasp fully), and therefore appreciated the potential of the black vote in key states. In Coolidge's papers is a memorandum of 9 August 1924 noting the number of Afro-American voters in "important states" in the West and North. Attracting these Afro-American voters

¹ For cogent discussions of this question, see John Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); Seth Scheiner, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Negro, 1901-1908," *Journal of Negro History*, 47 (November, 1962): 169; Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington, The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3-32; Donald McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge: The Quiet President* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1967), 217, 241.

² Edward C. Lathem, *Your Son, Calvin Coolidge* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1968), 34-40; McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge*, 1-30, 217, 241; Claude M. Feuss, *Calvin Coolidge: The Man From Vermont* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1940), 1-70.

was the challenge for Coolidge, for they had no especial reason to support him. While the appointments of Slemp and Sherrill counted as excellent political strategy for gaining white southern support, they were decisions anathema to many blacks who viewed the two men as little more than segregationists and members of the "Lily White" faction. That faction had emerged in the South in the 1890s on the basis of a political program excluding Afro-Americans from participating and exercising influence in Republican party conventions on the local, state, and national levels. The appointments were not encouraging signs to Afro-Americans, then sizing up a Coolidge who indeed had been almost too quiet as Vice President and was still largely unknown to blacks. Upon becoming president in 1923 about the only virtue he had to commend him to blacks was the fact that he came from New England, a region Afro-Americans associated with the Abolitionist movement of the antebellum era and with more liberal attitudes on matters affecting race relations and citizenship rights for blacks at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet New England had instilled in him none of this strong commitment or determination to improving race relations in the country.³

There were reasons, however, for Coolidge's lack of interest in critical racial issues of his day. In Vermont where he was born on 4 July 1872, Coolidge, if the written record is correct, had no familiarity with Afro-Americans or the host of problems they faced. His first exposure to blacks came in a limited manner in the early 1890s when he entered Amherst College. Prominent on Amherst's campus in that period was the accomplished Afro-American student athlete, William H. Lewis, who after graduating from that college obtained a law degree from Harvard University and subsequently became a follower of the unusually powerful black leader and principal of Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington. Lewis' athletic exploits while he was in college caught the attention of Coolidge during his school days at Amherst. In October, 1892, the young Calvin, who attended major athletic contests involving college rivalries, wrote to his father that the Harvard football team had trounced soundly its Amherst opponents by a score of 26 to 0 and that a "negro by the name of Lewis" playing "centre rush" led the Cambridge eleven to victory. This was perhaps the only interest Coolidge expressed in an Afro-American, at least while he was a student at Amherst.⁴

In Coolidge's subsequent career as an attorney in Northampton, legislator,

³ "Memorandum on Important States," August 9, 1924, reel 63, Calvin Coolidge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts; Sam Marvello, "The Migration of Blacks to the North, 1911-1918" *Journal of Black Studies*, 15 (March, 1985), 292; Daniel M. Johnson and Rex R. Campbell, *Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981), 68-79.

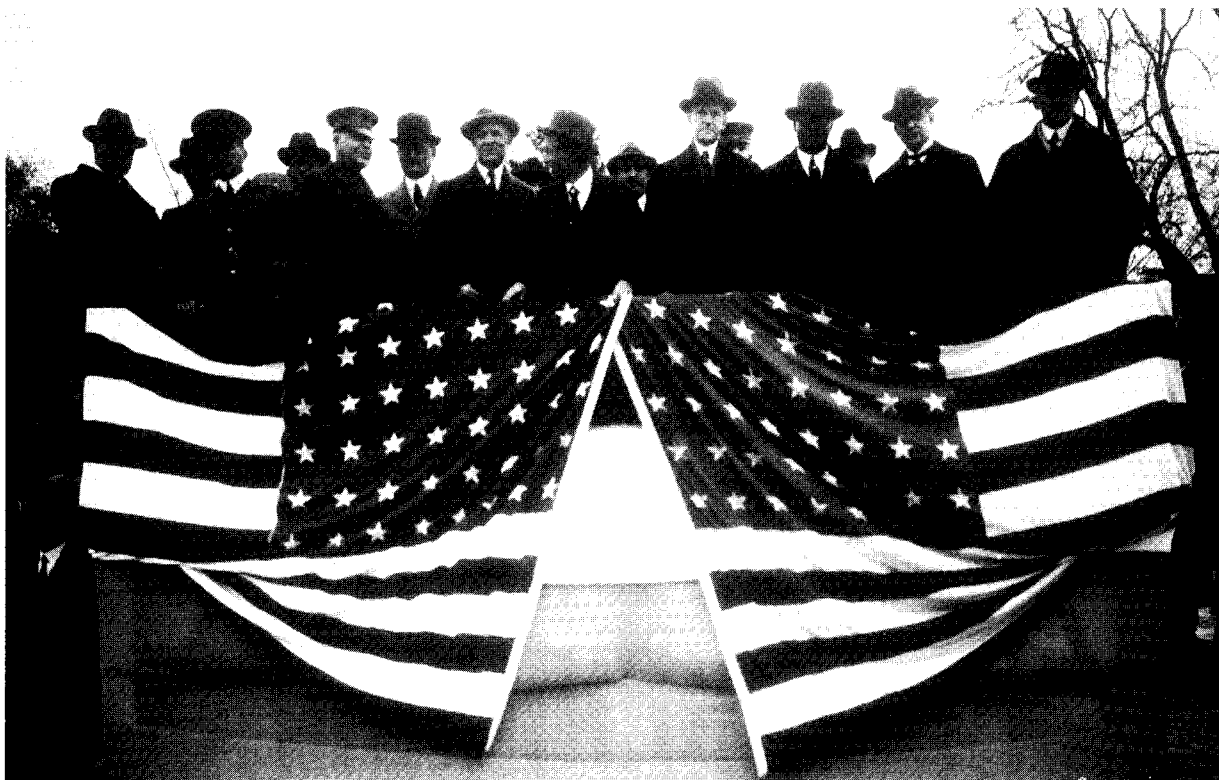
⁴ Lathem, *Your Son, Calvin Coolidge*, 34-40; McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge*, 1-30; Feuss, *Calvin Coolidge: The Man From Vermont*, 1-70.

and governor in Massachusetts from 1900 to 1920, and early years as the Vice President of the United States, he focused in a nominal and limited way on issues of concern to Afro-Americans. The sum total of his early political efforts on behalf of the black community may have been a ceremonial salute as governor in 1919 welcoming home Massachusetts black soldiers who fought in World War I and his discussion on 27 April 1920 with then Boston attorney William H. Lewis regarding the possibility of forming a machine gun battalion of Afro-American troops in Massachusetts. This latter recommendation Coolidge transmitted to the Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. Coolidge's later years as Vice President, however, did acquaint him with some Afro-American leaders on the national level. He responded positively to a request in 1922 from Emmett Jay Scott, formerly secretary to Booker T. Washington, to recommend a black, Butler Wilson, for a state patronage job in Massachusetts. Coolidge honored this appeal owing largely to the political support he received from Butler as a Massachusetts delegate to the Republican party presidential nominating convention of 1920.⁵

Later as Vice President, Coolidge had a chance to see an important side of black life in the South when he traveled to Tuskegee, Alabama in 1923 to participate in the dedication ceremony for the opening of the Veterans Hospital. There he met Robert Russa Moton, formerly commandant of cadets at Hampton Institute, who succeeded Booker T. Washington as principal of Tuskegee Institute in 1916. Coolidge came to like the Afro-American leader as well as the brand of educational training he espoused at Tuskegee Institute: trades and crafts or the newest techniques in farming, all primarily in the endeavor to prepare blacks for jobs or land ownership. While in the Alabama town, Coolidge, in a prompt show of support for Moton, volunteered to contribute to efforts to increase the endowment funds of Tuskegee Institute and its sister school, Hampton in Virginia. His appreciation of Moton and the difficulties the black leader faced in the South also led to a significant show of support from the White House when the struggle over control of the Veterans Hospital precipitated racial tension in Tuskegee shortly after the medical facilities were opened.⁶

⁵ Emmett Jay Scott to William H. Lewis, 27 April 1920, cont. 18; Lewis to Scott, 30 April 1920, cont. 28; Scott to Channing Cox, 25 January 1923, cont. 24; Republican Party Campaign Broadside, c. 1920, cont. 28, Emmett Jay Scott Papers, Soper Library, Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland.

⁶ Robert R. Moton to Calvin Coolidge, 17 December 1924, reel 64; Calvin Coolidge Statement, 3 October 1924, reel 64, Coolidge Papers, Microfilm Edition; Coolidge to Moton, 9 August 1923, cont. 86, Robert Russa Moton Papers, Hollis B. Frissell Library, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama; Pete Daniel, "Black Power in the 1920s: The Case of Tuskegee Veterans Hospital," *Journal of Southern History*, 36 (August, 1970) 368-88; Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 5-31.



Calvin Coolidge

Reviewing the Tuskegee R.O.T.C., 1923: fifth from right, Governor W.W. Brandon of Alabama; fourth, Vice President Calvin Coolidge; third, Dr. Robert R. Moton, Principal, Tuskegee Institute. Photo courtesy of Dan T. Williams, Archivist, Tuskegee University.

Tuskegee white opposition in 1923 to Afro-American employment in upper-echelon jobs in the Veterans Hospital led to a Ku Klux Klan march on the grounds of the facilities to intimidate blacks then working there. In its sortie on the hospital, however, the white supremacist group avoided marching directly on the campus of nearby Tuskegee Institute where many Afro-American farmers and school alumni had stationed themselves to protect Moton, the students, and the institution identified with the venerable Booker T. Washington. In the midst of this tension-filled environment Moton, who was confronted with the difficult diplomatic task of maintaining peace as well as obtaining jobs for blacks in the hospital, received extraordinary support from the White House in accomplishing his two objectives.⁷

By 1923 Coolidge, it seems, had come to sympathize with blacks on some problems regarding their plight in the American society, but perhaps more significant was the fact that in this stage of his political career, he had come to understand these issues through contact with Tuskegee individuals such as Moton, Scott, and Lewis. Like their former leader Booker T. Washington, they were individuals who sought to profit by ties to powerful politicians and philanthropists in the North and South. Consequently, they turned to Coolidge with similar thoughts when he became president in 1923. Coolidge's ties to these individuals, coupled with his willingness to meet with other distinguished reform-minded blacks, augured well for the President during his formative months in office and led to a period of good will between him and the overall Afro-American community.⁸

Coolidge welcomed officials of the Negro National Educational Congress to the White House in September, 1923 and listened attentively to their expressions of alarm about the problems of segregation and discrimination within the federal government. In October the President granted an interview to an Afro-American group brought to Washington by William Monroe Trotter, the fiery black editor of the *Boston Guardian*. Trotter had gained much attention at the turn of the twentieth century as a major critic of Booker T. Washington's public program of placing economic development and trade school education ahead of the struggle for Afro-American voting rights and crusade against segregationist codes in the country. (Trotter, who seldom minced words, had been so outspoken on a

⁷ Daniel, "Black Power in the 1920s," 368-88; Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 5-31.

⁸ In the personal papers of Coolidge and his standard biographies by McCoy and Feuss, there is no evidence to suggest that his contact with blacks during his early days and vice presidency went beyond interaction with the Tuskegee-oriented men. For information on this topic see the microfilm edition of the Coolidge papers as well as the collection of personal correspondence located in Forbes Library in Northampton, Massachusetts.

previous trip to the White House almost a decade earlier that then President, Woodrow Wilson, peremptorily terminated the meeting. This made it all the more remarkable that another President, Coolidge, would agree to see the Boston editor.) In that meeting Trotter urged the President to continue to assist Moton in his efforts to ensure blacks a central role in policies pertaining to the Veterans Hospital. Trotter also encouraged Coolidge to give strong presidential backing to an anti-lynching bill expected to come before Congress in 1924, and take steps to increase the enrollment of blacks in West Point and the Naval Academy. After the Trotter meeting, the President met another black delegation led to the White House in that same month by the prominent Afro-American attorney from Richmond, Virginia, Giles B. Jackson, who impressed upon Coolidge the need for a Negro Industrial Commission, a proposal expected to be included in the Delaware Congressman Caleb R. Layton's legislative bill to be considered by the House of Representatives that year.⁹

From the President's viewpoint, perhaps the most significant black visitor to the White House in October was Robert Russa Moton, the principal of Tuskegee, who had come to share with Coolidge information on southern political issues affecting the Republican party. The meeting was the result of a letter from Moton to Coolidge several weeks earlier, advising the President to confer with southern politicians Joseph O. Thompson, a white in Alabama, and Robert R. Church, a wealthy black businessman in Tennessee. Both men, as former Booker T. Washington political associates, had acquired an excellent understanding of the Republican party machine in their region. Their advice, Moton believed, would be useful in grappling with the issues of delegate support in the convention and the possible political strength of the party in their states in the election of 1924. Other Tuskegee-oriented political stalwarts attuned to the Booker T. Washington dictates of obtaining patronage positions traveled to the White House in October, the most prominent being Emmett Jay Scott, then secretary-treasurer and business manager of Howard University, James A. Cobb, a law professor at the same institution, and William H. Lewis. They, as a group, promptly suggested to the President the kinds of black political appointments to be made, and even drafted for Coolidge the necessary wording of a policy statement when the time came to announce to newspapers the anticipated patronage jobs to be given to Afro-Americans.¹⁰

⁹ John Blair, "A Time for Parting: The Negro During the Coolidge Years," *American Studies Series*, Volume 3 (London, England), 178-79; Stephen Fox, *The Guardian of Boston: William Monroe Trotter* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 248-49; Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America*, 200-23.

¹⁰ C. Bascom Slemple to Moton, 22 September 1923, cont. 86; Moton to Coolidge, 15 October 1923, cont. 86, Moton Papers; "Suggested Statement for the President," 4

Though Coolidge was drawn politically to the Tuskegee-oriented faction as a whole, it appeared for the moment in October, 1923 that his doors were open to other significant black leaders of the press, civil rights organizations, educational institutions, and Republican party as well. Thus, despite initial reservations, blacks as a whole were more optimistic as the new administration began to take shape. An indication of their positive attitude toward the President was reflected in the District of Columbia black newspaper, the *Washington Eagle*, which opined that “much significance is attached to the easy access to the White House which colored citizens now enjoy.” Coolidge did remain open to visits and discussions with Afro-Americans, and sought their advice on matters of race relations. Any doubts he may have had about what Afro-Americans wanted politically must have been dispelled by these meetings. In particular, he received a long detailed memorandum in November from the head of the Associated Negro Press, Nahum B. Brascher, who placed his news service at the disposal of the President as he had done also for Harding. Brascher wrote to Coolidge, summarizing and confirming that the issues central to Afro-Americans were policy changes to stop lynchings, segregation in public offices, and the discrimination policies of the civil service. Brascher also advised the President to provide more patronage appointments for blacks, extend the influences of Afro-Americans in policy-making decisions at the Veterans Hospital in Tuskegee, ensure the enfranchisement of more blacks in southern states, and increase the number of black representatives in Republican national conventions. Resolving all of these problems to the satisfaction of Afro-Americans would have been a difficult assignment for Coolidge, but he continued to give hope to blacks that some reform was forthcoming by his willingness to discuss these matters publicly.¹¹

The pinnacle of Afro-American confidence in the new chief executive came, consequently, shortly after Coolidge gave the annual presidential address to Congress in November and opened the segment of this speech on racial reform with the ringing declaration that under the Constitution, “the rights of colored citizens were as sacred as those of any other citizen” and that it was “both a public and private duty to protect these rights.” The President went on to urge the Congress “to exercise all its power of prevention and punishment against the hideous crime of lynching.” He also acknowledged that money had already been appropriated to give black Americans vocational training in agriculture, recommended federal funds for the medical school of the predominantly black Howard University to contribute to the overall objective of producing an additional five

October 1923, reel 63, microfilm edition of Coolidge Papers.

¹¹ N.D. Brascher to Coolidge, 6 November 1923, reel 63, Coolidge Papers; *Washington Eagle*, 6 October 1923.

hundred Afro-American doctors, and pointed to the need for a biracial industrial committee to facilitate the adjustment of large numbers of southern blacks migrating to northern urban centers in search of jobs and all-around better conditions. Concluding the portion of his speech on Afro-Americans, Coolidge did lessen the sting of these remarks to whites by proclaiming that "it was well to recognize that [racial] difficulties are to a large extent local problems which must be worked out by mutual forbearance and human kindness of each community. Such a method gives much more promise of a real remedy than outside interference."¹²

In these succinct but significant statements the President touched upon issues that had long troubled blacks and for which they had sought solutions on many previous occasions. Lynchings had been a perennial problem since the American Civil War. From 1880 to 1920, some 3,112 Afro-Americans had been victims of lynch mobs in the United States, but congressional legislative measures to end this often racially motivated crime had been voted down on five separate occasions prior to 1923. In 1923, the very year in which Congressman Leonidas Dyer's anti-lynching measure was defeated in the United States Senate, a total of twenty-nine Afro-Americans had been hanged by mobs. Anticipating the reintroduction of the Dyer Bill in Congress in 1924, Coolidge took a courageous step in urging Capitol Hill legislators to pass the anti-lynching measure. The chief executive's recommendation for a biracial commission for easing the settlement of southern black migrants in northern industrialized areas amounted to an endorsement of the Layton bill, one of the goals of which was to facilitate the transition of workers to life in urban regions. This particular bill was scheduled to come before Congress in 1924. Coolidge's pledging of funds to Howard University, an institution experiencing the kind of growth and development in the 1920s which caused blacks to label it "the Capstone of Negro Education," proved extremely soothing to many Afro-Americans who looked to the Washington, D.C., center of learning for the much needed cadre of well trained doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers, preachers, and teachers vital to the welfare of the black community. In all, the Afro-American segment of the President's annual speech before Congress in 1923 was favorably received by blacks who interpreted it as the beginning of new executive sensitivity to assist them in their endeavors to improve their status in the American society.¹³

In the wake of his speech to Congress, Coolidge continued to welcome

¹² Calvin Coolidge, *Annual Message of the President of the United States to Joint Session of Congress*, November, 1923 (Washington: Government Printing Press), 1-14.

¹³ Maceo Crenshaw Dailey, Jr., "Emmett Jay Scott: The Career of a Secondary Black Leader," Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 1983, 438-77; Giles B. Jackson to C. Bascom Slemph, 25 October 1923, reel 63, Coolidge Papers.

blacks to the White House and to discuss racial reform issues with them. In February, 1924, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People led a coalition of black church groups and lay organizations to the White House to discuss varying issues of concern to Afro-Americans. Within the group were such Afro-American notables as the organization's executive secretary, James Weldon Johnson; the head of its Washington, D.C. branch, Archibald Grimke; president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Phillip Randolph; editors Robert Abbott of the *Chicago Defender*; Robert L. Vann of the *Pittsburgh Courier*; and Carl Murphy of the *Baltimore Afro-American*. During the course of the meeting, this group handed to Coolidge a petition of 124,000 signatures urging a pardon for the Afro-American soldiers involved in the racial melee in Houston, Texas in 1917 where 17 whites were killed, a request the President granted a few years later.¹⁴

Between 1923 and 1924 the alacrity which Coolidge demonstrated in meeting with Afro-Americans proved encouraging to most of them, save for the seasoned and cautious veterans of civil rights organizations and more radical activists in the quest of racial reform. Chandler Owen and A. Phillip Randolph, the two brilliant editors of the radical black journal, *The Messenger*, had expressed their apprehension earlier by pointing out that "Coolidge [was] pretty cool on the Negro question." Following his own meeting with the President, James W. Johnson commented some years later that "it was clear Mr. Coolidge knew absolutely nothing about colored people. I gathered that the only living Negro he had heard anything about was Major [Robert Russa] Moton. I was relieved when the audience was over, and I suppose Mr. Coolidge was too." Given the provincial background of Coolidge and his political predilections for Tuskegee-oriented black leaders, Johnson's comments were essentially correct. More critically, they revealed what would become grave and inherent problems in the President's style of leadership: meeting with major representatives of the Afro-American community but ultimately coming to rely on the advice of the "old guard" black politicians. In an era where growing reform organizations and movements heightened the expectations of blacks for positive change, such a strategy made them more impatient with a Republican party which showed less concern with their problems and correspondingly took their vote for granted.¹⁵

Neither Coolidge nor the Republican party could afford to remain impervious to the growing importance and thrust of black movements and organizations—particularly the NAACP, the unfolding of the "New Negro" artistic flower-

¹⁴ Blair, "A Time for Parting," 178-79; Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America*, 200-23; Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 248-49.

¹⁵ James W. Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York: Viking Press, 1933), 374; Blair, "A Time for Parting," 177-99.

ing known as the Harlem Renaissance centered in upper Manhattan (a place many Afro-Americans believed to be the cultural and political capital of the black community), and the extraordinary mass movement of blacks led dramatically by the Universal Negro Improvement Association and its inimitable, Jamaican-born leader, Marcus Garvey, who immigrated to the United States in 1916. These movements and organizations exemplified the intensity of concern over racial problems and changing emphasis of blacks in the 1920s, and their determination to bring about much needed elevation in the status of Afro-Americans in the United States. Though these three movements were centered in New York City for the most part, their tentacles reached significantly into many Afro-American communities in the country and influenced black thought and behavior.¹⁶

The incipient nationalism of the Marcus Garvey-led UNIA instilled self pride in many blacks and stimulated them to become involved in self-help economic projects on a level more grandiose, though less substantial, than Booker T. Washington's movement from 1901 to 1915. Garvey originally planned to visit the United States for the explicit purpose of meeting with Booker T. Washington, whose program of self-help organizational and institutional development within the black community appeared to be fundamentally applicable to Jamaican conditions. Entering the country after the death of Washington, Garvey, nonetheless, continued with his original plans of involving himself in organizational endeavors for black progress and did his leadership homework accordingly. Garvey traveled throughout the United States between 1916 and 1919 to gauge the plight of black Americans. Settling later in Harlem, he formed the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League to organize blacks around the world to improve their status. The Association's paramilitary group, capitalist projects, and mass meetings inspired blacks to concentrate on rising above their second-class citizenship in the United States or their colonial status in countries in the Caribbean or Africa. The UNIA's slogan, "one God, one Aim, one Destiny," soon appealed to numerous blacks in the United States. Perhaps as many as 400,000 individuals joined or supported Garvey and the UNIA during the 1920s. G. Emonei Carter, the first Vice President of the organization, who earlier had served as a waiter in a Florida Hotel Coolidge frequented on vacation, wrote to the President in the manner befitting a proud, racially conscious representative of an organization to the head of a sovereign

¹⁶ David L. Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); See Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggle of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976) for important discussions of the Garvey movement and the Harlem Renaissance. See also Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America*, for an examination of the general extent to which the party of Lincoln overlooked black organizations.

state, alerting him to the significance of the UNIA. There is no evidence, however, that Coolidge responded. Garvey and Garveyism were too far outside of the mainstream of American life, and already under the scrutiny of United States military officials and later the Bureau of Investigation for “fomenting” racial hatred. In a curious twist, though, Garvey and many UNIA followers politically supported Coolidge in the 1924 presidential election. But they would voice no similar support for the Republican party presidential candidate of 1928.¹⁷

While strictly an artistic movement, and seemingly innocuous on the political front, the Harlem Renaissance was designed to claim citizenship rights by virtue of a creative intellectual outpouring of literature, music, and painting to reveal the beauty and dynamics of the Afro-American community. For black thinkers the perception of that movement extended far beyond the promise held out by Charlotte Osgood Mason, the eccentric white spinster in mid-town Manhattan, who sponsored Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston to portray blacks in their atavistic, “primitive African” sense. Afro-American intellectuals such as the NAACP’s Walter White and James Weldon Johnson, both novelists of the Harlem Renaissance, and University of Chicago graduate student and later head of Fisk University, Charles Johnson, viewed the artistic movement in terms of exposing the debilitating effects of racism and second-class citizenship. The fact that individuals in the NAACP and those with views compatible with this organization were involved in a cultural movement which featured such talented writers as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Wallace Thurmond reflected the consciousness that literature, music, and painting could serve political purposes and vice-versa. Alain Locke, for example, anticipated great social gains accompanying a “second wave” of black artistic contributions. There would be a “releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to that revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships.”¹⁸

In one sense or another, the UNIA, NAACP, and Harlem Renaissance leaders were inextricably linked together (though they too were capable of internecine squabbling) in their thrust for racial uplift. They were indicative, more significantly, of the growing consciousness and political awareness of the need for reform of vital importance to the larger Afro-American community. If nothing else, such groups made it apparent that there was a struggle going on in the black

¹⁷ Martin, *Race First*, 3-66; Emonei Carter to Coolidge, 8 December 1924, reel 63, Coolidge Papers; Dailey, “Emmett Jay Scott,” 299-301.

¹⁸ Alain Locke, “The New Negro,” in Locke, ed., *The New Negro* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 15.

community for leadership of Afro-Americans, and that no one organization or individual, as had been the case during the era of Booker T. Washington, could deliver the black vote. Any political party depending on the support of the black electorate needed to consider the importance of this change both in terms of the political consciousness of blacks and the balkanization of power within the Afro-American community—something the Republican party refused to do, in any constructive and creative manner, in the 1920s. The Republican party's failure to consider the significance of this change or to explore wider political ties with the Afro-American community caused an erosion of black support after 1924. Coolidge had initiated the process of good will and appeared prepared to follow through on it, but ultimately lapsed into dependence for political advice and policy on the small residual group of black leaders formerly associated with Booker T. Washington. With this, the likelihood of the President's seeking any major racial reform policies receded into the background.¹⁹

Why the President turned to the Tuskegee-oriented men can best be explained by the political capital to be derived from such ties. Booker T. Washington's disciples were foremost team players in the game of politics, and had limited objectives—*viz.*, claiming more patronage jobs and assistance for institutions or communities with which they were affiliated. Politically, they could be expected to accept party decisions and mandates in the realm of race relations without any obstreperous public show of discontent. Satisfying the narrow personal objectives or professional interests of Tuskegee men was generally incentive enough for them to do the bidding of their political or philanthropic benefactors. In this sense, Tuskegee men were preeminently trustworthy.²⁰

By virtue of his position at Tuskegee as successor to Booker T. Washington, Robert Russa Moton stood out initially as Coolidge's preferred adviser on Afro-American affairs, and a key person for maintaining black allegiance to the Republican party. Moton, however, had not sorted out in his own mind the nature of the role to be assumed at Tuskegee: whether to till the post in the political leadership manner of Booker T. Washington or narrow his role to that of a college president interested in national affairs only to the extent that they affected Tuskegee Institute. His reluctance to involve himself more fully in politics on the national level between 1923 and 1928 prevented him from exploiting his

¹⁹ For full discussions of this question see Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*; and Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America*, 177-99; also, Blair, "A Time for Parting."

²⁰ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, contains the most recent discussion of the interaction of Washington and his followers with Republican party officials.

connection with Coolidge in the fashion Booker T. Washington had done with earlier American presidents. Moton's trips to the White House during Coolidge's presidency resulted in a few suggestions for political appointments for Tuskegee loyalists, but stopped short of the systematic lobbying for patronage jobs for his followers and other machinations to exercise any significant influence within the Republican party at the national level.²¹

Within the political arena, Moton nonetheless adhered to the Tuskegee imperative of serving and appeasing powerful whites in return for favors. In 1923, while the wider black community was recoiling at the Coolidge appointment of C. Bascom Slemph as White House secretary because of his southern racial bias against Afro-Americans, Moton refused to take such a position and instead applauded Coolidge for the selection and described Slemph as a very talented person. If Moton seemed out of step with the larger Afro-American community on the Slemph appointment, his expression of confidence in Coolidge's decision was the basis of a political quid pro quo that could gain for the Tuskegee principal influence in Alabama where it was of particular importance to him. Coolidge indeed sustained the much needed commitment to Moton to allow for his prominent role in the staffing and other administrative decisions of the Veterans Hospital in Tuskegee. In April, 1926, the Tuskegee principal's secretary, Albon L. Holsey, thanked the President for this kind of support and also noted "that the trouble at the Veterans Hospital had abated since the White House became involved." Moton, however, did not go much beyond this kind of localized endeavor to exploit his relationship to the Coolidge administration.²²

Another black political adviser upon whom the President depended was William H. Lewis, who had attended Amherst College at the same time as Coolidge. A party machine operative from the days of Booker T. Washington, Lewis' early contact with Coolidge and his educational training as an Amherst man combined to ease him into the seat as an adviser to the President. Lewis managed to bask within the inner circles of the Coolidge administration for less than a year and during that period achieved the questionable honor of shaping the President's thinking on the necessity of "playing politics" with the black community. This political approach, springing from Lewis' suggestion, was directed initially at the remarkable black leader W.E.B. Du Bois, the first Afro-American to receive the Ph.D. degree from Harvard University and the then

²¹ Moton to Slemph, 20 January 1925, cont. 86; Coolidge to Moton, 9 August 1923, cont. 86, Moton Papers; Moton to Coolidge, 17 December 1924, reel 64, Coolidge Papers.

²² Albon Holsey to E.T. Clark, 21 April 1926, reel 64, Coolidge Papers; C.B. Slemph to Moton, 22 September 1923, cont. 86; Moton to Slemph, 13 December 1923, cont. 86, Moton Papers.

ranking savant and polemicist for racial justice in America.²³

Involved extensively in Afro-American uplift endeavors and the early twentieth century Pan-African congresses, and seeking a more global black approach to the problems of racial bigotry in the Americas and white colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean, Du Bois, as editor of the NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*, drafted scores of penetrating essays and eloquent editorials denouncing white prejudice and hostility leveled at blacks. Du Bois' scathing words proved embarrassing on more than one occasion to whites and blacks alike who vacillated on issues of racial reform. Thus in his capacity as the *Crisis* editor, he already had been faced with several efforts in the past to either silence or compromise him. Lewis, owing to his political connection to the Coolidge administration, tried in vain to coopt Du Bois in the 1920s to ensure more favorable *Crisis* editorials on the President and the Republican party.²⁴

In 1923, during the early stages of the Coolidge administration, Lewis, in an effort to manipulate Du Bois, craftily suggested to the President that the time was appropriate "to play a little politics." Lewis recommended the appointment of the *Crisis* editor as the President's special representative with the rank of envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the inauguration in January, 1924 of Charles Burgess Dunbar King, President-elect of the West African Republican of Liberia.²⁵ The appointment, Lewis explained confidently to Coolidge's secretary, Slemp, "will ensure the support of the 'Crisis' the most widely read publication among the colored people or stullify it if it should come out against us." Some quick scurrying by the State Department enabled Du Bois to travel to Liberia as a representative of the United States, but the political ruse failed to convert him into a Coolidge backer. Du Bois, who generally remained above nostalgic party loyalties, voted for Robert M. La Follette, the third party progressive candidate for the presidency in 1924.²⁶

But Du Bois was only one target of Lewis' endeavors to generate more Afro-American political support for the Coolidge administration throughout 1923 and

²³ E.J. Scott to E.T. Clark, 21 January 1924, reel 139; W.H. Lewis to C.B. Slemp, 30 October 1923, reel 139, Coolidge Papers.

²⁴ Lewis to Coolidge, 4 October 1923, reel 139; Scott to E.T. Clark, 21 January 1924, reel 139; Lewis to Slemp, 30 October 1923, reel 139; President C.D.B. King to W.E.B. Du Bois, 7 September 1923, reel 139; Charles Hughes to Coolidge, 26 December 1923, reel 139, Coolidge Papers.

²⁵ Liberia was established by the American government in 1822 as a refuge for repatriated former slaves from the United States.

²⁶ Lewis to Slemp, 30 October 1923, reel 139; President C.D.B. King to W.E.B. Du Bois, 7 September 1923, reel 139; Charles Hughes to Coolidge, 26 December 1923, reel 139, Coolidge Papers.

1924; Lewis was also particularly keen on recommending the political appointments of Tuskegee men of the Washington era. Demonstrating his loyalty to Coolidge and the Republican party, Lewis anticipated receiving the administration's high-ranking and coveted post of official political organizer within the black community during the presidential election of 1924. Frustrated by the loss of this position to another prominent black in Boston, William Mathews, Lewis defected from Republican ranks in 1924. In returning to the party almost immediately following the election of 1924, which Coolidge won, Lewis affected another curious *volte face*, but he was unable to regain his former status as a major black adviser. Lewis had helped, though, to set in motion and sanction the President's policy of "playing a little politics" within the black community, a policy based on the offering of limited patronage jobs and other favors instead of substantial policy changes or reform in the interest of improving the status of Afro-Americans.²⁷

With Lewis on the fringe of the Coolidge administration after 1924, Emmett Jay Scott became the most influential Afro-American political adviser to the President. Working characteristically in behind-the-scenes endeavors to influence political events, Scott guided Tuskegee political loyalists who sought recognition within the Coolidge administration. Throughout his long involvement in politics from the 1890s to the 1920s, Scott learned not to expect any major or sweeping reforms for blacks. He did believe, however, that Afro-American communities could expect piecemeal reforms in instances where they organized themselves or when white politicians or philanthropists were encouraged to assist them in self-help projects. Scott began his career in Houston, Texas in the 1890s as editor and part owner of a black newspaper, *The Texas Freeman*. He served subsequently as private secretary to Texas Afro-American political boss Norris Wright Cuney from 1894 to 1897 and then Alabama educator Booker T. Washington until 1915. During his association with Washington, Scott was recognized for his superior ability by prominent white politicians and philanthropists such as Theodore Roosevelt, Andrew Carnegie, and Julius Rosenwald. He was of such overriding importance at Tuskegee that with Washington's death in 1915, many of the black leader's followers promptly turned to Scott as the de facto head of their political machine. Scott, in fact, had narrowly missed out in the race to succeed Booker T. Washington as principal of Tuskegee Institute and a major leader of Afro-Americans between 1915 and 1917. He was catapulted into national attention, though, during World War I with his appointment as Special Assistant on Negro Affairs to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker.²⁸

²⁷ See "Memorandum from Perry Howard on W.H. Lewis," 1 October 1924, reel 63, Coolidge Papers.

²⁸ Dailey, "Emmett Jay Scott," 34-127.

With the war's end in 1919, Scott received an appointment as secretary-treasurer and business manager of Howard University, placing him in the nation's capital and political nerve center where he envisioned a role for himself as a powerful black political boss. But after backing the World War I army officer, Leonard Wood, for the Republican party presidential nomination in 1920, Scott suffered politically with the victory of Harding in the convention and the subsequent election. Having supported the wrong candidate, Scott and his political allies were overlooked by Harding in the handing out of patronage jobs generally occupied by blacks. On several occasions between 1921 and 1923, Scott implored Harding to appoint more Tuskegee loyalists to patronage jobs, but the black political leader's requests generally remained buried at the bottom of the list. With Coolidge's coming to office in 1923, Scott anticipated that his followers would receive patronage jobs more readily at the hands of a president expected to be more liberal toward blacks in general and the Tuskegee-oriented political faction in particular. Coolidge's first year in office justified Scott's political optimism as he and other Tuskegee loyalists drew more attention from the new President and the Republican party.²⁹

Scott's role became more pronounced in the Republican party, particularly in his capacity as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Republican National Executive Council. In accordance with his rising influence in the new administration, Scott scheduled a meeting for the President and White house secretary Slemp with black editors on 29 May 1924, prior to the party's national convention; there he helped to extract a pledge from the Afro-American editors to back Coolidge for the nomination and bid for the executive post in 1924. Scott's popularity and influence with the new administration were manifested on another occasion in June of 1924 prior to the national convention when Coolidge accepted an invitation to address an audience gathered at Howard University for the commencement exercise. On the platform from which the President spoke were Emmett Jay Scott and one of his ranking allies, James A. Cobb, a law professor at the institution: two black politicians determined to capitalize on their connections to the Republican party to obtain patronage jobs and financial backing for Howard University. On that occasion both men must have been heartened by Coolidge's speech in which he observed that: "Racial hostility, ancient tradition, and social prejudice are not to be eliminated immediately or easily, but they will be lessened as the colored people by their own efforts and under their own leaders shall prove worthy of the fullest measure of opportunity."³⁰

As a black leader, Scott had adhered to the premise in this statement since the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Chicago Defender*, 14 June 1924. Dailey, "Emmett Jay Scott," 236-63, 438-77.

³⁰ Dailey, "Emmett Jay Scott," 1-371, *passim.*, *Chicago Defender*, 14 June 1924.

days of his involvement in racial uplift activities in Houston, Texas in the 1890s. His philosophy of leadership entailed a concept he labeled “constructionalism”—i.e. blacks devising policies and programs for uplift rather than merely always reacting to capricious racism whether in particular instances or more institutionalized forms. Motivated by this view of leadership in the 1920s, Scott had prevailed upon Republican party legislators in the nation’s capital to obtain larger appropriations for Howard University and the subsequent recognition of the federal government’s responsibility to fund the black institution yearly in a manner similar to financial aid provided for West Point and the Naval Academy. Scott’s ties to white Republican politicians and philanthropists had indeed allowed him to exercise influence beyond his administrative job and responsibilities as secretary-treasurer and business manager of the black university: he became one of the leaders of the Howard clique which engineered the election of the college’s first full-time black President, Mordecai Johnson, in 1926. Scott’s activities after 1923 centered on utilization of his political influence for educational progress at Howard, and acquisition of more patronage jobs for his political allies and followers.³¹

Scott ingratiated himself with the Coolidge administration by advising and guiding the President on ways to improve his executive image and appeal to blacks. In activities long associated with the traditional means of Tuskegee men for courting favor with white politicians, Scott influenced black newspapermen to write favorably of Coolidge and alerted the President to the importance of such endeavors. Scott, for example, wrote the President on March 5, 1927, explaining that he had mailed letters to many black newspapers and the Columbia Press Bureau pointing out Coolidge’s actions in regards to the “reduction of sentence of former members of the 24th U.S. Infantry” involved in the Brownsville episode.³²

Scott, in his angling to become even more influential with the new administration, found it much easier to gain access to the White House after the resignation of Coolidge’s secretary, C. Bascom Slep, in January, 1925 and his replacement with Edward T. Clark, a white Amherst alumnus who did his college preparatory work at Howard University and thus felt some allegiance to the black educational institution. With Coolidge in the White House, Scott did enjoy more favor with the new president as well as the Republican party.³³

Tuskegee men, many of whom were Scott’s closest associates, were once

³¹ Dailey, “Emmett Jay Scott,” 318-71.

³² Scott to Coolidge, 5 March 1927, reel 64, Coolidge Papers; McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge*, 285.

³³ Feuss, *Calvin Coolidge*, 286; Scott to E.T. Clark, 21 May 1926, reel 50, Coolidge Papers; Scott to Coolidge, 6 October 1925, reel 64, Coolidge Papers.

again given significant patronage jobs: Charles Anderson of New York as Collector of Internal Revenue, at a salary of \$6,000 annually; Walter L. Cohen of Louisiana as Controller of Customs, at a salary of \$5,000; and Arthur Froe of Washington, D.C., as Recorder of Deeds, at a salary of \$4,000. Owing in part to another of Scott's recommendations, Hallie Q. Brown, former lady principal of Tuskegee and a member of the Afro-American Club women's movement, became Director of the Colored Women's Division of the Republican National Committee. The major political appointment Scott succeeded in obtaining for a friend, however, was that of a judgeship to the municipal court of the District of Columbia in 1927 for James A. Cobb to replace the prominent black Washingtonian Robert H. Terrell who died that year.³⁴

Scott clearly was the ranking, if behind-the-scenes, black adviser to the President. Coolidge's political connection to Scott manifested itself even on a social level when in 1927 the President extended courtesies to the Howard University secretary by mailing flowers to his daughter upon her marriage to Hubert Delaney, who later ran unsuccessfully for a congressional seat in New York. (Delaney was later appointed as a judge in New York City.) Tragically, it was the death of this very same daughter later in 1927 that led to almost a year of mourning for Scott and his family and only marginal political involvement for him during that twelve-month period.³⁵

Only on one or two occasions while Scott served as the major political adviser to Coolidge did he urge the President to seek some solution to the problems of lynchings and segregation. And when the President did respond to the problems of bigotry and discrimination after 1924, whether at the behest of Scott or others, his statements often had a matter-of-fact ring to them. Worse, as was the case in 1926 when he criticized the Ku Klux Klan (but not in 1925 when this white supremacist group held a major march and rally in Washington, D.C.), his response sometimes appeared to be a perfunctory political exercise to merit credibility. The President did respond in other instances by pointing out the ills of lynchings once again in his speech before Congress in 1925 and, in another case, when he admonished a federal official, Winfield Scott, Commissioner of Pensions in the Interior Department, for allowing the separation of black and white employees in federal offices under his jurisdiction. But these cases represented individual reactions that held no promise of any major executive branch shift in policy or long-term directives in the interest of Afro-Americans. What the President failed to do to correct racial injustices perhaps was a more

³⁴ "Memorandum: Appointment of Colored Men, 1926," reel 64, Coolidge Papers; Scott to James B. Reynold, 16 October 1924, reel 63, Coolidge Papers; *Chicago Defender*, 7 June 1924.

³⁵ Dailey, "Emmett Jay Scott," 269-70.

telling story. Coolidge, for example, decided ultimately to forego any endorsement of the Layton Bill and anti-lynching measure in Congress because he feared such support would jeopardize the passage there of legislation for the Mellon tax reduction act of 1924. The extent of Coolidge's retreat from his commitment to reform measures for Afro-Americans was apparent in his response to a black delegation to the White House in 1927 when he expressed apprehension that any support on his part to enforce the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment might lead to a disruptive Senate filibustering maneuver hampering endeavors to get other legislation through the Congress.³⁶

In many ways, Coolidge, as president, proved to be too much the pro-business conservative Republican trying to avoid political or social problems that might limit his ability to deal fundamentally with economic development. His administration became more conservative and preoccupied with economic expansion and development from 1923 to 1928, and accordingly less concerned with social maladies of bigotry and discrimination. In retrospect, perhaps no amount of organizational and institutional thrust of Afro-Americans could have altered this political process, but it was easier for Coolidge to lapse into his conservative posture on racial matters owing to his relationship with Afro-American politicians who were basically content with the bestowing of financial aid to institutions they represented or the acquiring of patronage jobs for themselves and their allies.³⁷

The discrepancy between Coolidge's statements for racial reform and his policy of neglect of the overall interests of the Afro-American community at large fostered an acute sense among blacks that they had been betrayed. The NAACP gave clear evidence of its disappointment by passing a resolution in 1926 that Afro-American "political salvation and . . . social survival lie in our absolute independence of party allegiance in politics and casting our vote for our friends and against our enemies." The resolution marked a turning point in the relationship between blacks and Republicans, and revealed that traditional party strategies and ways of winning the Afro-American vote had run their course. The party of Lincoln could no longer anticipate the kind of black support it had enjoyed in previous years. This instance of black political independence and the search for an alternative had been hastened by Coolidge's policy of "playing politics" which underscored to blacks the neglect of their basic concerns by

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 468; Blair, "A Time for Parting," 182-84, 181; William Monroe Trotter to Coolidge, 1 August 1927, reel 64; Everett Sanders to Winfield Scott, c. September 1927, reel 64, Coolidge Papers.

³⁷ Blair, "A Time for Parting," 177-99; McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge, passim*, 141, 306-10, 329, 257.

Republicans who had come to take the Afro-American vote for granted.³⁸

Within the context of black political disappointment with the Republican presidential administration by the mid-1920s, Coolidge's decision not to run for the executive office in 1928 appears even more intriguing. The President's statement of "I do not chose to run," while strong, still left open the possibility of a draft movement and seems to have been a political trial balloon. Any understanding of Coolidge's personality, particularly his sensitivity and need for reassurance that he was doing a fine job in the executive office, reveals why he placed his candidacy before the American public in such a problematic way. By late 1927, prior to the nomination contest, he seemingly needed affirmation and acknowledgment from the American people that he had done a credible job. Had they come forth quickly and decisively in favor of Coolidge, it is more than probable that he would have felt obliged to honor their wish. Yet, this did not happen, and Coolidge, in the absence of a draft campaign, was left to abide by his words that he "did not chose to run." There is, however, strong indication, owing to Coolidge's activity regarding the black community at least, that he was taking steps in the electoral interest of the Republican party or his own candidacy, given the open possibility of a draft movement in 1928. Curiously enough, it manifested itself in a political decision affecting the black nationalist, Marcus M. Garvey, who had been convicted of mail fraud in 1924 and sentenced to the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary where he was scheduled to remain until 1928.³⁹

Garvey's followers mounted a strong effort to get him released from the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, including the mailing of numerous petitions to Calvin Coolidge. In the midst of this endeavor, the Jamaican's wife, Amy Jacques Garvey, was approached by Robert L. Vann, editor of the highly regarded black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and attorney James A. Cobb, both of whom suggested rather confidently that for a fee of \$5,000, they could obtain a presidential pardon for Garvey. It is probable that this was a scheme which originated with the trio of Emmett Jay Scott, Cobb, and Vann, and that all three men were depending on their relationship with Coolidge to obtain the pardon for Garvey. It can only be speculated whether they believed and suggested to Coolidge that he or the Republican party could profit politically and count on more black votes by issuing this pardon to a black leader who many Afro-Americans believed to have been victimized for his role in organizing perhaps the most significant black mass movement of the twentieth century. Given the timing

³⁸ Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America*, 224; this interpretation seems warranted also in view of previous evidence and the virtual non-existence of letters to this effect in the Coolidge Papers.

³⁹ Lillian Rogers Parks, *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House* (New York: Fleet Publishing Corporation, 1961), 195-200; Martin, *Race First*, 14.

of the offer to Amy Jacques Garvey, however, it is more than likely that these issues were uppermost in the thinking of Vann and Cobb. Only the large legal sum requested by Cobb and Vann led Garvey's wife to refuse their assistance to get her husband released. She eventually hired two young white attorneys for considerably less to obtain Garvey's release from jail in late 1927, some six months before his sentence was to have officially ended. The President's pardon for Garvey came, it should be noted, during the preparation for the elections of 1928.⁴⁰

It seems correct to observe that the release of Garvey was more than just a disinterested gesture on the part of a president. It appears to have been politically motivated, a last-minute atonement to blacks and bid for their votes. Here once again was a quadrennial presidential election where the interim four years had produced hardly any constructive legislation or overall Republican party interest to warrant political support. More specifically, the decision may have been necessary owing to the long list of Afro-Americans standing ready to renounce the Republican party in 1928. Editors of major black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, and the *Boston Guardian* all turned their backs on the Republican party, and voiced support for the Democratic presidential candidate of 1928, Al Smith. Marcus Garvey, who previously had endorsed both Harding and Coolidge, echoed the sentiment of black editors that blacks should vote Democratic in the forthcoming presidential election. And even Walter White of the NAACP suggested rather strongly that the fate of the organization hinged on the rejection of the Republican party in 1928 by the masses of black Americans. In the South also, the alliance between blacks and Republicans showed signs of weakening as indicated by Robert R. Church's open, "best-of-two-evils" political letter of 1928 in which he proclaimed that "the Republican party offers us little. The Democratic Party offers us Nothing." All of these individuals were powerful representative leaders in the Afro-American community. Their disappointment in Republican party leaders in 1928 and, in some cases, their support for Democratic candidates evinced the intensity of their political alienation from the party of Lincoln. Why presidents locked in the White House behind advisers were capable of alienating various factions and political allies, whether they be black or white, was something which concerned Coolidge and a problem to which he provided astute answers in his autobiography when he

⁴⁰ Martin, *Race First*, 3-19; Andrew Buni, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974) 232; Amy Jacques Garvey to Andrew Buni, 9 August 1971, Marcus Garvey Papers, cont., Fisk University Library.

wrote in 1929:

It is difficult for men in high office to avoid the malady of self delusion. They are always surrounded by worshippers. They are constantly, and for the most part sincerely, assured of their greatness They live in an artificial atmosphere of adulation and exaltation which sooner or later impairs their judgement. They are in grave danger of becoming careless and arrogant It is necessary for the head of the nation to differ with many people who are honest in their opinions. As his term progresses, the number who are disappointed accumulates. Finally, here is so large a body who have lost confidence in him that he meets a rising opposition which makes his efforts less effective.⁴¹

Coolidge's judgment was impaired in a similar manner with blacks because he made the mistake of surrounding himself with "old guard" politicians who were a carryover from the Booker T. Washington era. And, as president, he too came to take the Afro-American vote for granted in a decade when blacks were demonstrating a capacity for new thinking and seeking other political alternatives compatible with reformist activities of the UNIA, the NAACP, and the Harlem Renaissance movement. Considering all of this, it is still an overstatement to argue, as one historian does, that the Coolidge administration was largely responsible for the shift of blacks to the Democratic party in the 1930s. Although Coolidge's policies may not have precipitated a mass exodus of blacks from the Republicans, he was largely responsible for the Afro-American political mood of despair of 1928, manifested in the feeling that little could be done to make the Republican party more sensitive to their votes and to the need for reform in their communities. The shift of Afro-Americans from the Republican to the Democratic party in 1936 reflected cumulative black political disappointment with the "party of Lincoln" occurring over the preceding seven decades as much as it did the search for immediate relief from the Depression of 1929 and the resulting economic and political dislocation. Coolidge, however, might have salvaged some of the Afro-American faith in the Republican party in the 1920s by a more open and continuous response to the wider spectrum of thought within the black community as he had done for a few months in 1923 and 1924. Afro-Americans were certainly not ready to take the leap of faith into the Democratic party by the

⁴¹ Martin, *Race First*, 199-200; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 9-12; Calvin Coolidge, *The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge* (Rutland: Academy Books, 1972), 241.

latter half of the 1920s, but neither were they willing to suffer continuously with a Republican party unappreciative of their votes and impervious to their requests.⁴²

⁴² Blair, "A Time For Parting," 199. For treatises on this historical issue see Rayford W. Logan, *Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier Books, 1965); Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Richard B. Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America: From McKinley to Hoover, 1896-1933* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973).