

= William Monroe Trotter =

William Monroe Trotter ( sometimes just Monroe Trotter , April 7 , 1872 ? April 7 , 1934 ) was a newspaper editor and real estate businessman based in Boston , Massachusetts , and an activist for African @-@ American civil rights . He was an early opponent of the accommodationist race policies of Booker T. Washington , and in 1901 founded the Boston Guardian , an independent African @-@ American newspaper , as a vehicle to express that opposition . Active in protest movements for civil rights throughout the 1900s and 1910s , he also revealed some of the differences within the African @-@ American community . He contributed to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ( NAACP ) .

Born into a well @-@ to @-@ do family and raised in Hyde Park , Massachusetts , Trotter earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees at Harvard University , and was the first man of color to earn a Phi Beta Kappa key there . Seeing an increase in segregation in northern facilities , he began to engage in a life of activism , to which he devoted his assets . He joined with W.E.B. DuBois in founding the Niagara Movement in 1905 , a forerunner of the NAACP . Trotter 's style was often divisive , and he ended up leaving that organization and founding the National Equal Rights League . His protest activities were sometimes seen to be at cross purposes to those of the NAACP .

In 1914 he had a highly publicized meeting with President Woodrow Wilson , in which he protested Wilson 's introduction of segregation into the federal workplace . In Boston , Trotter succeeded in 1910 in shutting down productions of The Clansman but he was unsuccessful in 1915 with screenings of the movie Birth of a Nation , which also portrayed the Ku Klux Klan in favorable terms . He was not able to influence the peace talks at the end of World War I , and was in later years a marginalized voice of protest . In an alliance with Roman Catholics , in 1921 he did get a revival screening banned of Birth of a Nation . He died on his 62nd birthday after a possibly suicidal fall from his Boston home .

= = Early life and education = =

William was the third child , and first to survive infancy , of James Monroe Trotter and Virginia ( Isaacs ) Trotter . His father James was born into slavery in Mississippi ; James ' mother Letitia was enslaved , and his father was her white master Richard S. Trotter . Letitia , her son and two daughters were freed by their master after his marriage and sent to Cincinnati , Ohio , which had a thriving free black community . After working as a teacher , James Trotter enlisted in the United States Colored Troops during the American Civil War , and was the first man of color to be promoted to lieutenant in the 55th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry ( Colored ) .

Virginia Isaacs , also of mixed race , was born free in 1842 in either Ohio or Virginia . Her mother Ann @-@ Elizabeth Fossett was born into slavery at Monticello , where she was a daughter of Joseph Fossett and Edith Hern Fossett , and granddaughter of Elizabeth Hemings . Virginia 's father Tucker Isaacs was free . Tucker Isaacs , a free person of color , purchased the freedom of Ann @-@ Elizabeth Fossett , Virginia 's mother . The family moved to Chillicothe in the free state of Ohio , where Virginia grew up in its thriving black community . There she met and married James Trotter .

Shortly after the Civil War , the Trotters moved from Ohio to settle in Boston , Massachusetts . After their first two children died in infancy , they returned to the Isaacs farm of Virginia 's parents , where their son William Monroe Trotter was born on April 7 , 1872 . When he was seven months old , the family moved back to Boston , where they settled in the South End , far from the predominantly African @-@ American west side of Beacon Hill . The family later moved to suburban Hyde Park , a white neighborhood . The Trotters had two more children , both daughters .

Trotter 's father broke through many racial obstacles placed before him , but was often frustrated in his attempts to gain equal treatment or fair consideration . While serving in the Union Army , he protested the inequality of pay between blacks and whites . In Boston he was the first man of color to be employed by the Post Office Department ( now the U.S. Postal Service ) , a job he left after he was repeatedly passed over for promotion because of discriminatory Republican @-@ led federal

government policy . Politically active , the elder Trotter was a leading African @-@ American Democrat in New England . He supported Grover Cleveland for President , and was rewarded in 1886 when Cleveland appointed him Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia , the highest federal position filled by black men at the time . Two other prominent men of color of that era , Fredrick Douglass and Senator Blanche Kelso Bruce , also held the post . The job was a lucrative one , and the Trotter family prospered .

The young Trotter ( who was usually called by his middle name " Monroe " ) grew up in this environment , and was introduced to Archibald Grimké , another politically active African American who also lived in Hyde Park . He excelled in school , graduating from the otherwise all @-@ white Hyde Park High School as valedictorian and president of his high school class . He went on to Harvard University , where he continued to distinguish himself academically . He was awarded merit scholarships after his father died , and was the first man of color to be awarded a Phi Beta Kappa key at Harvard . He earned a bachelor 's degree magna cum laude in 1895 and a Masters in 1896 , working a variety of odd jobs to help pay his tuition .

During his years at Harvard , he adopted a number of habits which he maintained for much of his life . He organized and led the Total Abstinence League , a temperance organization ; he was a teetotaler and never drank alcohol . He was active in the Baptist church , in which he had considered becoming a minister .

= = Marriage and family = =

Following his graduation , Trotter participated in the upper echelons of Negro society in Boston , a number of whose members had ancestors free before the Civil War . He belonged to an exclusive literary society that met at the home of Cambridge educator Maria Baldwin . On June 27 , 1899 , Trotter married Geraldine Louise ( " Deenie " ) Pindell ( October 3 , 1872 ? October 8 , 1918 ) , who was from another activist family . He had known her since childhood . She assisted him throughout his career until her death in the 1918 flu pandemic . The couple had no children .

= = Early career = =

Trotter 's career began inauspiciously . His initial attempts to get jobs at established banking and real estate firms were unsuccessful , leading him through a succession of lower @-@ paying clerking jobs . He finally landed a job in a white @-@ owned real estate firm in 1898 , but decided the next year to open his own business selling insurance and brokering mortgages . He was not particularly active in agitating for civil rights in these years , although his strong opinions on racial equality were evident in an 1899 paper in which he called on African Americans to seek admission to institutions of higher learning . ( It was a common practice of the time to direct African Americans away from higher education opportunities and into industrial training programs . ) Trotter 's business was relatively successful , and he was able to purchase investment properties .

Trotter was increasingly troubled by what he saw as the accommodationist policies of Booker T. Washington , one of the leading African @-@ American figures of the 1890s and founder of the Tuskegee Institute . Washington 's policies were enshrined in the Atlanta Compromise , outlined in an 1895 speech he gave in Atlanta , Georgia . He said that Southern African Americans should not agitate for political rights ( such as the right to vote and equal treatment under the law ) as long as they were provided economic opportunities and basic rights of due process . Washington actively promoted the idea that African Americans , once they had proven themselves as productive members of society , would be granted full political rights . Trotter , Grimké , W. E. B. Du Bois , and other northern radicals disagreed with these ideas , arguing that it was necessary for African Americans to agitate for equal treatment and full constitutional rights , because doing so would bring other benefits . By the turn of the century , African Americans in the South had been effectively disfranchised by violence around elections , and restrictions in voting registration rules , and , finally , constitutional amendments or new constitutions in southern states .

Although Boston was comparatively congenial when compared to other parts of the country , Trotter

and others felt that Washington 's stance was leading to an increase in more typically Southern racist attitudes in the city . " The conviction grew upon me " , he wrote , that his business successes could be endangered " if race prejudice and persecution and public discrimination from mere color was to spread up from the South and result in a fixed caste of color " .

= = The Guardian = =

Trotter 's racial activism blossomed in 1901 . He helped found the Boston Literary and Historical Association , which became , according to biographer Stephen Fox , " a forum for militant race opinion " . He also joined the Massachusetts Racial Protective Association , another local group that promoted political goals of equality . Under the aegis of the latter group , Trotter in October 1901 gave his first major protest speech , attacking Washington 's accommodationist stance : " In Boston [ Washington ] said that the Negro should wait for the franchise until he had got property , education and character . Washington 's attitude has ever been one of servility . "

With George Forbes , another Protective Association member , in 1901 Trotter co @-@ founded the Guardian , a weekly newspaper . At first Forbes , an Amherst College graduate with some experience in publishing , was the driving operational force in its production , while Trotter funded the effort and served as its managing editor . The paper became a forum for a more outspoken and forceful approach to gaining racial equality , and its contributors and editorials ( which were generally written by Trotter ) regularly attacked Washington . The paper 's editorial stance brought a stream of criticism from more mainstream African @-@ American publications : the New York Age , calling it " putrescent " , wrote that " Editor Trotter ... makes himself smelt if not felt " ; another wrote that the Guardian was " carrying its cases too fast and too far " , and that Trotter suffered from a " mental malady " . The Guardian had limited circulation , but was highly influential as one of only 200 African @-@ American publications in the country . It suffered financially due to Trotter 's poor accounting and inattention due to his heavy schedule . Forbes , who principally worked as a librarian in the city library , left the business in 1904 because of Booker T. Washington 's legal assaults on the newspaper and pressure by Washington supporters on his employers . Trotter 's wife , and later his sister , assisted in the paper 's publication .

Trotter , in a deliberate move , transferred the Guardian 's offices in 1907 to the same building that had once housed William Lloyd Garrison 's Liberator . Trotter idolized Garrison , a leading abolitionist agitator before the Civil War , and had studied his methods . He was a regular correspondent with Garrison 's sons William , Jr. and Francis Garrison .

The Guardian was always unprofitable , a condition that was exacerbated by Trotter 's refusal to take advertising for alcohol and tobacco . He sold off all of his Boston @-@ area properties by 1910 to raise funds for the newspaper , and he was lax in collecting payments from his subscribers . In his later years , the quality of the publication noticeably declined , and its operations were propped up by a local community group 's fund @-@ raising activities .

= = Attacking the African @-@ American establishment = =

In the early 1900s Trotter noticed that racial segregation was spreading in Boston : the number of hotels , restaurants , and other public establishments refusing service to African Americans was increasing . He came to realize that , in order to effect real change , the radical message needed to be taken out of Boston , and began organizing protest meetings across New England in 1903 . At the suggestion of Trotter , William H. Ferris went to Washington D.C. in January 1903 . Ferris gave a presentation critical to Booker T. Washington in front of the Bethel Literary and Historical Society on January 6 , 1903 . Richard W. Thompson gave spoke in support of Washington as replies at the Second Baptist Lyceum on January 25 and Jesse Lawson did the same on February 3 . In 1999 , Jacqueline M. Moore argued that Thompson 's paper failed to hold his ground against Ferris , who was present at the talk .

His long @-@ term objective was to effect policy changes in the National Afro @-@ American Council , then the only national @-@ level organization of African Americans . At the group 's annual

meeting in Louisville , Kentucky , Trotter and others introduced resolutions calling for more activism , but Booker T. Washington supporters ( also known as " Bookerites " ) , who controlled the council , saw to their defeat . One commentator wrote that the " Boston idiots " had been treated " in delightful fashion " . The Guardian described the convention as " dominated to death by one man " . The activities of the radicals at the convention did bring them some national press . Trotter continued to criticize Washington in the Guardian ; his attacks were particularly harsh and personal , and brought a bitter tinge to the disagreement .

In this period , while the Great Migration of African Americans out of the South to the North was beginning , blacks in the two regions dealt with different conditions . The vast majority of the millions of African Americans still lived in the South , many in rural areas where they were the majority population . But they were effectively disfranchised by new electoral rules and state constitutions , utterly closed out of the political process . This situation would continue , despite some temporarily effective court challenges , through the 1960s . Washington believed he had to help this population within the constraints of their environment . At the same time , he secretly funded legal challenges against the voter registration and electoral restrictions . Trotter and other radicals tended to come from the North , where African Americans exercised more rights in daily life , including the suffrage , were more urbanized , and had achieved more in work and education , but were still subject to discrimination .

Following their failure to advance the radical agenda in Louisville , Trotter and the other radicals sought a more sympathetic forum in which to attack Booker T. Washington . An opportunity arrived when Washington was set to speak in Boston in July 1903 . When the Tuskegee Institute leader was introduced to a visibly hostile crowd , a small riot broke out . Trotter , who had arrived prepared with several provocative questions to ask Washington , attempted to read them over the din of the melee . He was among the arrested , and the " Boston riot " received national press coverage . Trotter later claimed that there was no plan to break up the meeting . Bookerites pressed charges against Trotter for disrupting the meeting ; defended by Archibald Grimké , Trotter was convicted and spent thirty days in the Charles Street Jail . Although the Bookerites had hoped to discredit the radicals with the trial , they gained them wider publicity . After the trial , Trotter founded the Boston Suffrage League ( 1903 ) , and when a New England Suffrage League was founded in 1904 , Trotter was elected president .

Washington countered Trotter 's attacks with a variety of tactics . He took various legal actions against Trotter , including at least one libel suit and criminal charges . In addition , he used his network to apply pressure to Trotter 's supporters in their workplaces ( in some cases government and academic positions ) . In addition , he had other sympathizers secretly infiltrate and report on activist meetings organized by Trotter and others . Washington also provided financial support and expertise to start other publications in Boston to counter Trotter 's radical voice . As a result of such activities , Trotter 's printer dropped the activist and his newspaper as a client . But Trotter found another printer and continued publishing the Guardian despite the setback .

= = Niagara Movement and the NAACP = =

In the early months of 1905 , Booker T. Washington sought to create an umbrella organization to represent all the major African @-@ American leaders of the day . Du Bois and Grimké were the two most radical leaders invited to its early organizational meetings , but both eventually refused to ally with Washington , whom they saw as dominating the group . Du Bois , Trotter , and two others organized a meeting of radicals from across the nation in western New York . Meeting in July just across the Canadian border in Fort Erie , Ontario they founded the Niagara Movement . Organized so that no one man could dominate it , the group espoused a radical declaration of principles ( authored by Trotter and Du Bois ) , calling for agitation for equal economic opportunity and exercise of full civil rights for African Americans . The organization was soon divided internally by political and personal disagreements , and Washington worked from outside against its growth .

During the early months of 1906 , friction began to develop between Du Bois and Trotter over the admission of women to the organization . Du Bois supported the idea , and Trotter opposed it , but

eventually relented . The matter was smoothed over during the 1906 meeting . Their division became more significant when Trotter split with Clement Morgan , a longtime supporter and Movement member , over Massachusetts politics and control of the local Movement chapter . Du Bois sided with Morgan and , when the Movement met in Boston in 1907 , he reappointed Morgan to a leading position in the organization . Attempts to heal the rift failed , and Trotter resigned from the Movement . Because of these difficulties , the organization had effectively collapsed by 1908 . The break between Trotter and Du Bois was permanent , and they never worked directly together again . Du Bois wrote in 1909 that it was " utterly impossible to work with Mr. Trotter . "

Despite the Niagara Movement 's failure , its goals had appealed to white supporters of racial equality . They participated in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ( NAACP ) , which drew an inter @-@ racial coalition of support . Trotter and Du Bois were both present at meetings in 1909 in which its foundation was laid . Although some of Trotter 's proposals were accepted ( to address segregated transportation as a grievance ) , others were not ( such as his proposal for a bill to make lynching a federal crime ) . Trotter was not invited to be on the organization 's executive committee ; neither was Booker T. Washington , who boycotted the effort .

Trotter never played a significant role in the NAACP , and in its early years actively competed with it . In 1911 Trotter 's group and the NAACP both held rallies in Boston to mark the centennial of abolitionist Charles Sumner 's birth . Trotter was peripherally involved with the NAACP for a few years , but he did not approve of the amount of white involvement in the interracial group . His feud with Du Bois ran deep , so he rarely contributed to the organization at the national level . He was also troubled by the attitudes expressed in the Boston chapter , which he told NAACP leader Joel Spingarn needed more " radical , courageous activity . " He eventually drifted away from the NAACP .

= = National Equal Rights League = =

After Trotter split from the Niagara Movement , he helped organize a conference of like @-@ minded activists held in Philadelphia in April 1908 , and served as the conference chair . In this capacity , he excluded any attendees whose racial ideology he opposed , as well as those who supported Republican William Howard Taft in the upcoming presidential election . ( Trotter opposed Taft because he had tired of what he considered the Republican Party laissez @-@ faire policies on race . ) This conference led to the formation of the Negro @-@ American Political League , which eventually became known as the National Equal Rights League ( NERL ) . Trotter described this group as " of the colored people and for the colored people and led by the colored people . "

NERL , which biographer Fox describes as Trotter 's " personal fief " , was unable to attract high @-@ profile membership as the NAACP did . Trotter did not want white members , and was unable to work effectively with other African @-@ American leaders . NERL and the NAACP , while both working toward similar goals , regularly feuded over matters public and personal .

As the NAACP attracted more money and talent , and became the center of anti @-@ Bookerite civil rights activity , Trotter and the NERL became increasingly marginalized on the left . Trotter would not have as prominent a role in the civil rights dialogue again . By 1921 the League had been reduced to a handful of Trotter supporters .

= = Trotter and Woodrow Wilson = =

Trotter 's opposition to Booker T. Washington placed him at odds with Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft , Republican presidents who relied on Washington as an adviser and otherwise enjoyed widespread African @-@ American support . Trotter supported the southern Democrat Woodrow Wilson in the 1912 election . Wilson , in a brief meeting with Trotter and other NERL members , made vague statements about fair treatment of African Americans . But , he succumbed to pressure from Southerners in his cabinet and agreed to segregate federal offices . The NAACP and NERL ( then known as the National Independent Political League , or NIPL ) protested , and

Trotter secured a meeting with Wilson at the White House in November 1913 . Wilson said that his policies were not segregationist , but Trotter characterized Wilson 's denial as " preposterous " .

Trotter continued his protests , eventually gaining a second invitation to the White House in November 1914 . This meeting with Wilson ended with a heated exchange between the two men . Wilson claimed to be dealing with a " human problem " from which politics should be left out , and suggested to Trotter 's group that they could always vote for someone else in the next election . Trotter continued to argue that the segregationist policy was humiliating to African Americans . Wilson responded , " If you take it as a humiliation , which it is not intended as , and sow the seed of that impression all over the country , why the consequences will be very serious . " After Trotter said this was an insult , Wilson angrily ordered him to leave , saying " If this organization wishes to approach me again , it must choose another spokesman ... your tone , sir , offends me . "

Trotter 's second meeting with the President was widely covered in the press , featured on the front page of the New York Times and other leading newspapers . A white Texas newspaper described Trotter as " merely a nigger " and " not a Booker T. Washington type of colored man " , and northern papers also criticized him for his " insolence " to the president . The Boston Evening Transcript , while observing that Wilson 's policy was segregationist and divisive , pointed out that although Trotter was basically correct , he " offends many of his own color by his ... untactful belligerency " . African Americans were divided in their response to the incident : some claimed that he did not represent them , while others , notably Du Bois , grudgingly admired Trotter 's audacity . Du Bois wrote that Wilson was " insulting & condescending " in the meeting . Trotter parlayed the publicity into a series of speaking engagements , in which he denied " that in language , manner , tone , in any respect or to the slightest degree I was impudent , insolent , or insulting to the President . "

Trotter continued to protest segregationist policies of the Wilson administration . When the country began large @-@ scale recruiting for the military in World War I , Trotter opposed the establishment of segregated officer training facilities . Through his influence , recruitment of blacks in the Boston area was lower than expected . During World War II , the military integrated the officer corps , and President Harry Truman afterward completed integration of the armed services .

When the Great War ended , Trotter sought to use the 1919 Paris Peace Conference as a vehicle to raise international awareness of US government policy toward African Americans . He viewed the reality of segregation as incompatible with Wilson 's war vision to " make the world safe for Democracy . " Trotter organized a meeting in Washington , DC related to the peace conference ; he and ten other African @-@ American delegates were chosen to attend the peace conference . The State Department refused to issue passports to those delegates , or to African Americans planning to attend a Pan @-@ African Congress that Du Bois was organizing to be held concurrently with the peace conference in Paris . Du Bois and other African Americans were supporting African colonies ' desire for independence .

To get to Europe , Trotter posed as a seaman seeking work in New York , and got a job as a cook on the SS Yarmouth to gain passage to France . He arrived in Paris alone and with little more than his cook 's clothing , only to find that the principal peace negotiations had already taken place . The powers did not include any statement of racial equality . Trotter attracted the French press in his accounts of racial mistreatment in the United States , but he could not gain access to any of the official delegations to the peace conference . He also missed Du Bois ' Pan @-@ African Congress , which was held in February 1919 while he was still seeking passage .

Trotter returned to the United States in July 1919 to learn of ongoing race riots at major cities across the country . Postwar economic and social tensions had erupted , and blacks fought back against white violence in cities such as Chicago and Omaha . Trotter quickly supported active resistance to white @-@ on @-@ black violence , writing , " Unless the white American behaves , he will find that in teaching our boys to fight for him he was starting something that he will not be able to stop . " His writings prompted calls in Congress for the censorship of the Negro press : South Carolina Congressman James F. Byrnes accused Trotter of " doing his utmost to incite riots and bloodshed . " Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge gave Trotter a chance to testify during Senate deliberations on ratification of the Treaty of Versailles , which Lodge opposed on grounds other than Trotter 's . Lodge 's opposition was successful : the Senate never ratified the treaty .

= = Other protests and later years = =

Trotter mounted a campaign against Thomas Dixon 's play *The Clansman* when it opened in Boston in 1910 , which portrayed the Ku Klux Klan in heroic terms during Reconstruction . His protests succeeded in closing the production . While on his speaking tour in early 1915 , he learned that D. W. Griffith 's movie , *The Birth of a Nation* , adapted from *The Clansman* , would be opening in Boston . He rushed back to lead protests against the film . In April , the Tremont Theatre denied Trotter and a group of African Americans tickets to the showing . When they refused to leave the lobby , plainclothes police moved in , sparking a scuffle . Trotter and ten others were arrested ; other protests took place both inside and outside the theater . Trotter , united with other factions of the African @-@ American community , tried but could not get the film banned in Boston . This united front , along with the death later in 1915 of Booker T. Washington , reduced for a time the internal hostilities in the Boston African @-@ American community .

The KKK had a revival for a decade after 1915 , especially in industrial cities and the Midwest . In 1921 , Trotter was successful in shutting down new screenings of *Birth of a Nation* in Boston ; he allied with Roman Catholic organizations , who objected to the KKK 's anti @-@ Catholic stance of the 20th century , and were strong in the city as a result of extensive Irish and Italian immigration .

Trotter 's wife had died in the 1918 influenza pandemic . She had been a partner in all his activities and he missed her greatly .

Through the 1920s and 1930s , Trotter subsided into a genteel poverty , using the *Guardian* as an ongoing voice of protest . He lobbied for anti @-@ lynching bills in Congress , with limited success . Even when the House overwhelmingly passed such a bill in 1922 , the Southern bloc in the Senate filibustered and effectively killed passage of the bill for three years running . ( White Democrats effectively controlled nearly all the Congressional seats apportioned to the total population of the South , after having disfranchised blacks . ) They controlled chairmanships of numerous important committees , which were established by seniority .

In 1923 Trotter eventually came to an uneasy truce with the NAACP . His attempts to promote his style of activism , however , were eclipsed by activities of younger leaders , such as Marcus Garvey , a Jamaican immigrant in New York City and leader of the UNIA .

Through these years , Trotter routinely wrote in the *Guardian* about incidents of racial injustice , including the 1931 trials of the Scottsboro boys . They had been accused and were convicted of raping two white women in Alabama . Historians have concluded they were innocent .

On the morning of April 7 , 1934 , his 62nd birthday , William Monroe Trotter died after a fall from the roof of his home in Boston . The cause is uncertain , but it is known that he was depressed and troubled at the time . He may have committed suicide .

= = Legacy and honors = =

Several schools and academic institutions were named for him : the William Monroe Trotter Elementary School in Dorchester , the William Monroe Trotter Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston ( a research institute for the study of black history and black culture ) , and the William Monroe Trotter Multicultural Center ( aka Trotter House ) at the University of Michigan .

Trotter 's first home in Dorchester , the William Monroe Trotter House , was designated a National Historic Landmark in recognition of his significance in the civil rights cause .

In 2002 , scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed William Monroe Trotter among his 100 Greatest African Americans .