

**“A Monument to Jim Crow”: Post-War Racial Liberalism and the Battle Over the
Booker T. Washington Black Veterans Hospital**

Lihani du Plessis

HST 407: Racial Politics in the United States

Dr. Marissa Chappell
Spring 2018

FINAL DRAFT

Introduction

“It has been demonstrated over and over again that ‘separate but equal’ facilities are a legal fiction and a judicial myth. There never has been, nor can there ever be, equality in segregation. The inevitable result is second-class facilities based on race which we contend is contrary to our basic laws.”

– Walter White, NAACP Secretary¹

During the summer of 1951, staunch Mississippi Democrat and racial demagogue, John Rankin unwaveringly stated that “in the South we take care of Negroes better than anywhere else in the world.”² Rankin, a member of Congress from 1920 to 1952, served sixteen consecutive terms and used his influence to uphold the white supremacist traditions of his southern homeland.³ Anti-Semitic, in favor of anti-miscegenation and Japanese internment laws, and opposed to anti-lynching laws, Rankin pushed to pass bill HR 314.⁴ Already rejected twice by the Senate HR 314 proposed the construction of an all-black veterans hospital as a memorial to Booker T. Washington at his birthplace in Franklin County, Virginia. Rankin portrayed the bill as a means of uplift for African Americans: one could either “vote for this bill or shut the door of hope in the face of these Negroes.”⁵ Why would Rankin, a notorious racist, argue in favor of providing opportunities for black physicians and health care for black veterans?

Rankin’s affirmative tone towards African American uplift demonstrates how racial liberalism had swept the post-war American political landscape. Despite the adamant backing of Rankin, Edith Nourse Rogers [R-MA], and other supporters, the hospital was never

¹ *Hearings before the Select Committee on Labor and Public Welfare*, HR 3814, Veterans Hospital Program, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., February 2, 1948, 111.

² *Commemorative Veterans’ Hospital For Negro Veterans*, HR 210, 82nd Cong., 1st sess. *Congressional Record* (June 6, 1951): 6200.

³ “John Rankin Dies; Ex-Legislator, 78,” *The New York Times*, November 27, 1960, 86.

⁴ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 122-123.

⁵ HR 210, *Congressional Record*, 6200.

constructed as HR 3814 died in the House of Representatives in 1951 in a 223-117 vote.⁶ This paper examines the three sessions of congressional records surrounding the Booker T. Washington hospital (hereafter BTW hospital). An analysis of racial liberalism in claims-making—which encompassed the American Creed, American exceptionalism, and “the American Way”— reveal how advocates of the BTW hospital justified unequal medical treatment for black World War II veterans, and how members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Medical Association (NMA) made unyielding claims to full citizenship rights in order to achieve racial equality.

By drawing on a large body of historical scholarship that examines World War II as a critical turning point in changing American racial ideologies, this paper offers insight into the developing ideology of racial liberalism at the center of post-war claims to citizenship and the nation’s self-image. Scholars Wendy Wall and Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff suggest that the government and the media employed intentional political strategies during and after World War II to create a persona of racial liberalism and a unified America. The government made claims to patriotism and nationalism, which acted to defend democracy by defeating the common enemies of fascism and totalitarianism, while simultaneously neglecting to address the roots of racial discrimination.⁷ Racial liberalism is the belief that racism is fundamentally incompatible with the American Creed, which promotes democracy and equality, and views the United States as an exceptional leader in race relations. Thus, racial liberalism called for

⁶ “VA Negro Hospital: HR 314,” *The Congressional Quarterly Almanac: 82nd Congress, 1st Session — 1951 Volume VII*, Congressional Quarterly News Feature: Washington D.C. (1951): 296.

⁷ Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, “Constructing G.I. Joe Louis: Cultural Solutions to the ‘Negro Problem’ during World War II,” *Journal of American History* 89, No. 3 (December 2002): 958-983; Wendy Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

increased individual rights to be achieved through government intervention, which aimed to eliminate private prejudices without addressing structural inequalities.

Racial liberalism is the overarching ideological umbrella that includes American exceptionalism and what Wall terms, the unifying rhetoric of “the American Way.”⁸ The rhetoric of American exceptionalism views the United States as unusually committed to the ideals of democracy and egalitarianism. Likewise, “the American Way” as described by Wall, promoted tolerance, individual liberty, and viewed cultural pluralism and diversity as the defining features of democracy.⁹ “The American Way” differed slightly from racial liberalism in that it idealized the current state of the United States. In contrast, racial liberalism viewed the elimination of overt racism as a way to achieve equality through the auspices of democracy. Both racial liberalism and “the American Way” share the rhetoric of tolerance and pluralism while negating to address the underlying discrimination. It is within this scaffold of racial liberalism that the arguments for and against the BTW hospital emerge.

Furthermore, many scholars suggest that the military service and experiences of black veterans abroad during World War II shaped their views on citizenship and democracy, thus creating a sense of entitlement from which they challenged the American racial status quo.¹⁰ Other scholars argue that the inability of black veterans in the South to fully access the benefits of the 1946 Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (GI Bill of Rights) due to poor administration and

⁸ Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”*, 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ Christopher S. Parker, “When Politics Becomes Protest: Black Veterans and Political Activism in the Postwar South,” *Journal of Politics* 71, No. 1 (January 2009): 113-131; Jennifer E. Brooks, “Winning the Peace: Georgia Veterans and the Struggle to Define the Political Legacy of World War II,” *Journal of Southern History* 66, No. 3 (August 2000): 563-604.

Southern racism, fostered black veterans activism.^{11,12} This activism reached healthcare as white physicians applied racial stereotypes to injured black veterans when determining compensation qualifications.¹³ Black veteran's voices are strangely absent in the congressional records; this paper will, therefore, focus on the ways in which debates over the BTW hospital took place within the rhetorical bounds of racial liberalism.

In the immediate postwar years, the black hospital became a contested space in debates about equalization and integration. Some scholars propose that this debate occurred because black organizations and physicians were deeply invested in the black hospital. Black hospitals and clinics were formed through grass-roots organizing in the Jim Crow era due to the lack of African American access to health care.¹⁴ Therefore, the black hospital became a place which not only served black patients but also provided professional employment for black doctors. In 1946 the Hill-Burton Act expanded federal funding to build hospitals and stipulated that health care would be provided without discrimination, yet it is debated among historians how much the act benefitted African Americans.¹⁵ The Hill-Burton Act mandated but did not achieve non-discrimination, instead, as proposed by scholar Karen Kruse Thomas, it created a system of

¹¹ David H. Onkst, "'First a Negro . . . Incidentally a Veteran': Black World War Two Veterans and the G.I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948," *Journal of Social History* 31, No. 3 (Spring 1998): 517-543; Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*; Michael D. Gambone, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

¹² Onkst, "First a Negro...Incidentally a Veteran," 532.

¹³ Robert F. Jefferson, "'Enabled Courage': Race, Disability, and Black World War II Veterans in Postwar America," *Historian* 65, No. 5 (September 2003): 1102-1124.

¹⁴ David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito, "'Let Down Your Bucket Where You Are': The Afro-American Hospital and Black Health Care in Mississippi, 1924-1966," *Social Science History* 30, No. 4 (Winter 2006): 551-569; David Barton Smith, "The Politics of Racial Disparities: Desegregating the Hospitals in Jackson, Mississippi," *Milbank Quarterly* 83, No. 2 (2005): 247-269.

¹⁵ Karen Kruse Thomas, "The Hill-Burton Act and Civil Rights: Expanding Hospital Care for Black Southerners, 1939-1960," *Journal of Southern History* 72, No. 4 (November 2006): 823-870.

Deluxe Jim Crow segregation, where segregated health care was provided in new or updated facilities.¹⁶ With the advent of Deluxe Jim Crow medical facilities, black physicians debated whether to refuse or accept segregated and black-only hospitals. Thus, these debates situate the state of black healthcare within the context of “the long civil rights movement” by showing the tensions of how African Americans maneuvered within the dominant political system to gain increased access to healthcare.

African Americans disagreed about the proposed BTW hospital; some argued for equality under segregation and others argued for full integration. The terms ‘separatism’ and ‘integrationism’ are borrowed from scholars Karen Kruse Thomas and Vanessa Northington Gamble. Both scholars use ‘separatism’ to denote arguments for equalization within the separate but equal Jim Crow framework (also referred to as equalization arguments). This line of argumentation states that some healthcare benefits now in a segregated hospital are better than no healthcare at all. Whereas, ‘integrationism’ argumentation advocates for full integration, which is in alignment with the long-term goal of equality, even if that negates healthcare to black veterans now. The NAACP and the NMA strongly opposed the BTW hospital and argued for full integration by claiming that it would promote segregation and harm foreign relations.¹⁷ Other African Americans, including the Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial group (hereafter BTWBM), argued for separatism by suggesting that the BTW hospital would provide employment opportunities for black physicians and care for a large number of black veterans.¹⁸ This debate also surrounded the Hill-Burton Act, the Tuskegee veterans Hospital,

¹⁶ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 175.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110, 112.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

and the black hospital movement more generally.¹⁹ My research will add to this scholarly conversation through investigating the effect of racial liberalism on separatism versus integrationism debates present in the BTW hospital congressional hearings.²⁰ This paper also extends the historiography of “the long civil rights movement” of black access to health care by examining the ways in which the black medical community embraced different ideological positions in order to gain equality.

The congressional hearings for the BTW hospital serve as the primary source base for this case study, which is supplemented by the mainstream (*New York Times*) and black press (*The Crisis*, and *The Chicago Defender*) coverage of the BTW hospital. This paper will cover the congressional hearings from the 80th session in 1948 (S 1414, HR 3814), the hearings from the 81st session in 1949 (HR 3296, HR 6034), and the congressional record from 1951 (HR 314). The black community adopted separatist or integrationist philosophies and lines of argumentation which all took place within the framework of racial liberalism. These philosophies reveal intra-racial differences which permitted the black hospital to remain a contested space in an era when civil rights activists slowly dismantled Jim Crow segregation. This paper argues that in post-war America, racial liberalism became the prevailing political framework from which both white and black, opponents and advocates of the BTW hospital made their claims.

¹⁹ Vanessa Northington Gamble, *Making A Place for Ourselves: The Black Hospital Movement, 1920-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Mary Kaplan, *The Tuskegee Veterans Hospital and Its Black Physicians: The Early Years* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2016); Karen Kruse Thomas, "The Hill-Burton Act and Civil Rights," 823-870; Karen Kruse Thomas, *Deluxe Jim Crow: Civil Rights and American Health Policy, 1935-1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

²⁰Thomas, "The Hill-Burton Act and Civil Rights," 825; Gamble, *Making a Place for Ourselves*, xvi.

Separatism: Arguments in Favor of the BTW Hospital

In February 1948, Senator Wayne Morse [R-OR] chaired the first congressional hearings for the BTW hospital. The bill was introduced by Senator Chapman Revercomb [R-WV] after the House Committee on Veterans Affairs constructed it in July 1947. Revercomb justified the bill under the presumption that a large number of black World War II veterans in the South needed additional hospital facilities.²¹ Furthermore, Revercomb cited the support of the BTWBM to bolster the credibility of the bill.

Black witnesses who supported the bill portrayed the BTW hospital as a reward for African American war service and as a symbol of the American values of equality and morality. Supporters of the BTW hospital included African Americans Sidney J. Phillips, the President of the BTWBM, G. Lake Imes, vice president of the BTWBM, and attorney at law, Perry W. Howard. Phillips argued that the BTW hospital “will be a symbol of democracy which will serve future generations in the care and treatment for Negro veterans, who have contributed to the American way of life.”²² By embracing the mainstream white ideology of the ‘American Dream’ and the image of American egalitarianism Phillips romanticizes the service of black veterans in the Second World War. Furthermore, Phillips frames the war service of black veterans as a privilege:

The location of a veterans hospital at the birthplace of Booker T. Washington will reach and enrich the inner being of the Negro veteran...[it] will put the kind of feeling in their hearts, and the sort of fire in their souls that will not only help them to bear their infirmities with patience, but will also make them feel with the patriots of old, that it is a glorious privilege to live and die for a land that is big enough to make it possible for even its humblest citizens to go “From slave cabin to hall of fame.”²³

²¹ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 90.

²² *Ibid.*, 94.

²³ *Ibid.*, 96.

Phillips, Imes, and Howard embraced a separatism line of argument within the framework of racial liberalism, which served to depoliticize racial inequality by focusing on black achievements and imagined American egalitarianism.²⁴

These African American witnesses also embraced the politics of racial uplift by arguing that the construction of the BTW hospital would allow black veterans to have increased access to healthcare as well as provide black physicians and nurses with employment and training opportunities.²⁵ In addition, African American proponents argued that the BTW hospital will serve as an inspiration for the black community.²⁶ Imes embraced racial liberalism by reasoning that “a hospital for Negro veterans, managed and operated by the men and women of their own race, will be tangible evidence of the Nation’s gratitude more eloquent than words.”²⁷ Likewise, Howard also chose to focus on black advancement rather than the perpetual inequality faced by the black community. Similarly, Phillips embraced the politics of racial uplift by suggesting that locating the veterans hospital at Booker T. Washington’s birthplace would make the nation appear democratic and altruistic towards African Americans:

Negroes...are very emotional, and as I said they appreciate recognition, and if you put this hospital down there, you would provide them with a moral stimulus much more than if you gave them something at Atlanta or Washington or New York City or any other place like that...The Government would be wise in realizing a factor like that; and I think they would also get the greatest return for dollars spent.²⁸

²⁴ Sklaroff, "Constructing G.I. Joe Louis," 958-983.

²⁵ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 98.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁸ *Hearings before the Select Committee on Labor on Labor and Public Welfare*, HR 3296, Veterans Hospital Program, 81st Cong., 1st sess., August 10, 1949, 1131.

Phillips lessens the reality that the perpetual need for African American's to prove themselves before achieving full citizenship rights is contradictory to the American ideals of democracy and equality. Instead, Phillips and the other African American supporters of the hospital argued that the hospital would address healthcare inequality and fulfill the nation's claims of exceptionalism in democracy and egalitarianism. These arguments embrace patronizing attitudes which suggest that African Americans are emotional and easily manipulated by symbolic recognition, and that they needed a chance to "prove themselves."²⁹

Despite claims by opponents that there did not exist a sufficient number of trained black medical personnel to staff the hospital, proponents of the BTW hospital such as Rogers upheld her race liberal position that the BTW hospital would be "a tremendous boon for colored people" and that if they could "secure this hospital, it would mean added nurses and doctors."³⁰ Likewise, Phillips claimed that "surely you could find enough [black doctors] in the country to staff one more [black hospital]."³¹ The pseudo innocence which characterizes Rogers and Phillips' statements about the true nature of African American medical education is characteristic of racial liberalism, which proposed to aid black uplift while simultaneously negating the roots of discrimination.

²⁹ Interestingly, Phillips and the BTWBM not only advocated that the BTW hospital would serve black veterans but also that it would be the headquarters of a national program to provide African Americans below high-school level with trade and industrial training. Although opponents of the hospital did not attack this proposal, its existence also encompassed the politics of racial uplift within the broader structure of racial liberalism. The statements reads that, "this program will be based on the sane, fundamental teachings of Booker T. Washington and will not only aim to teach these Americans to earn a better living, but also strive to teach them how to live better and more useful lives by inculcating in them Booker T. Washington's lofty ideals of service." It appears that although the primary aim of the bill was to construct a black veterans hospital, African American proponents also aimed to simultaneously achieve educational and thus economic uplift. See, HR 3814, *Hearing*, 96.

³⁰ *Congressional Record*, 82nd. Cong., 1st sess. (1951), 6200.

³¹HR 3296, *Hearing*, 1129.

Members of Congress ardently debated the proposed location of the BTW hospital. Those in favor of the hospital, particularly Rankin, reasoned that despite the VA's stance that new veterans hospitals should be built in close proximity to medical centers, the BTW hospital should be constructed, instead, in a relatively isolated rural community in Virginia. Rankin stated that he was "not willing to locate a veterans hospital near a medical school just in order to provide guinea pigs for boys who are studying medicine."³² Rankin suggested that the isolated location of the Tuskegee hospital did not affect the quality of medical care provided and that locating the new black veterans hospital at Booker T. Washington's birthplace would give African Americans "an opportunity to demonstrate what, with their own doctors and their own nurses, they can do."³³ Rankin's argument is laid with contradictions; first, he suggested that black physicians are unqualified, but then he stated that black veterans would receive adequate care from black medical personnel at the segregated BTW hospital. These contradictions reveal the fallibility of Rankin's arguments made within the confines of racial liberalism, which restricted him from openly voicing his racist beliefs.

Despite the federal opposition to the BTW hospital by the Veterans Administration (hereafter VA) and the Budget of the Bureau, Rankin unwaveringly advocated for the hospital. He shifted the focus from the rational arguments against the hospital (the isolated location, the lack of black medical staff, segregation and discrimination, and the dubious motives of the BTWBM) to an argument that embraced "the American Way" by villainizing the NAACP as a "communist infested organization."³⁴ Rankin stated that "the real opposition is coming from a

³² *Congressional Record*, 82nd. Cong., 1st sess. (1951), 6194.

³³ HR 3296, *Hearing*, 1119-1120.

³⁴ *Congressional Record*, 82nd. Cong., 1st sess. (1951), 6199.

Communist front organization that cannot use these Booker T. Washington Negroes and are therefore against the Negro veterans hospital.”³⁵ By referencing a common enemy of democracy (communism) Rankin aimed to bolster the façade that the BTW hospital would be a positive contribution to the plight of African American improvement. The *New York Times* also stated that Rankin “opposed with equal zeal anything that he thought would break down the barriers of racial discrimination” and used communism “as a vehicle for his recurrent anti-Semitism and attacks of Negroes and labor.”³⁶ Rankin’s unsound arguments for the hospital reveal the far-reaching effects of post-war racial liberalism. He portrayed African Americans as ill-prepared for full citizenship rights and implied that opponents of the BTW hospital were in disagreement with the political consensus. In a sense, Rankin was stuck in racial liberalism, which forced him to employ stereotypes as a means of dismissing and demonizing claims for equal rights.

Integrationism: Arguments Against the BTW Hospital

African American opponents of the BTW hospital and their white allies also embraced the American ideal of democracy and egalitarianism but instead argued that integrationism would be the best method to achieve the American Creed. In a telegram to Senator Morse, Henry A. Wallace viewed the hospital not as a monument to Booker T. Washington but as “a monument to Jim Crow in the form of a hospital to treat the victims of racists.” Similarly, NAACP secretary Walter White staunchly rejected the hospital on the basis that it would perpetuate segregation and inequality. White argued for full integration by appealing to

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “John Rankin Dies; Ex-Legislator, 78,” *The New York Times*, November 27, 1960, 86.

President Truman's 1946 Committee on Civil Rights.³⁷ Letters from Mr. Thomas W. Young, president of the Negro Newspapers Publishers Association, and Reverend Dr. William H. Jernagin of the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches in America argued that the BTW hospital would be both an insult to the black veterans and harmful to the international image of the United States.³⁸ This international image, as proposed by scholar Mary Dudziak, was particularly important to the American government during the Cold War era, because race relations played a large role in the international conception of the United States and its influence in international politics. Thus, the government aimed to sustain the idea of American exceptionalism and moral superiority by highlighting the dependable, albeit slow, nature of democracy to achieve social change, which was contrasted to the constrictions of communism.³⁹ A telegram from George A. Parker of the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity aptly summarized the opposition's argument against the hospital:

It does violence to the spirit of democracy. It will add to our embarrassment of our representatives to the United Nations. It will give aid and comfort to our enemies abroad. It will lower our prestige among the world's democracies. The passage of this bill will be regarded as a victory by the forces of racial and religious prejudices.⁴⁰

Opponents of the hospital referred to the nation's global image and embraced arguments that preserved "the American Way", and consequently re-used dominant arguments of racial liberalism after the war to achieve their goal of integration.

³⁷ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁹ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 13.

⁴⁰ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 115.

Scholar Karen Kruse Thomas suggests that during World War II, a tactical move towards hard-line integrationism arose in black organizations such as the NAACP and NMA.⁴¹ This change towards integrationism echoed the shift that occurred in the northern black medical community in the 1930s, where the ideology of integration replaced Booker T. Washington's model of self-help.⁴² In 1945 the NMA adopted an integration strategy and by 1947 had joined forces with the NAACP to fight racial discrimination in hospitals, medical schools, and professional medical societies, targeting the Veterans' Administration hospitals first.⁴³ Although northern black physicians advocated for integration, southern black physicians held onto arguments for equalization under Jim Crow. Scholar Vanessa Northington Gamble suggests that this occurred because segregated black hospitals were safe spaces for black physicians to practice medicine.⁴⁴ It is from this background that Montague W. Cobb, Howard University Professor and member of the National Medical Committee of the NAACP, condemned the proposed BTW hospital and dismantled the Tuskegee veterans hospital as a model black hospital.

Tuskegee Alabama, although famous for the unethical syphilis study conducted on African Americans from the 1930s-1970s, was also home to the Tuskegee veterans hospital. The hospital opened in 1923 in response to the large number of black World War I veterans that required medical care.⁴⁵ Despite initial protests and vigilante violence by the white residents of Tuskegee, the hospital came to be regarded as the exemplary black institution. Proponents of

⁴¹ Thomas, *Deluxe Jim Crow*, 168.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 169; Gamble, *Making a Place for Ourselves*, 182.

⁴⁴ Gamble, *Making a Place for Ourselves*, xvi.

⁴⁵ Kaplan, *The Tuskegee Veterans Hospital and Its Black Physicians*, 23.

the BTW hospital frequently referenced the Tuskegee hospital as one of Booker T. Washington's successful projects for African American uplift.⁴⁶ The description of HR 3814 stated that it "is not a precedent. A Negro hospital, completely staffed and managed by Negroes, has been operated by the Veterans Administration at Tuskegee, Ala."⁴⁷ The Tuskegee hospital was referenced and romanticized by white advocates, particularly Rankin, as demonstrating imagined convivial Southern race relations: "We have an all-Negro veterans' hospital at Tuskegee, Ala...and it is the only veterans' hospital that I know of that has Negro physicians. We have quite a number of Negro doctors over the country that could supply this hospital. We have never had any trouble at Tuskegee. They have got along splendidly."⁴⁸ Black proponents of the BTW hospital also used the Tuskegee hospital as an example of black fortitude and competence. Imes stated that "down at Tuskegee where Dr. Washington did his great work, we had a hospital for Negroes...that hospital has been well run. It demonstrates what this hospital might do...As an Alabaman, I hope we can have a great hospital bearing the name of Booker T. Washington."⁴⁹

It is within this context that African American opponents critiqued the Tuskegee hospital as a model black institution. In particular, Cobb argued that equalization will not be actualized under Jim Crow because blacks will never get equal treatment. He also maintained the view that even if African Americans did receive equal treatment, segregation would still be

⁴⁶ In addition to the Tuskegee and BTW hospitals, another black veterans hospital was approved to be constructed in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. The Mound Bayou hospital was frequently referenced alongside the Tuskegee hospital as justification for the BTW hospital. The NAACP strongly protested the Mound Bayou hospital and it was never constructed. See, "Negroes Protest Hospital Plan," *New York Times*, March 22, 1947, 5; Venice T. Spraggs, "Claim Jim Crow Set-Up Too Far From Experts," *The Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1947, 1,2.

⁴⁷ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 89.

⁴⁸ *Congressional Record*, 82nd. Cong., 1st sess. (1951), 6192.

⁴⁹ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 103.

unacceptable: “not only has the segregating system not worked, but that it cannot work ... it is impossible to achieve equal justice under it and ... the time for its eradication from American life is now.”⁵⁰ Cobb further demonstrated that “the hospital at Tuskegee is known to have shared in the general conditions leading to professional deterioration” and that it is “not approved by a significant segment of public opinion ... as a precedent for providing proper medical care for Negro veterans.”⁵¹ Cobb’s critique disassembled the scaffold of racial liberalism used by the Deluxe Jim Crow system.⁵² Furthermore, Cobb vehemently challenged the assumptions of racial liberalism surrounding the BTW hospital: “what we see is not a bona fide attempt to meet the needs of the disadvantaged citizens, but merely an expedient which gives the appearance of doing something without relaxing the iron bars of the discriminatory system.”⁵³ Despite Cobb’s urgings, the proponents of the BTW hospital embraced the Deluxe Jim Crow system and racial liberalism. They saw this system not as the perpetuation of “the undemocratic treatment of the Negro in [the United States]” but as providing equal treatment and opportunity to African Americans in new segregated hospitals.⁵⁴

Yet, the lack of qualified black medical personnel served as a sensible argument against the BTW hospital. African Americans William L. Dawson [D-IL] and Adam Clayton Powell [D-NY] contended that due to the shortage of qualified black doctors, staffing a segregated hospital would be difficult, especially in an isolated location.⁵⁵ *The Chicago Defender*, the nation’s preeminent African American newspaper, echoed this argument and reasoned that because

⁵⁰ Ibid., 124.

⁵¹ Ibid., 122-123.

⁵² Thomas, *Deluxe Jim Crow*, 175.

⁵³ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 124.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁵ *Congressional Record*, 82nd. Cong., 1st sess. (1951), 6200.

black medical personnel would need to staff the segregated black hospital, the limited number of trained medical staff would be funneled away from places such as Howard Medical School, further decreasing the standard of black medical care.⁵⁶

During the Jim Crow era, Howard University Medical School in Washington D.C. and Meharry Medical College in Nashville Tennessee were the two predominant locations where African Americans could access medical training. Other locations also provided medical training for African Americans but due to poor resources and insufficient instruction, 53.7 percent of medical graduates failed the state board exams.⁵⁷ This resulted in a shortage of competent black doctors (and nurses) and consequently black run hospitals that provided substandard medical care. Southern states barred the few existing black physicians from practicing medicine on white patients, thus segregated hospitals “provided a safe haven from the humiliation of segregation.”⁵⁸ Therefore, it is unsurprising that the southern black physicians held onto the waning black hospital despite the shifting strategies of the NAACP and the NMA that pushed for full integration.

Interestingly, Powell challenged Rankin’s positive race liberal stance towards black veterans by calling the BTWBM group into question for siphoning money.⁵⁹ In 1946, during the 79th congressional session, Congress authorized the Booker T. Washington Memorial half dollar to be minted as a fundraiser for the BTW hospital.⁶⁰ The coins were embossed with a bust of Booker T. Washington and inscribed with the slogan “from slave cabin to hall of fame”, “Booker

⁵⁶ Venice T. Spraggs, “Claim Jim Crow Set-Up Too Far From Experts,” *The Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1947, 1,2.

⁵⁷ Cobb, Montague W, “Progress and Portents for the Negro in Medicine,” *The Crisis*, April 1948: 109.

⁵⁸ Thomas, “The Hill-Burton Act ad Civil Rights,” 845.

⁵⁹ *Congressional Record*, 82nd. Cong., 1st sess. (1951), 6197.

⁶⁰ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 95.

T. Washington Birthplace Memorial”, “Liberty”, “In God We Trust”, and “Franklin County VA.”⁶¹

The BTWBM group sold the coins for \$2 a piece, collecting \$1.50 from each sale as a fundraiser for the BTW hospital. Phillips claimed that “eighty-one percent of the money needed for the erection of [the BTW] hospital [would] be netted to the United States Treasury through the circulation of the Booker T. Washington Memorial half dollar.”⁶² The Booker T. Washington half dollar exemplified the self-help philosophy which Washington extolled throughout his life, and embraced the politics of racial uplift. The fundraising efforts of the BTWBM existed in contrast to white veterans hospitals which were not funded through grassroots organizations but through the Veteran’s Administration and tax dollars.

Powell openly criticized the BTWBM and their half-dollars by calling into question who would profit from the construction of the hospital: “I am telling you that something smells here when you are going to build a Jim Crow hospital 35 miles from the nearest town in a waste wilderness, where there are only two creeks and you are going to spend \$5,000,000.”⁶³ Furthermore, Powell questioned who owned the land and who would benefit when the Government purchased the land to build the “Jim-Crow monument.”⁶⁴ In addition, Powell also claimed that the BTWBM used 90 percent of the money fundraised to pay for salaries, and thus he asked Congress to form an investigation into the BTWBM.⁶⁵

Despite the BTWBM’s fundraising efforts the Veteran’s Administration and the Bureau of the Budget opposed the hospital. General Omar N. Bradley of the VA, explained that six

⁶¹ “1946-1951 Booker T. Washington Half Dollar,” Early Commemorative Coins, accessed May 11, 2018, <http://earlycommemorativecoins.com/1946-1951-booker-t-washington-half-dollar/>

⁶² HR 3814, *Hearing*, 95.

⁶³ *Congressional Record*, 82nd. Cong., 1st sess. (1951), 6199.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6200.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6199.

veterans hospitals, open to white and black veterans, were in operation within a 200-mile radius of Franklin County and thus a hospital dedicated to the treatment of black veterans was unnecessary.⁶⁶ The Bureau of the Budget reasoned that the BTW hospital would “not be in accord with the program of the President” and fiscally challenging because a large number of new veterans hospitals were already under construction across the country.⁶⁷

Mainstream and Black Press Media Coverage of the BTW Hospital

Although the congressional hearings signify that African Americans disagreed, the black press as represented by *The Crisis* (magazine of the NAACP) and *The Chicago Defender* (hereafter *The Defender*), unequivocally opposed the BTW hospital and segregated veterans health care. *The Defender* coined the BTW hospital the “Jim Crow veterans facility” arguing that “it upholds the superior race theory which the war was fought to wipe from the face of the earth.”⁶⁸ By referencing African Americans’ wartime service, *The Defender* placed the BTW hospital and segregation in the global context of World War II, the burgeoning Cold War and the ensuing American ideals of democracy encompassed by racial liberalism. Likewise, *The Crisis* “[condemned] without reservation the...construction of segregated hospitals for Negro veterans,” which they reasoned to be “against the purpose and intent of the law.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ HR 3814, *Hearing*, 274. Interestingly, *The Chicago Defender* attributed Bradley as stating in 1946 that, “in segregating Negro patients in a few hospitals, we are not discriminating because of race, creed, or color. Rather, we are adding to the comfort and security of the great majority of our Negro patients.” In 1948, at the time of the hearing Bradley did not use this argument, rather he voiced opposition to the BTW hospital on the basis that it would be unnecessary in light of the numerous VA hospitals in the surrounding area. “Jim Crow Hospitals Add To ‘Comfort’ Of negro Vets, Says Gen. Bradley,” *The Chicago Defender*, February 23, 1946, 1,8.

⁶⁷ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, *Providing for the Establishment of a Veterans’ Hospital for Negro Veterans at the Birthplace of Booker T. Washington, in Franklin County, VA: Report (To Accompany H. R. 314)*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess. 1951. H. Rep. 230, 3.

⁶⁸ Venice T. Spraggs, “Claim Jim Crow Set-Up Too Far From Experts,” *The Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1947, 1,2; “Solon Pushes Booker T. Jim Crow Hospital,” *The Chicago Defender*, August 2, 1947, 1,3.

⁶⁹ “Veterans Affairs: Veterans Hospitals,” *The Crisis*, August- September 1951, 481.

In contrast, *The New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*) predominantly published short, factual articles without the racially charged terms and commentary as seen in *The Defender* and *The Crisis*. However, in one article the *NYT* stated that if bill HR 3814 passed it would set “a dangerous precedent for the care of veterans.”⁷⁰ The *NYT* also supported the VA and their policy to locate new hospitals in close proximity to medical centers: “The Veterans Administration should be given a free hand in locating its facilities at the best places, without regard to politics or local pride.”⁷¹ Although the *NYT* primarily exhibited neutrality, in this instance the article conveys condemnation of local segregation practices. This rhetoric of disapproval alludes to the ideology characteristic of racial liberalism, that racism (segregation) is fundamentally incompatible with the American creed.

Although Booker T. Washington was not alive during the hearings, the BTWBM used the testimony of Portia Washington Pittman, Washington’s daughter, to signify the black community’s approval of the hospital. Pittman testified in the 80th and 81st congressional hearings and submitted a statement for the 1951 congressional session. Pittman’s statements revealed her full support of the BTW hospital as “the most fitting symbol” and tribute to her father. Interestingly, *The Defender* published an article on June 23rd, 1951 which stated that Pittman was not associated with the BTWBM and that she had split ways with the group 18 months prior. Despite Pittman’s apparent split with the BTWBM group they still used her statement in the 1951 congressional session.⁷²

⁷⁰ “VA’s Hospitals,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1948, 22.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Venice T. Spraggs, “Booker T’s Daughter Bares Split With Sponsor of Memorial For Dad,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 23, 1951, 1,2.

Conclusion

The BTW hospital congressional hearings unmistakably silenced the black veteran's voice. Did black veterans approve of the BTW hospital? Did black veterans ascribe to segregationist or integrationist ideologies? How was their view influenced by their wartime service and lack of access to GI Bill benefits? Why is the voice of the black veteran removed from the arguments surrounding the BTW hospital? Further historical research is needed to uncover the black veterans opinion regarding segregated health care in the post-war era, specifically surrounding the proposed BTW hospital.

World War II had a profound effect on American racial politics; "the American Way", the international move towards decolonization, and the American commitment to protect democracy against the peril of communism all fueled the expansion of racial liberalism which permeated American politics. This paper adds to the scholarly conversations surrounding "the long civil rights movement" of black access to health care and the changing debates about equalization under segregation and integration present in the black community. Opponents of the BTW hospital argued most effectively within the framework of racial liberalism because segregating veterans was a clear indication that the American Creed had not been reached. Recognizing the influence of racial liberalism on American racial politics illuminates the strategies used by segregationists and integrationists alike to achieve their goals of increased African American civil rights a decade before the classic phase of the civil rights movement.