

Walter White and Passing

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Abstract

Walter White, the blond, blue-eyed Atlantan, was a voluntary Negro, that is, an African American who appears to be White but chooses to live in the Black world and identify with its experiences. He joined the NAACP national leadership in 1918 as assistant secretary and became secretary in 1931, serving at this post until his death in 1955. His tenure was marked by an effective public antilynching campaign and organizational stability and growth during the Depression years *and* by controversy over his leadership style. For him, posing as a Caucasian—and then telling all who would listen about his escapades—had three interrelated purposes. First, he developed inside information about mob psychology and mob violence, publicity of which was critical to the NAACP's campaign against lynching. Second, White hoped to show Whites in particular the fallacy of racial stereotyping and racial categorization. Third, by emphasizing the dangers he courted—and even embellishing on them—he enhanced his racial bona fides at key times when his Black critics called into question his leadership.

Keywords: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Walter White, Passing, Race Leadership, Lynching Investigations

Walter White, the blond, blue-eyed Atlantan who was the long-time leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was a voluntary Negro, that is, an African American who appears to be White but chooses to live in the Black world and identify with its experiences. He used his anomalous condition to advantage. His popular writings on his complexion and “passing” exploded racial stereotypes and challenged the idea of race as an immutable category and as a basis for apportioning the rights and benefits of society. At the same time, he exploited his position as a voluntary Negro; his exotic status paradoxically afforded him a social standing and a wealth of contacts that would have been denied him had he been White. White enjoyed masquerading alternately as White and as African American. He happily made fools of unsuspecting White supremacists and utilized his ambiguous appearance to demonstrate the absurdity of racial hierarchies.

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Walter White was not consumed by the angst that afflicted the protagonists of the Harlem Renaissance's passing novels, including his own *Flight* (1926). It is doubtful that White ever gave serious thought to passing in the sense of making a life for himself as a Caucasian. For White, at least, it would be fair to say that he appropriated the label voluntary Negro heuristically, on the one hand to signal to African Americans his commitment to racial justice, and to startle Whites into paying attention to the psychic toll of racism and the fight for equality. While he would have found relief from the unceasing suspicions and hostility from Caucasians by becoming one of them, taking on a White identity would just as certainly have uprooted him.

White's father's occupation as a federal postal employee as well as the family's light skin tone placed the Whites in the city's late nineteenth-century Black elite. This stratum also included business owners who catered to a White clientele, domestic workers for elite White families, and professionals (Meier and Lewis, 1992, p. 103); after 1900, "[d]octors, lawyers, real estate owners, insurance executives, bankers, college professors, and well-to-do ministers" (Hunter 1997, p. 148) would increasingly dominate the upper class. The Whites' association with some of Black Atlanta's bedrock institutions like the First Congregational Church and Atlanta University assured the family an honored position in a community that was separated along class and color lines. White captured the flavor of this stratification in *Flight*. "There were churches attended in the main only by coloured people who were mulattoes or quadroons, others only by those whose complexions were quite dark" (p. 55). The upper class women's organizations were marked by a "uniform lightness of skin" (p. 55). Intra-racial color conflict, the result of "a system which made colour and hair texture and race a fetish" (p. 55), infected personal relations of young and old alike.

But by the time he would have been able to make or act on a decision to pass, Walter White's life was in place: he had been raised and educated within institutions that valued the struggle for social change, not the individual's escape from oppression. He was assuming prominent positions in the political and economic life of Black Atlanta. And he was extraordinarily close to his family, an attachment his second wife identified as a principal reason he did not pass.¹ So while Walter White quoted a guesstimate that "upward of 5,000 Negroes forget their Negro blood every year and become to all intents and purposes white—socially, professionally and in every other way" (White 1928), neither he nor the vast majority of Black persons with physiognomies comparable to his chose to alienate themselves from African American society.

For him, posing as White—and then telling all who would listen about his escapades—had three interrelated purposes. First, he developed inside information about mob psychology and mob violence, publicity of which was critical to the NAACP's campaign against lynching. Second, White hoped to show Whites in particular the fallacy of racial stereotyping and racial categorization. Third, by emphasizing the dangers he courted—and even embellishing on them—he enhanced his racial bona fides at key times when his Black critics called into question his leadership.

When he first joined the NAACP national staff as assistant secretary in January 1918, the organization's officials expected that the twenty-four-year-old White would be an administrator—an energetic one, yes, but a paper pusher nonetheless.² But on February 13, as he and James Weldon Johnson took the subway from their Harlem residences to their downtown offices, they read with steadily mounting horror of the torture and murder in Tennessee of Jim McIlherron on the previous day, which ironically happened to be Lincoln's birthday. A mob of more than one thousand watched as McIlherron was chained to a tree, doused with coal oil, poked with hot

irons, castrated, and slowly roasted alive, before his body was thrown on a pyre. On such occasions, the usual practice was for the national office to send protests to the governor, other elected officials, and candidates for office, and to send out press releases to the daily papers and Black weeklies, and encourage NAACP chapters to do likewise. Occasionally the association sent an official investigator to the crime scene, and in one case it hired the Burns Detective Agency. Exposé was the NAACP's chief weapon, but these methods earned little sustained public attention and few tangible results.

But now association officials realized that they had a secret weapon: a new executive who could pass for White, was eager to help the cause, and, as a brash young man, was looking for a bit of adventure. Five days after McIlherron's murder, White was on a train bound for Estill Springs, Tennessee, midway between Chattanooga and Nashville. After several days of mingling with the town's White population, including members of the mob, White reported the particulars of the spectacle, including the incident that touched off the formation of the mob, McIlherron's desperate escape attempt, and his capture. A few months later, White was dispatched to Brooks County, Georgia, to investigate the murder of Mary Turner. Unnerved by such signs of the growing African American assertiveness as the Great Migration, the local gentry had organized a pogrom to extinguish Black sharecropper's hopes for deliverance. When Mary Turner, nine months pregnant, bitterly protested her husband's death at the hands of the pogromists, they turned on her. They pulled her from her home, tied her upside down to a tree, soaked her with gasoline, and set her ablaze. When they saw she was still alive after this ordeal, they cut open her womb, crushed the baby's skull when it fell to the ground, and then filled both mother and child with bullets. Over the next eight years, White investigated more than forty lynchings and eight race riots. He earned serious results, as the daily press regularly printed his journalistic accounts, sometimes on the front page; in one instance, his report led directly to a multi-part front-page series in the *New York World* on racial violence and political corruption in South Carolina.

Walter White built on the exposés of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, whose antilynching crusade predated his by more than two decades. The lynching in Memphis in March 1892 of three friends of hers whose only "crime" was their business success, which incensed local Whites, prompted Wells-Barnett to rethink the standard lynching-for-rape explanation. Wells-Barnett utilized her connections with networks of Black women and churches to travel across the South to ferret out the facts of the torrent of lynching in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Her visit to Indianaola, Mississippi, for example, uncovered the real cause of one all-too-typical lynching. Whereas the press had reported the rape of an eight-year-old White girl, Wells-Barnett brought to light that the "victim" was the eighteen-year-old daughter of the town's sheriff, who was caught flagrante delicto in the bedroom of one of the family's Black servants. She supplemented her eyewitness inspections, chronicled in her major pamphlets *Southern Horrors*, *Red Record*, and *Mob Rule in New Orleans*, and elsewhere, with analyses of data gleaned from articles from the *Chicago Tribune*; Wells-Barnett proved beyond doubt not only that lynching was not revenge for rape, but also that rape was used as an excuse to lynch Black men in only 30% of the instances of mob murder.³

Wells-Barnett's investigative reports were within the Progressive muckraking tradition: "Tell the world the facts," she advised her audience. "A factual appeal to Christian conscience would ultimately stop these crimes" (Wells-Barnett quoted in Holt 1982, p. 47). Her writings revolutionized our understanding of the crime of

lynching. Her conclusions, plainly written, were startling. "Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread bare lie that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women." Rather, lynching was to teach "the lesson of subordination. 'Kill the leaders and it will cow the Negro . . .'" (Wells-Barnett 1997, pp. 52, 65). And finally, a "Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give" (Wells-Barnett quoted in Schechter 2001, p. 84).

Walter White amplified Wells-Barnett's findings. But as important as the information White developed is the poise with which he conducted his investigations. In Tennessee he pretended to be "a salesman for the Exelento Medicine Company of Atlanta selling hair-straightener, who is awaiting a fresh batch of samples which should have reached here on Saturday. It has worked beautifully so far," he wrote back to NAACP headquarters. Local Whites were reluctant to talk with an itinerant salesman, "but by waiting for them to bring up the subject, which I knew would be inevitable, and by cautious questioning I got all the information I needed." He then thumbed his nose one final time at both the White residents of this backwater and the danger he faced: "Give my regards to Mr. [James Weldon] Johnson and tell him they haven't lynched his Corona [portable typewriter] yet." Presumably his guise allowed him to work both sides of the color line without attracting attention: White townspeople would expect him to talk not only with them, but with the Black residents to whom he would be hawking his de-kinking products. And his thorough report on this gruesome affair reflected knowledge of the situation he could only have developed with the help of Estill Spring's African Americans.⁴

When he had finished his investigation into the Mary Turner lynching, he impersonated a White newspaper reporter in order personally to present his findings to Georgia Governor Hugh Dorsey. When he went to Ocoee, Florida, to investigate reports of massive White violence against Blacks who attempted to vote in the November 1920 elections, he encountered an incendiary situation and a White populace that was more tight-lipped than usual about their deeds. None of White's native charm and honey-dipped salesman's personality could pry information from the Whites. But then he let be known around town that he might be interested in purchasing an orange grove. Once he offered to do business with them, White Occoceans' cupidity got the better of them, and they eagerly told White of their deeds, which he subsequently published in the influential *New Republic* and about which he testified before a congressional committee.⁵ During the Red Summer of 1919, Walter White ventured to Arkansas to investigate a massacre of hundreds of Black sharecroppers in the hamlet of Elaine. Borrowing credentials from a Chicago newspaper whose editor was an enthusiastic participant in the ruse, White presented himself to the state's governor as a reporter eager to get out the "true" story of Black lawlessness. By pretending to be ignorant of the crimes he was to investigate, White tricked this inflated state politician into providing him with letters of introduction slathered with praise for his journalistic acumen. Walter White uncovered the true story of vigilante justice and left town just before it dawned on local Whites that the man they thought was a reporter had that single drop of Black blood that qualified him as a Negro. When he published the story of the pogrom in Elaine, the governor could only splutter. In these and other investigations, White adumbrated a strong connection between Whites' avarice and their commission of racial violence, which would receive thorough treatment in his groundbreaking study of lynching, *Rope and Faggot* (1929).

Walter White's masquerades are legendary. As he regaled his audience with his adventures in passing, he emphasized with melodramatic flair the dangers he faced.⁶ But he also placed in the foreground his aptitude for fooling the rednecks, who stood sentry at the racial boundary lines, certain they could detect non-Nordics trying to cross. In an article about passing in the mass circulation *New York World-Sunday*, he told of his train ride through Georgia in a Whites-only car. White neatly flips racial stereotypes. He rode in the Whites-only car to escape the shabbiness and odors of the Jim-Crow coach, but it provided no respite, as two noisy children, "liberally bestuck with candy, were enjoying themselves by running up and down the aisle, tumbling over the feet of other passengers and making of themselves pests and nuisances." Seeking some peace and quiet, White headed to the smoking car—traditionally the Jim Crow car, which White passengers did much to befoul. His solitude was short lived, interrupted by a White peach grower who peppered White with questions. When White, who answered in monosyllables in an effort to dissuade the intruder, offered that he was from New York, the peach grower took this as an opening to pontificate about his favorite subject: Negrophobia. The South was being overrun, the man said, by Blacks who could pass. Grabbing White's hand, the man explained his surefire method for safeguarding the White race. "He took my hand palm downward in his," White explained. "'Now, if you had a single drop of nigger blood in you, you'd have a dark blur or purple circle right along here at the base of your nails. But, you see, you're white—so you ain't got any circle.' His triumph seemed a bit less than complete as I grinned cheerfully at him and said nothing," White concluded (White 1928).

Walter White reprised his adventures on both sides of the color line to White audiences in an attempt to erase that line altogether. If the most ardent defenders of Nordic purity failed to quarantine White, what did race mean anyway? He worked hard to persuade Whites to question their own racial prejudices, and to a surprising degree, he succeeded. Charles Edgerton of Ithaca, New York, who had spent several years in the nation's capital and adopted its White Southern customs, explained the disorienting/reorienting experience of seeing Walter White speak: "It seemed funny the other night when the chairman spoke of 'his race' (your race), meaning the Negro race. Your race, on every rational ground, is the Caucasian. If you are a Negro, it is by your own choice; you could so easily have gone over to white."⁷

The eminent litigator Arthur Garfield Hays confessed his own racial epiphany upon meeting Walter White. Hays assisted Clarence Darrow at the 1925 Scopes monkey trial and then later that year at the trial of Dr. Ossian Sweet in Detroit, which established for African Americans the legal precedent of armed self-defense. His and Darrow's lives were changed by this encounter:

My first personal connection with the N.A.A.C.P. was a good many years ago, with Clarence Darrow, and I shall never forget the occasion on which Darrow and I were visited by a committee headed by Spingarn, White, [Charles] Studin and [James Weldon] Johnson. After Arthur Spingarn had told the story of what happened to the Sweets in Detroit, fighting to defend themselves and being charged with murder, Darrow turned to Arthur Spingarn with his swarthy skin and dark hair and said: "I know the troubles of your race and I am deeply interested." Spingarn replied: "I don't happen to be a Negro." And Darrow turned to Studin and said: "You'll understand how I feel about this." And Studin said, "I am not a Negro, either." Then he turned to Walter White and said: "I won't make that mistake with you," and Walter said: "I am a Negro." Then we had some discussion with Walter White as to why he was so race-conscious and

we found out that . . . although he is seven-eighths white, he was just as race-conscious as any other Negro and he had decided to devote his life and his career to the question.⁸

Yet the potential inherent in Walter White's cross-racial escapades to transform Whites' racial attitudes was mitigated by his simultaneous embrace of the ideology of uplift, which has been best explored by historians Kevin Gaines (1996) and Glenda Gilmore (1996). The African American elites—the “Best Men” and “Best Women,” as some of them self-identified—who adhered to uplift ideology “sought to refute the view that African Americans were biologically inferior and unassimilable by . . . [claiming] class distinctions, indeed, the very existence of a ‘better class’ of blacks, as evidence of what they called race progress” (Gilmore 1996, pp. 62–63). Walter White could make Whites do a double take when they looked at him, but he exposed the serious limitations of his *trompe l'oeil* techniques when he appealed to the class prejudices of potential White patrons.

In 1921, White journeyed to Europe to solicit international support for the NAACP's antilynching crusade. Among the persons he approached was H. G. Wells, the author and Labor Party politician. A skilled raconteur, White began a discussion of lynching and the race problem in America, but was initially unable to penetrate Wells's indifference. The eminent man of letters apparently could not muster the enthusiasm to talk about racial violence in America with a young White man. Sensing Wells's disappointment, White emphasized the fact that he was indeed a Negro. While White thus succeeded in capturing Wells's attention, he also unloosed the British author's racial philistinism. There was a certain excitement talking with a Negro who did not look like one, Wells admitted. Most Englishmen, “even the most intelligent,” he said (apparently including himself), thought of African Americans as they did Africans: “They imagine him with a ring through his nose, a love for gaudy and ridiculous clothing and as one whose chief amusement is indulging in some cannibalistic orgy.” For Wells, White's physical appearance did not so much shatter his stereotypes as it was the exception that proved the rule. Rather than explicitly challenge Wells's condescending racism, White pandered to it by arranging a trip to the United States and introducing him to “proper” African Americans so that he would not get the “wrong angle.”⁹ Walter White did not share Wells's extreme racial fantasy, but he was unable to use Wells's startle to advantage because of their shared class prejudices.

African Americans' reactions to the way Walter White used his skin color to shape his public image ranged from amused to hostile. Several friends and acquaintances kidded him, saying he was passing for *Black*. “Our very *deepest* personal and ‘racial’ thanks for your visit here,” wrote one long-time friend after White spoke in her city. “Of course,” she added, “you're not ‘colored’ but we accept your own label and thank you just the same—perhaps more.” The new president of Lincoln University in Missouri, a fast friend and firm supporter of White, described the racial climate in Jefferson City this way: “its attitude toward your *alleged* people is more southern than some southern towns I know.” Even White's brother George, who was just as light (and race conscious), good naturedly chided his sibling when he exaggerated his physical similarity to the majority of African Americans.¹⁰

To suggestions from friends and friendly but curious onlookers that he might after all *be* White, Walter White returned the good-natured banter. His autobiography is titled *A Man Called White*. He enjoyed his work with Algernon Black, the leader of the Ethical Culture Society, with whom he served in the wake of the 1943

Harlem riot. White gleefully recounted Black's comment that "the Black-White Committee is an ideal combination, especially since the man named 'Black' is white and the man named 'White' is black—or calls himself black" (White 1949, p. 240). In these circumstances his chameleonic actions had the desired effect of challenging racial stereotype.

But a considerable number of African Americans accused him of trading on his color to personal advantage, as seen in NAACP stalwart Joel Spingarn's keen observation "that hundreds of Negroes think you are really a white man whose natural desire is to associate with white men." A friend from his early days in Atlanta challenged White's right claim to his heritage: "You are no more a Negro than Roosevelt was a Dutchman," he wrote. W. E. B. Du Bois, in the midst of his battle with Walter White for control of the NAACP in the mid-1930s, presented his *prima facie* case against his rival: "In the first place, Walter White is white," he wrote.¹¹

White was never completely able to put these suspicions and accusations to rest, and, as Du Bois's utterance shows, they reached a crescendo when his leadership of the NAACP was impugned. These comments always irritated him and helped to create an inner tension whose outward manifestation usually was an exaggerated identification with the race. He thus created a racial pedigree that was unassailable. He rehearsed his undercover assignments and his involvement in other racially explosive incidents. But in the retelling, he embellished, exaggerated, and distorted events to fend off his critics and ensure his place as a race man. Two of the most often repeated tales of his life—his experience in the Atlanta riot and the tragedy of his father's death—were in part manufactured by White when there were efforts afoot to replace him as NAACP secretary.

It was certainly true, as Walter White insisted, that for him—as for other Negro Atlantans of his complexion and his class—his race consciousness was set by the viciousness of the 1906 Atlanta race riot. The sight of a mob marching down the street toward his home bound him forever to Black America, he declared. He related in his memoirs how, at the age of thirteen, he and his father guarded over the family property. They stood by the front window of their darkened home and waited for the mob to advance; father handed son a rifle with the admonishment, "Son, don't shoot until the first man puts his foot on the lawn and then—don't you miss!" (White 1949, p. 11). The incident has made its way into countless studies as the defining moment in Walter White's life. But while the mob did march up his boyhood street and menace his family's home before it was scattered by gunfire from Black neighborhood defenders, Walter White invented the climactic scene of armed father and son calmly waiting to teach the mob a lesson. There were, in fact, no guns in the home.¹²

Similarly, he exaggerated the circumstances of his father's death. In November 1931, George White was hit by a White driver as he crossed the street. When he did not arrive at home, one of his daughters went searching for him and found him lying unconscious in the street. Alerted to the incident, one of George White's sons-in-law, Will Westmoreland, searched for him in the Jim Crow emergency room. When told that George White was not a patient, the brown-skinned Westmoreland immediately surmised that the fair-complected White had been taken to the Whites-only infirmary. When he checked there, the medical staff realized what had happened, and they immediately transferred George White across the street to the dilapidated, ill-equipped, and indifferently staffed Black ward. He lingered for a few weeks before he died.

But to this heart-wrenching loss, Walter White appended another insult. The medical staff was horrified to discover the racial identity of his father: "What!" one of

them exclaimed, “have we got a nigger over here on the white side?” The added detail rings true, especially given the shameful history of medical malpractice against African Americans in the South that often rose to the level of manslaughter. But the humiliating curse was never uttered, and Walter White knew this to be the case. But as in the Atlanta riot story, White spun this venial lie to reassure African Americans that, though he could pass, Walter White personally felt the pain and humiliation of segregation—and was indeed Black.¹³

On occasion, however, the psychic tensions generated by the powerfully contradictory social meanings of his physical appearance unexpectedly exploded. Such was the case in his bizarre response to Black America’s highly critical reaction to his second marriage to a White woman. In 1949, Walter White divorced his wife of twenty-seven years, Gladys, a handsome, bronze-skinned woman, and wed South African-born Poppy Cannon (Janken 2003, pp. 171–172, 328–332). Much of Black America was scandalized. Typical of the weekly press was the *Afro-American’s* call for his removal from the NAACP and its claim that it had been a mistake to keep in leadership so long “a man who wanted to be white so bad.” C. C. Spaulding, the chief executive of the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company and one of White’s strongest supporters among the Black “Best Men,” was aghast that White would validate the arch-segregationists’ libel that African American men’s greatest ambition was “to invade the white race.” One of White’s sisters accused him of opportunism: he had married the darker-skinned Gladys, she wrote, only to prove to Blacks that he had race pride; now that he was firmly established as a race leader, he reverted to his true desire: to have “a white woman to share the rest of your days.”¹⁴

Walter White had tried to preempt both the disapproval and salacious fodder that publicity of his messy personal affair provoked. He had persuaded Gladys to initiate the divorce in Mexico, he and Poppy were married in a judge’s chambers in New Jersey, and he had obtained a leave of absence from the NAACP on account of poor health. (Hypertension and heart disease eventually led to his death in 1955.) He tried to appear unperturbed, much as Frederick Douglass did when his marriage to a White woman generated heated criticism, claiming that the inalienable right to love whom one wished was central to what the NAACP had been fighting for since its inception.

But the din would not cease, and it was joined both by ordinary citizens and some of his closest colleagues, including Thurgood Marshall. Demoralized perhaps by the sustained clamor, White lobbed a grenade into the debate about racial identity. In an objectionable piece in *Look* magazine, “Has Science Conquered the Color Line?” (White 1949, pp. 94–95), he blithely suggested that African Americans use a newly discovered chemical compound that leaches melanin from the skin as a way to end color prejudice. As might be expected, the article did nothing to calm roiling waters; rather, the tides threatened to swallow him, with the resurfacing of the old charges that he really desired to be White and intensified calls for his shunning.¹⁵

Rather than a twilight confession of a man who wanted to be White, an interpretation that is wholly contradictory to the corpus of White’s work, his article was more likely an attempt, unseemly though it was, to incite those who he thought were tormenting him for his personal choices. As he had donned roles in the past to make a point, so he now acted the part of provocateur. In all respects it was a tawdry denouement. The outrageousness of the *Look* article may have been parodic had it been penned at an earlier age but now was an embarrassment, ill-suited to an elder statesman.

Leaving aside the polarized rhetoric sparked by White’s *Look* article, if Americans were nonplussed by his stand on race, perhaps this was due to a conflation of two related but distinct issues. Walter White always argued that there was a single human

species and that race was a biological (but not a social) fiction; citizenship rights and social benefits must not be based on race; and the subordination of Blacks must be abolished. But this did not mean he favored the erasure of all notions of race, particularly in the extreme form of an amalgamation of dark-skinned people into a single Euro-American phenotype and cultural standard. On the contrary, Walter White affirmed his Negro racial identity and was proud of the accomplishments of his people and their culture. But rather than advocate for critical institutions like the Black schools and colleges to continue as racially exclusive preserves, he believed they should be incorporated into a larger American life, not as artifacts but in order to democratize the country and reflect more fully the contours of the nation's humanity.

It should be emphasized that even after the bitter fallout from the *Look* article Walter White did not alter his political program, and the NAACP continued to pursue racial equality and full citizenship rights for African Americans. In this regard, Walter White was remarkably consistent. His life and career offer a cautionary tale: racial identity and political orientation cannot be deduced directly from physical features. It is a serious mistake to equate appearance and essence, and exclude from consideration such items as politics and strategy. Walter White's adventures across the color line were not primarily for personal gain. Rather, they aimed to reveal the foolishness of Whites' claims of racial superiority, undermine the mob's terrorist hold over African Americans, unravel the very notion of classification of human beings according to some biological concept of race, and to do all this while claiming that his outward appearance fitted him to be a race leader.

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NOTES

1. Poppy Cannon interview by David Levering Lewis, March 1975, Voices of the Harlem Renaissance, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York NY.
2. Ten days after White began his job at NAACP headquarters, association secretary John Shillady noted that White "is already proving his fitness and adaptability for the work." White was given charge of "the collection of definite information and literature of value to the Association on all phases of its work, the preparation of lists (names and addresses) of prominent and influential persons of various fields of public efforts, the indexing of potential givers to the funds of the Association, and the devising of questionnaires to be sent to the Branches covering specific information wanted in the central office." Board of Directors Minutes, February 11, 1918, Papers of the NAACP (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1993), part 1, reel 1, frame 586, microfilm. Hereafter cited as NAACP/mf, followed by a part, reel, and frame number.
3. Wells-Barnett's account of the lynching of her three friends is in Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases* (1892), in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, edited with an introduction by Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 1997), pp. 64-65; her account of the Indianola lynching is in *Southern Horrors*, pp. 65-66. On Wells-Barnett's connections with women's networks and churches, see Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett & American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 84.
4. Walter White to John R. Shillady, February 18, 1918, NAACP/mf p7A r17 f821; Walter White, The Burning of Jim McIlherron: An N.A.A.C.P. Investigation. *The Crisis*, May 1918: 16-20.

5. Walter White, summary of statements by witnesses of election day violence in Ocoee, Florida, n. d. [November 1920], NAACP/mf p11B r4 f708. See also Walter White, Election by Terror in Florida. *New Republic*, January 12, 1921: 195–197; and Congress, House, Committee on the Census, *Hearings on H.R. 14498, H.R. 15021, H.R. 15158, and H.R. 15217 before the Committee on the Census*, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., December 29, 1920, pp. 42–67.
6. See, for example, Walter White, I Investigate Lynchings. *American Mercury*, 16 (1929): 77–84.
7. Charles Edgerton to Walter White, December 13, 1929, NAACP/mf p2 r12 f302.
8. Arthur Garfield Hays, “NAACP Legal Victories and Civil Liberties,” speech to the annual convention of the NAACP, June 20, 1940, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, NAACP/mf p1 r10 f997.
9. Walter White to Mary White Ovington, September 15, 1921, NAACP/mf p11B r18 f285; Walter White to Board of Directors, October 17, 1921, NAACP/mf p1 r2 f208.
10. Constance Ridley Heslip to Walter White, [November 1931], NAACP/mf p2 r14 f485; N.B. Young to Walter White, December 22, 1925, NAACP/mf p2 r9 f376; George White to Walter White, October 30, 1924, NAACP/mf p2 r8 f211.
11. Joel Spingarn to Walter White, memo, January 10, 1934, NAACP/mf p11A r30 f200; L. B. Palmer to Walter White, January 25, 1925, NAACP/mf p2 r8 f558; W. E. B. Du Bois, Segregation in the North. *The Crisis*, April 1934: 115–116.
12. White’s experiences in the Atlanta riot are discussed in Kenneth Robert Janken, *WHITE: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: The New Press, 2003), pp. 15–18.
13. On the death of George White, see Janken 2003, pp. 167–170. For more on the disastrous consequences of emergency medical care for African Americans, see Spencie Love, *One Blood: The Death and Resurrection of Charles R. Drew* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
14. Mr. White’s Marriage. *Washington Afro-American*, July 30, 1949, p. 20; C. C. Spaulding Chides Walter White for His Recent Marriage. *Chicago Defender*, national edition, September 3, 1949, p. 1; Alice Glenn to Walter White, (postmarked June 7, 1949), WFW/PCW box 2 folder 72A.
15. For African Americans’ reaction to this article, see *New York Amsterdam News*, August 27, 1949, p. 2; *Chicago Defender*, national edition, August 27, 1949, p. 27; and especially the *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 27, 1949, photocopy of article in author’s possession.

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