



A Chief Lieutenant of the Tuskegee Machine: Charles Banks of Mississippi

David H. Jackson JR.

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This scholarly biography is the first book-length volume to examine the life and work of Charles Banks, Booker T. Washington's chief "lieutenant" in Mississippi, who became the most consequential African American leader in the state and one of the South's most influential black businessmen in the early decades of the twentieth century. David H. Jackson, Jr. presents a new perspective on Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Machine that counters its more familiar image as conniving, heavy-handed, intolerant, and ruthless. In a rare look at the machine's inner workings, the book discusses the benefits of membership and the often-unacknowledged fact that involvement with the machine was mutually beneficial for Washington and his supporters. Jackson argues convincingly that Washington did not keep his key men, "lieutenants" like Charles Banks, on a leash; indeed, his effectiveness depended largely on these figures, who promoted his agenda in various states. Part of Banks's significance was his success in delivering Washington's program in a way that was palatable to blacks in the South - especially in Mississippi, a state historically known for its economic deprivation and racial unrest. The book also presents the first comprehensive golden-age history of Mound Bayott, Mississippi, an all-black township that Banks's business acumen helped shape economically. Contrary to the accommodationist view, Jackson profiles Banks through a constructionist framework to reveal a strong yet conflicted black leader and follower of Washington. His development was shaped by rural poverty, white supremacy, the dominant influence of the philosophy and personal power of Washington and the concept of the all-black town as a strategy for avoiding some of the worst economic and psychological effects of discrimination.

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