Michel Huysseune

"This Country, Where Many Things Are Strange and Hard to Understand": Booker T. Washington in Sicily

Introduction

Booker T. Washington's *The Man Farthest Down*, published in 1912 (after a partial prepublication in the review *Outlook* in 1911), narrates extensively his 1910 visit to Europe. The prominent African-American politician travelled with Robert E. Park, who later became well-known as a sociologist.[1] They went from the United Kingdom through Germany and Bohemia to Italy and Sicily, visiting Palermo, the *zolfatara* (sulphur mines) region and Catania. Their journey then continued to Hungary and its border zones with Russia (where Washington showed a strong interest in the condition of the Jewish population), then back to the United Kingdom after a visit to Denmark. The relatively short tour (six weeks, between August 28 and October 7, 1910) was undertaken with the professed intention of observing Europe's lower classes, their circumstances of living, and their possible processes of uplift.

Booker T. Washington presents his book as the endeavor of a traveler interested in social conditions in Europe. He contrasts it explicitly with mainstream travel books focusing on historical sights and museums.[2] The book abounds with statements describing how he and his travel companion went off the beaten track: in the case of Sicily, for instance, he notes about his trip to the sulphur mines that they "started off into a wild region, which no guide-book had charted and, so far as I knew, no tourist had ever visited" (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 205). This emphasized difference from travelers of leisure reflects Washington's strong belief in his personal brand of the Protestant work ethic, as well as his apparent

inability to stop working. The book is also (though Washington does not draw attention to this dimension) very different from his own description of his first European trip in *Up from Slavery* (chapter XVI), where he focused on the social recognition he received. *The Man Farthest Down* does not mention the social events that did take place also during his 1910 journey, and that he described in another book, *My Larger Education*, published immediately after the journey in 1911 (215-20). Instead, *The Man Farthest Down* purports to offer the reader the reflections of a candid traveler/observer, who has devoted his entire journey to observing and acquiring information on the social situation of the countries he visited. The book reads as a journalistic, rather than scientific, work with a focus on the traveler's personal observations.[3] Although Washington does mention that throughout the journey he and Park gathered information and read extensively on the social conditions of the places visited, this documentation generally remains in the background. The book contains few bibliographic references, and Washington has a distinct tendency to remain vague on the sources of his information. On the contrary, he emphasizes his conversations with local people, revealing also the difficulties in finding the men and women farthest down and in conversing with them: the travelers frequently (and certainly in Sicily, since neither of them knew Italian) had to rely on translators/mediators.[4]

The carefully staged, direct, and accessible style of the book hides the more ambitious intellectual agenda of the author. Ostensibly, Booker T. Washington is clear about his stated goals: in the brief introduction to the first *Outlook* article (an introduction which is absent from the book-version of *The Man Farthest Down*) he expresses his intention to fight the pessimism of African Americans from the South about their living conditions by showing that worse conditions often prevail in Europe (Harlan & Smock, Vol. 11: 131-32). In addition, Washington notes that his travel route had also been influenced by the issue of immigration to the United States and by the oft-voiced proposal to replace black laborers in the American South by European immigrants; hence his desire to acquire a better knowledge of the societies and places of origin (Sicily included) of those immigrants and possible competitors (ibid.).

At another level, *The Man Farthest Down* aims to prove the validity,

in the European context as well, of the program Booker T. Washington consistently defended in the United States for the African-American community: uplift through education and self-help, as well as the acquisition of thrift and a labor ethic that would enable African Americans to thrive in an industrial society. The European context enables Washington to invest his program with a more global and universal significance, thereby also implicitly affirming the "normality" of the African-American process of uplift and deconstructing prevalent racist paradigms of black "pathology." *The Man Farthest Down* includes at the same time a sustained reflection on the challenges and resistances this process may encounter. His observations lead him to understand social change in Europe (especially in its less industrially-developed and more rural areas) as the outcome of a generally slow emancipation from feudalism, and he interprets this process as the equivalent of the post-slavery process of uplift of the African-American community (describing feudalism and slavery, respectively, as oppressive political and social systems located in the past).[5]

Washington seems to be mainly interested in the uplift of rural populations, both because of his home agenda (the uplift of African Americans in the rural South) and because of the afore-mentioned immigration issue: according to him rural uplift in the home countries would decrease the number of emigrants (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 5), and thereby diminish the potential competition for African Americans. Once again drawing parallels with the experience of African Americans in the United States, he envisions uplift always as a collective process involving ethnic communities. He highlights the example of the role of cooperation in the model process of uplift realized by the Danish peasants and pays sustained attention to the political, social, and cultural components of the emancipation process of the Slav populations in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is because such collective processes seem to be absent in Italy and in Sicily (the region he focuses upon in greatest detail) that those are for him more problematic cases.

Following his similar political strategy in the United States, at various moments he ostensibly downplays the political dimension of the process of uplift, arguing also in the case of Europe the secondary importance of political rights compared to the virtues of moral uplift. However, Europe

allows him to outline explicitly, in the chapter on Denmark, the ultimate goal of uplift. As model self-helpers and self-educators, Danish peasants have acquired not only economic affluence. Washington underlines that they also cultivate the liberal arts (the importance of which he tended to downplay in his enunciations on African-American education) and, more importantly, that they possess political power: he states that they "are now the controlling influence in the Danish Parliament" (322).

This layered structure of the text definitely problematizes prevailing interpretations of *The Man Farthest Down*. Scholarly discussions of the book understandably focus on its American significance: they tend to be related to evaluations of the author and his controversial political role in African-American history. In light of the professed statements of the author and of his political profile as a moderate, as a rule and unsurprisingly scholars highlight his accommodationist stance and his investment in proving that African Americans in the United States, and more specifically in the South, were better off than many of the European poor (cf. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington in Perspective* 159; Meier 106; Totten; Zimmerman 222). *The Man Farthest Down* undoubtedly does contain this accommodationist message for his white American audience, and the author does intend to prove that immigrants from Europe would not be superior to African Americans.

On the other hand, scholars like St. Clair Drake and Dickson D. Bruce convincingly highlight the complex ambivalence of the book, drawing attention to Booker T. Washington's authorial duplicity and to the rhetorical devices he displays with considerable mastery to subvert, for instance, the racist paradigm. They also emphasize that *The Man Farthest Down* was written at a moment when Washington himself seems to have been in doubt about his accommodationist strategy (ibid). In Booker T. Washington's writing, beyond the ostensible conformism, the critical intervention lies in the details, in the seemingly anodyne and casual off-hand remarks that imply comparisons and implicit or explicit critiques of racial discrimination and the conditions in the U.S. South. His journey offered a perfect stage for such an authorial strategy, since describing Europe allowed him more authorial liberty than writing about the United States. Under the guise of a quasi-exotic or at least unconventional travel narrative,

Europe allows him to discuss subjects more taboo in the U.S. context, such as socialism (throughout the book) and farmers' strikes (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 91-100). As such, Washington's reflections on Europe are well worth analyzing on their own terms, both for what they explicitly tell about the countries he visited and for what they implicitly reveal about the United States and more broadly about social and race relations. This is especially true in the case of Sicily, both because of its prominence in the economy of *The Man Farthest Down*, and because it frequently functions as the region farthest down in Europe, the negative Other of the United States. For Washington, Sicily is apparently "this country, where many things are strange and hard to understand" (126). It is the place where his program of uplift appears most problematic: the author provides fewer suggestions for the uplift of the Sicilian population than in any other section of the book. However, the prominence of Sicily in the book betrays its crucial hermeneutic function. Despite the author's professed perplexity and difficulty in understanding the island, his descriptions of Sicily as America's Other and at the same time as a society very similar to the United States play a crucial and as yet neglected role in his reflections on identity and difference.

Sicily as America's Traditionalist Other

In the economy of the entire volume, the chapters on Sicily are certainly striking both for their length (about a quarter of the book, the most extended section devoted to any region) and for their importance in the comparative perspective Washington articulates. Washington arrived in Palermo by sea, and from there he visited the sulphur mines region and then proceeded to Catania where he shipped back to the Italian mainland. The chapters on Sicily, however, follow a thematic rather than a chronological order, discussing respectively "The Labourer and the Land in Sicily" (chapter VIII), "Women and the Wine Harvest in Sicily" (chapter IX), "The Church, the People, and the Mafia" (chapter X), and "Child Labour and the Sulphur Mines" (chapter XI, the only chapter on Sicily also published in *Outlook*). The importance of these chapters is reinforced by

the chapter on mainland southern Italy that precedes them (chapter VII, "Naples and the Land of the Emigrant"), functioning as a prologue to the discussion of Sicily's Otherness.

Sicily and the Sicilians appear at a first reading simply as a negative counter-image of African Americans in the U.S. South, as a site that provides the author with an opportunity to critique the old continent as a whole: "Sicily is, in this, like a great many other places I saw in Europe: it looks better on the outside than it looks on the in" (127-28). Washington highlights the attachment of its population (with the exception of the educated elites) to their traditional way of living:

> people who were so saturated with antiquity, so out of touch, except on the surface, with modern life, so imbedded in ancient habits and customs, that it would take a very long time, perhaps years, to get any real understanding of their ways of thinking and living. (126)

He suggests at one point that its ancient history and particularly its ethnic "otherness" determines its present:

> For example, in seeking to understand the difference in the position of women in Sicily from that of other parts of Europe I learned that one had to go back to the Greeks and the Saracens, among whom women held a much lower position and were much less free than among the peoples of Europe. (163)

Sicilians embody specific negative characteristics enabling Washington to make a number of comparisons with the United States that foreground the greater advantages enjoyed by the African-American community. With regard to living standards, access to education and property, religion, and morality, Washington deems African Americans as more privileged. An emblematic case in point is the discussion of morality and religion. This section includes the only extensive scholarly quotation in the chapters on Sicily (and also the longest quotation of the entire book). The passage in question concerns the filth, promiscuity, and dubious morality of life in small Sicilian towns (158-59). Washington draws his information from the 1905 monograph *Die Insel Sicilien in volkswirtschaftlicher, kultureller und*

soziale Beziehung written by the now almost entirely forgotten German statistician Georg Wermert.[6] Like Wermert, Washington links this alleged lack of morality to Sicilian Catholicism: according to him it is superstitious and instrumental, oriented towards obtaining personal advantages instead of promoting morality. As such, it is for him the equivalent of the remnants of African-American plantation religion that were a frequent target of his polemics in the United States (Moses, "More Than an Artichoke" 119-20). In comparing Sicilian Catholicism with the "notions that the Negroes are supposed to have imported to America from Africa" (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 173), he highlights the similarity between Sicilian religion and the fetishism of the "savages in Africa" (ibid.). Following a well-established Orientalist representational tradition in Protestant northern Europe and the United States, he comments on the irrationality and immorality of the island's Catholicism, associating it with primitivism and backwardness.

Deconstructing Stereotypes of Backwardness

Complicating the Orientalist paradigm he ostensibly reproduced, in arguing the alleged inferiorities of Sicilians Washington goes to great length to point out that such inferiority is by no means to be essentialized and even less racialized. Sicily, in fact, affords him the opportunity to describe his own experience of unsettling stereotypes:

> I went to Italy with the notion that the Sicilians were a race of brigands, a sullen and irritable people who were disposed at any moment to be swept off their feet by violent and murderous passions. I came away with the feeling that, whatever might be the faults of the masses of the people, they were, at the very least, more sinned against than sinning, and that they deserve the sympathy rather than the condemnation of the world. (214).

He uses the chapters on Sicily, and more specifically the issue of Mafia to launch a regular attack on "racial explanations" (181):

> My own experience has taught me, however, to distrust what I may call "racial explanations." They are convenient and easy to make, but too sweeping, and, practically, the effect of them is to discourage any effort to improve. For example, if some one discovers that the condition in which a people happens to be found at any given time is due to race, that it is constitutional, and in the blood, so to speak, then, of course, there is nothing to do. If, however, it is due to environment, education may help" (181-82).

The seemingly casual tone of such remarks downplays rhetorically Washington's theoretical sophistication and ambition, as Wilson J. Moses has recently highlighted (*Creative Conflict*). Washington often indulges in deconstructions of modes of thought that were prevailing also in the intellectual community of his time:

> One of the most interesting experiences I had while in Europe was in observing the number of different classes and races there are in Europe who look down upon, and take a hopeless view of, certain of their neighbours because they regard them as inferior. For example, one of the first things I learned in Italy was that the people in northern Italy look down upon the people of southern Italy as an inferior race. I heard and read many times while I was in Italy stories and anecdotes illustrating the childishness, the superstition, and the ignorance of the peasant people and the lower classes generally in southern Italy. In fact, nothing that I have known or heard about the superstition of the Negro people in America compares with what I heard about the superstition of the Italian peasants. (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 109-10)

We do not know up to which point Washington was informed about the important debate on the South that had recently taken place in Italy, a debate in which the articulation of racialized discourses on southern inferiority had played an important role (cf. Teti). He was certainly well-informed about such arguments against African Americans in the United States, and he used Italy to de-racialize the very logic of those arguments by noticing how the notions of 'superior' and 'inferior' groups function in similar ways in very different contexts.

In his deconstruction of stereotypes, Washington is concerned first of all with providing a positive image of African Americans and, as already

mentioned, his description of alleged Sicilian backwardness and amorality is in itself certainly not free of stereotypes.[7] However, at several points *The Man Farthest Down* also challenges embedded stereotypes of Sicily. He problematizes, for example, the image of indolent inhabitants of warm climates[8], highlighting on the contrary that "there is no other country in Europe where incessant labour is so largely the lot of the masses of the people" (195). Earlier in the book, he had articulated a very explicit critique of stereotyped representations of the labor ethics of the so-called inferior groups:

> Several times, in my efforts to find out something about these so-called "inferior people," I made inquiries about them among their more successful neighbours. In almost every case, no matter what race it happened to be to which I referred, I received the same answer. I was told that they were lazy and would not work; that they had no initiative; that they were immoral and not fitted to govern themselves. At the same time, I found them doing nearly all the really hard, disagreeable, and ill-paid labour that was being done. Usually I found, also, that with fewer opportunities than the people around them, they were making progress. (57)

Revealing his oft-underestimated theoretical sophistication and modernity, here Washington offers a critical reading of the ethnocentricity of the tradition that relates economic success of populations to their presumed labor ethics and entrepreneurial capacities (a tradition connected with the work of Max Weber that exercised a strong influence on twentieth- and twenty-first-century social science theory and development sociology). This critique is all the more interesting since Washington himself was an enthusiastic proponent of the idea of uplift through hard work and thrift. As Wilson J. Moses ("More Than an Artichoke"; *Creative Conflict,* chapters 8 and 9) has convincingly highlighted, there is a family resemblance between Washington's worldview and the main source of this theoretical tradition, Max Weber's contribution that links Protestant ethics and the development of capitalism, which Washington's writings had anticipated. By proposing a rational version of Protestantism as an instrument for the uplift of African Americans, Washington intended to argue in favor of the universal capacity for uplift.[9]

Sicily is, however, the place where Washington, in his description of the living conditions of the *carusi*, the child laborers in the sulphur mines, sheds the most explicit doubts on the universal value of his theory of uplift through labor.[10] The miner who buys them "actually purchases a slave" (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 202). For them, no redemption through labor is possible: in the awful conditions in which they have to live and work, their only future is getting old quickly and dying young. By identifying the *carusi* as "slaves," Washington once again intends to "normalize" the African-American experience, and at the same time this identification also allows him to articulate a very explicit condemnation of the "peculiar institution" he did not always voice in the United States. Even though he at times characterized African-American slavery "as a school for industrial habits," at others times he noticed that "it was said to undermine the work ethos" (Moses, "More Than an Artichoke" 121). There is no ambivalence regarding his opinion on the "slavery" of the *carusi*, since, as he notices, they simply die young, with no benefit whatsoever for themselves or even for the families that sold them (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 202). They are an extreme example of what seems to have been Washington's general opinion of Sicily: a place where people work hard but where nonetheless the possibilities for uplift seem limited.[11]

Washington's description of the *carusi* exemplifies a second level of his narrative on Sicily, namely taking conditions on the island as a starting-point for overt and covert critiques of social conditions in the American South as well as of contemporaneous racist justifications of its segregationist policies. For instance, his comments on the Catholic Church's neglect of popular education in Sicily (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 175) lend themselves to an American reading, since they find an obvious reference in the analogous refusal of white political elites in the U.S. South to give adequate financial support for black education, as Washington also states more explicitly a few pages later (182). The author pursues a similarly critical vein in his comparison between the living conditions of farmers. He problematizes in practice his own repeated statements on the much better living conditions of African-American farmers compared to the Sicilian agricultural population by pointing out the similarities between the exploitative farming contracts in Sicily and those existing in the South

of the United States after the abolition of slavery, namely cash renting and sharecropping (141-42). This comparison is all the more interesting since he argues that peasants in Sicily are "crushed by a system of overseers and middlemen as vicious and oppressive as that which existed in many parts of the Southern States during the days of slavery" (140), implying in fact that the post-slavery contracts were equally exploitative. Washington uses a similarly comparative method to voice critiques of southern whites in the matter of organized crime. He first contrasts *omertà* (the 'conspiracy of silence' of Sicilians, when confronted with authorities) in Sicily with the law-abiding behavior of African Americans (177-78), but a few pages later he notes that "the Mafia seems to have grown up, in the first place, like the White Caps, the Night Riders, and the lynchers in our own country, as a means of private vengeance" (184). Although he does refer to the opinion of (unnamed) experts that such an organization could not survive in the United States because of the absence of an oppressive social regime like that of Sicily (186), he nevertheless compares the mafia with the political machine of Tammany Hall, New York (185-86), ultimately suggesting that it may be less outlandish than he himself ostensibly admits.[12] Complicating his orientalist images of Sicilian Others, these comparisons point to disturbing continuities that undermine prevailing clear-cut oppositions between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies highlighting less-than-obvious similarities between Sicily and the United States.

Un-traditional Sicilians?

At several points, Washington adds appreciations of Sicilian life that contrast with his overall negative picture. A first one concerns artisanal activities in Catania, which he describes in detail. He admires the skills of the artisans and, in what may very likely have been a romanticized image of them, praises the involvement of children in these activities as an example of the transmission of industrial skills that African-American families lack (192-200). His conversation with a farmer near Palermo (one of the rare conversations in Sicily he mentions) reveals that the latter is a keen modernizer, applying new technologies, contrary to the general

image of unrelenting traditionalism Washington sketches of Sicily (134). The most outspoken problematization of stereotypes on Sicily occurs in Washington's description of his visit to the sulphur mines in Campofranco, in relation, perhaps not coincidentally, to the one group of people Wermert (427) explicitly identified with a *negerähnlichen Typus* [negro-like type]. Washington emphasizes the initial fears of the travelers who have decided to visit what they imagined as a threatening underworld tainted by lawlessness and exploitation, inhabited by savage and criminally-minded mine workers. Washington describes how on the train to Campofranco Park tried to learn some Italian by means of an Italian grammar, in the hope of making himself understood in a situation imagined to be dangerous (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 206-07). These images of fear and danger are then contrasted with a description of the courteous hospitality he encountered in the mines. The author highlights on several occasions the politeness and courtesy of the Sicilians. In fact, in the book Sicilians are the only group systematically associated with these character traits.[13] The chapter on the sulphur mines also allows him to describe progress on the island, namely the improvement in the working conditions that he discerns (compared to the extreme exploitation of child labor that he expected to encounter) and that he attributes to legislative changes (211).

There is a pronounced inherent tension, then, in Washington's description of Sicilians: on the one hand he typecasts them as an Oriental and primitive other of Americans, including African Americans, but at the same time his comments frequently display genuine empathy for Sicilians. This attitude seems to be characteristic of Washington's more general sympathy for the downtrodden, regardless of whether or not they displayed the tendency to moral uplift he deemed necessary for their progress.[14] This appreciation also emerges at other moments of his visit to Sicily, especially in his lively descriptions of the working classes in and near Catania (148-56; 192-200).[15] This understanding, moreover, is combined with a real appreciation of the qualities of the Sicilian population, countering his statements on their ignorance and superstition:

> In Sicily I found peasants living in a condition of dirt, poverty, and squalor almost beyond description. But everywhere I found among these people, even

> the lowest, individuals who, when I had an opportunity to talk with them, invariably displayed an amount of shrewd, practical wisdom, kindly good nature, and common sense that reminded me of some of the old Negro farmers with whom I am acquainted at home. (320)

Conclusion: Explaining a 'Strange' Island

Washington's positive images of Sicilians helped him to question prevailing negative categorizations that read them as an inferior race. Like other African-American intellectuals of his time, he articulated an outright rejection of racial interpretative frameworks, at a moment when the belief of social scientists in biological racism was slowly declining, even though most mainstream social scientists, including his travel companion Robert Park, never entirely rejected thinking in racial categories.[16] On the contrary, in explaining Sicily's backwardness, Washington highlights structural factors: "The real reason for the backward condition of Sicily is, in my opinion, not so much the intermixture of races as the neglect and oppression of the masses of the people" (182). Although occasionally highlighting the positive role of legislation (for example that against child labor in the sulphur mines), he draws several negative sketches of the role of Italian authorities, whose work is beneficial mostly to the privileged classes they almost exclusively represent. What struck him particularly was the wide variety of custom dues in Catania, which impacted most negatively on the lower classes and exemplified a very unfair and economically stifling system of taxation (186-90). More in general, he observes that:

> Italy has not done well by her lower classes in the past. She has oppressed them with heavy taxes; has maintained a land system that has worn out the soil at the same time that it has impoverished the labourer; has left the agricultural labourers in ignorance; has failed to protect them from the rapacity of the large landowners; and has finally driven them to seek their fortunes in a foreign land. (122)

He omits, however, to draw conclusions from this observation, and more specifically does not devote much explicit attention to the Italian electoral system that excluded the lower classes from voting, although he does observe that in Sicily the large majority of the population are excluded from electoral participation because of their illiteracy (184).

The Man Farthest Down drastically complicates several (but not all) prevailing stereotypes on Sicily, and it also does not shun from indicating the structural causes of the island's problems. However, more than in the case of the other countries in Europe he discusses, Washington seems perplexed about the possibilities of uplift in Sicily. For him, the processes of uplift and social change through the kind of bottom-up collective mobilization that he outlines in relation with the Danish peasants and with the Slav peoples in the Austro-Hungarian empire have no clear equivalent in southern Italy and Sicily. His views may be related to the fact that he remains silent about two salient political events indicating the possibility of grass-roots mobilization and social reform: the Sicilian Fasci and municipal socialism in Catania.[17] This absence cannot be explained only in light of Washington's conciliatory political stance: as St. Clair Drake has pointed out, Washington embraced the European context as an opportunity to describe forms of political mobilization (e.g., unionizing and also agrarian strikes) that he was reluctant to envisage directly and explicitly in the context of the United States. Washington, in fact, acknowledged the role of the socialists in Sicily, whom he describes as "the only party that has sincerely desired and striven for the enlightenment and general welfare of the people at the bottom" (Washington 175), but he does not specify the effective actions they have undertaken.

This discretion may be related to the logic of Washington's narrative, that typecasts the poor Sicilians as 'the men (and women) farthest down', as a community bound by its past and by tradition and hence as a (partially and ambivalently) negative Other of Americans and African Americans. Washington may have considered that highlighting the radical political agency of Sicilians would enable dangerous comparisons with the United States and unsettle his public accommodationist stance. One of the striking features of the text, however, is how Washington frequently

subverts his own type-casted image of Sicily as a community locked up in its traditionalism. The most striking quality of *The Man Farthest Down* that emerges in the chapters on Sicily is the author's profound empathy with the downtrodden and capacity for in-depth analysis of their condition. Combined with his hostility towards racism, this leads him to unsettle stereotyped representations of the men and women farthest down in Sicily, and hence to transcend his own Orientalist typecasting of Sicilians.

Notes

[1] Although Washington refused to include Park as official co-author, he did acknowledge the important role Park played in the elaboration of the book (*The Man Farthest Down* 16-17). Park also contributed to the organization of the journey and the collection of documentation. However, as St. Clair Drake and Dickson D. Bruce have pointed out, Washington kept control of essential editorial decisions and the overall message the book conveys.

[2] Washington is in line here with the tradition of African-American travel writers who, as Charles Baraw has noted, often emphasize the political meaning of their journey to Europe.

[3] Note from correspondence from Washington to Park: "First article received and very good. Do not fail to keep them light, and in natural, easy, conversational style. Outlook people very much afraid we will make them heavy and scientific" (Harlan & Smock, Vol. 10: 417).

[4] In these interactions, moreover, information also had the problematic status of a commodity, since Washington offered payment for it: the Sicilian miners in Campofranco were in fact the only persons "who refused to accept money for a service rendered me" (*The Man Farthest Down* 216).

[5] In *My Larger Education*, Washington draws even more explicitly a conclusion from his journey than in *The Man Farthest Down*. He highlights that he experienced everywhere "a great and silent revolution" of agricultural uplift through education and organization, with the goal of reaching a "position of political and economic independence" (*My Larger Education* 207). Interestingly enough, he points to southern Italy and Sicily as possible exceptions to this trend (ibid. 213). He nevertheless states (as he had already done in *The Man Farthest Down* 122-23) that emigration and the return of emigrants from the United States were bringing changes to the South and were starting to contribute to rural progress (*My Larger Education* 214-15), much in line with what later scholars of southern Italy have observed (e.g. Bevilacqua 61-62).

[6] *The Man Farthest Down* erroneously refers to the author as Mr. S. Wermert. Wermert's book and its possible impact on *The Man Farthest Down* deserve further research. Wash-

ington expressed his appreciation of this "great book on the social and economic conditions of the people" (158).

[7] An example is his long citation of Wermert on the alleged amorality of life in small towns (see above). Wermert was overall quite sympathetic towards Sicilians and appreciative of their capacities for improvement, and he also rejected racial explanations of the island's problems, highlighting instead economic, social and moral causes (396). However, he seems to have been obsessed about the allegedly loose sexual mores of Sicilian women, and the passage quoted by Washington exemplifies this obsession.

[8] See for example the presence of this topos in the 'imperial' narrative on Sicily provided by Coleridge describing Sicilians as "by nature indolent" (Corona 138).

[9] Weber's "avowed purpose was to offer a non-racialist explanation of the rise of Western Europe to economic and industrial superiority" (Moses, *Creative Conflict* 167). However, his writings were also influenced by his anti-Catholic and anti-Polish personal bias (Zimmerman 212ff).

[10] It should be noted, however, that Washington's description of the *carusi* mainly derives from other, unmentioned sources (*The Man Farthest Down* 201-4). During his visit to the mine he did encounter a group of child laborers in dire conditions just outside the mine (211-12); but within the mine he did not see any of them, and his overall impression of these mines (204-13) is definitely less negative than his initial description of the *carusi*.

[11] In this context, it is useful to note that Max Weber himself, contrary to many of his modern epigones, was ambivalent in his appreciation of the Protestant ethic.

[12] However, with regard to the southern Italian immigrants to the United States, he remarks that many of them belong to the criminal classes (Washington, *The Man Farthest Down* 179).

[13] For the topos of the polite manners of Sicilians, see also Romeo 31.

[14] According to Raushenbush (54), Washington sympathized more with Russian peasants than with the more privileged Danish ones, deeming the social condition of the former as more similar to that of African Americans.

[15] As elsewhere in the book, he seems to have been particularly interested in the plight of working women. The position of women in Sicily and in Europe in general is a constant concern of the book: in the first chapter Washington states that "the man farthest down in Europe is woman" (*The Man Farthest Down* 20). This topic is therefore in need of further in-depth analysis.

[16] For an extensive analysis of Park's views on race, see Lyman 27-70 and Saint-Arnaud 83-119. Both authors draw attention to the fact that, notwithstanding his generally non-biological view and his skepticism about the allegedly lower intelligence of African Americans, Park uses the concept of 'temperament' that was often associated with biological racial determinism (Lyman 41-43, Saint-Arnaud 94-95; see also Zimmerman 224-25).

[17] Interestingly Wermert, his only explicitly acknowledged scholarly source on the island, discusses at length and appraises these examples very positively (405-19, 474-81).

Works cited

Baraw, Charles. "William Wells Brown, Three Years in America, and Fugitive Tourism." *African American Review* 44 (2011): 453-70.

Bevilacqua, Piero. *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale dall'Ottocento a oggi*. Roma: Donzelli, 1993.

Bruce, Dickson. D. Jr. "Booker T. Washington's The Man Farthest Down and the Transformation of Race." *The Mississippi Quarterly* 48 (1995): 239-53.

Corona, Daniela. "Miraggi coloniali. L'altra Sicilia di Samuel Taylor Coleridge." *Fogli di Anglistica* 1 (2007): 135-47.

Drake, St. Clair. Introduction. *The Man Farthest Down: A Record of Observation and Study in Europe.* By B. T. Washington. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1984. v-lxiv.

Harlan, Louis R. *Booker T. Washington in Perspective*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1988.

——, and Raymond W. Smock., eds. *The Booker T. Washington Papers.* Vol. 10. 1909-1911. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1981.

——, eds. *The Booker T. Washington Papers.* Vol. 11. 1911-1912. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1981.

Lyman, Stanford M. *The Black American in Sociological Thought*. New York: Putnam, 1972.

Meier, August. *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington.* 1966. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988.

Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. "More Than an Artichoke: The Pragmatic Religion of Booker T. Washington." *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up from Slavery 100 Years Later.* Ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 2003. 107-30.

Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *Creative Conflict in African American Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

Raushenbush, Winifred. *Robert E. Park: Biography of a Sociologist*. Durham: Duke UP, 1979.

Romeo, Marcella. "Il viaggio di Louis Golding in Sicilia." *Fogli di Anglistica* 4 (2010): 25-36.

Saint-Arnaud, Pierre. *L'invention de la sociologie noire aux États-Unis d'Amérique.* Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2003.

Teti, Vito. ed. *La razza maledetta. Origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale*, Roma: Manifestolibri, 1993.

Totten, Gary. "Southernizing Travel in the Black Atlantic: Booker T. Washington's *The Man Farthest Down*." *MELUS* 32 (2007): 107-31.

Washington, Booker T. *The Man Farthest Down: A Record of Observation and Study in Europe.* Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1912.

——. *My Larger Education. Chapters from my Experience.* 1911. Amherst: Humanity Books, 2004.

—— *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography.* Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1901.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905. Trans. Stephen Kalberg. Chicago: Dearborn, 2001.

Wermert, Georg. *Die Insel Sicilien in volkswirtschaftlicher, kultureller und soziale Beziehung*. Berlin: Reimer, 1905.

Zimmerman, Andrew. *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.