Scholar, Activist, or Religious Figure? Gilbert’s Reception and Legacy

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Religion
“The leaders of Colored Methodism had mastered the intricacies of southern racial diplomacy. ... This minority of black traditionalists had made their peace with the white South ... they shared the religious beliefs of white evangelicals. ... These freedpeople saw relationships between white and black southerners as cords of stability in a world that had become tumultuous and unpredictable.”

Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring* (1995), 21
“The John Wesley Gilbert program may be stated in the following sentences: No two races can live together, interlarded, under the same laws, but with different race marks and proclivities, in anything like peace without a program of ‘good will’ and interracial understanding.”

Colclough, The Spirit of John Wesley Gilbert (1925), 29–30
Bishop W. R. Lambuth and John Wesley Gilbert

“—and so we both made the trip together as brothers.”
“We are born and brought up with black men. They understand us, and we understand them. We understand their good qualities and their bad qualities.”

Lambuth; quoted in Kasongo, “A Spirit of Cooperation in Mission” (1998), 262
Politics
One Colored young man, John Wesley Gilbert, of Georgia, has gone to Athens to enter the American school there. He will find very little race prejudice in that classic land.
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1909.

A REVEREND FLUNKER.

Scoring the mal-address of the carpetbaggers and the biased tendencies of Northern teachers under whom Southern Negroes have been wrongly educated, Prof. John Wesley Gilbert of Augusta, Ga., implored the Arkansas Southern Methodist conference, which is in session at Morilton, Ark., to aid him in correcting these evils. Prof. Gilbert is a Negro, and is connected with Payne College in his home city. He said that the teachers sent down from the North know nothing of the real need of his race, and, that as a result, a false perspective was given his people, and a misconception of their place in the body politic. — Associated Press Dispatch.

The Reverend Gilbert's meaning is, of course, simply that Northern teachers inspired in the Afro-American a spirit of manhood which led him to aspire to higher and better things.

This unfortunate tendency Rev. Gilbert is laboring to reform and to make the Afro-American perfectly resigned to become simply a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for the Caucasians.

Rev. Gilbert would make the Afro-American more humble than Uriah Heap, just as he was in the times of slavery, perfectly willing to accept the white man as massa.

THE APPEAL is fearful that this attempt of Rev. Gilbert to reform the race is a little too late to effect that purpose.

Senator Stone seems to be laboring along the same line of policy by swatting the waiter who is not sufficiently expeditious in bringing his steak. He sees in the dilatory movements of the waiter, the awful effects of the teachings of Northern white teachers, abolitionists and carpetbaggers.

Those eminent statesmen, Tillman and Vardaman have already called the attention of the country to the same subject. In the opinion of THE APPEAL, Rev. (?) Gilbert is a flunky who deserves the contempt of every self-respecting Afro-American.
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President Walker persisted in his choice of Gilbert for the new faculty position, Carson resigned.

Gilbert’s appointment created a bi-racial faculty at Paine — a policy that has remained to this day. But Gilbert brought more than integration to Paine’s faculty, according to Paine’s history. Professor George E. Clary Jr., an expert on Paine’s foundation.

The young black professor had been thoroughly tutored in Greek and Latin, first by President Walker and then by Brown University’s faculty, and his classes paved the way for Paine’s eventual elevation from a teaching school with a Normal department to college level.

“This was to be a college, and to be a college, you had to teach Greek and Latin,” Clary said.
Modern Legacy
Challenging Theories of Racism, Diaspora, and Agency in African America

The Society of Black Archaeologists is happy to announce the publication of a Special Issue of Historical Archaeology entitled, “Challenging Theories of Racism, Diaspora, and Agency in African America.” The concept emerged from an SBA-sponsored panel at the 2014 SHA conference in Quebec, Canada. Special thanks to Chris Fennell and Bill White for editing the volume!

More information on the journal and papers can be accessed here: https://link.springer.com/journal/41636/51/1/page/1
“February is Black History Month, so it seems like the perfect time to celebrate John Wesley Gilbert -- who is generally regarded as the first African American archaeologist and is a Brown University alumnus twice over! Gilbert received his bachelor’s degree from Brown in 1888, and in 1891 was the first African American to receive a Master’s from Brown. We're proud that archaeology at Brown has such an important place in history.”

Joukowsky Institute Facebook post (2016)
“Archeologist who studied Greek literature and archeology in Athens at the American School (1890–91). Helped excavate Eretria and drew the first map of Ancient Eretria.”

Spigner, “Niobe Repeating” (2014), 27
Gilbert in 1902: the man and the symbol