



Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

I am Booker T. Washingtonⁱ and I have a plan for our race to demonstrate to whites our productivity and patience, which will bring us respect in time. I feel the best way to earn the respect of whites is to show them our talents and work ethics as laborers. I want to form schools and colleges in rural areas where blacks can learn to be better farmers, mechanics, custodians, domestic servants, and teachers. I want to prepare hundreds of teachers to start schools for African-American children. I want to create technical colleges where we research and teach the best ways of growing crops, raising animals, and fixing broken machines. I believe that we should accept the jobs we are given and do them as well as possible. By serving society in this way, we will earn the respect of whites and better feed our families.

I was born a slave on a small farm in Virginiaⁱⁱ and worked in the salt furnaces and coalmines of West Virginia as a child. I traveled hundreds of miles to attend Hampton Instituteⁱⁱⁱ, a school dedicated to teaching blacks practical skills such as mechanics and farming. After graduating, I was offered a position teaching at Hampton. My mentor received a letter from southern white men asking him to recommend a white principal for a “colored” school they wanted to open in the town of Tuskegee, Alabama. General Samuel T. Armstrong, the head of the Hampton Institute, recommended me.

I founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1881 with nothing but a shanty that leaked so badly a student had to hold an umbrella over my head while I was teaching. We started with 30 eager students and my purpose was to educate them as teachers so they could return to their rural areas and teach black children moral values, personal hygiene, self-discipline, and the virtues of work^{iv}. I had the students build many of the buildings on the campus in part of their learning construction skills.^v In order to get white business owners to donate money to my school, I assured them that I would teach nothing at Tuskegee that hinted of blacks working to achieve equality or challenging the standing of blacks in the south. I accept our status as “second class citizens” as a necessary evil for now. I believe that if we accept our position and work to make the best of it by becoming skilled mechanics, farmers, janitors, cooks, teachers, and domestic servants^{vi}, we will eventually win the respect of whites, but until then, we can find the “beauty and dignity” in the laboring work we are asked to do^{vii}.

In 1895 I spoke about my ideas to a crowd of prominent white politicians and businessmen in a speech that came to be known as the "Atlanta Compromise" and by the turn of the century, I had developed close ties with African American newspaper editors around the country who helped to spread my philosophy, and my efforts also attracted significant contributions from white donors, such as Andrew Carnegie. I also started the National Negro Business League in 1900 hoping it would encourage blacks to start their own businesses^{viii}, thus proving that they were as capable as whites of economic success. This would eventually lead whites to allow blacks -- or at least certain blacks -- their right to vote and equal treatment in the legal system. As a testament to how popular my ideas had become, in 1901 President Theodore Roosevelt invited me to dine with him at the White House.

Many African-American leaders criticize me for not pushing enough for equal rights for our race. However, my position is that we need to work within this current system for now for two reasons. First, our people are suffering and need to know more practical ways to work with their hands and start businesses right now to alleviate their current hardships. Secondly, we as a race do not have money to support educational systems so we need white donors^{ix} to provide us financial resources. They are not going to give us money if we challenge their superior position in society. We need to earn their respect ^xas exceptionally hard working people and at that point, I feel they will begin to recognize our need for equal treatment.^{xi}

ⁱ http://www.blackpast.org/files/blackpast_images/washington_booker_t.jpg

ⁱⁱ http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Counties/Franklin/033-0015_B.T.WashingtonNatlMonument_VLR_4th_edition.jpg

ⁱⁱⁱ http://0.tqn.com/d/womenshistory/1/0/1/i/2/Hampton_Institute_1899a.jpg

^{iv} http://www.fivay.org/booker_washington2.jpg

^v <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/scott/wash14.jpg>

^{vi} <http://www.historycentral.com/AfricanAmerican/Tuskegee.jpg>

^{vii} <http://negroartist.com/BOOKER%20T%20WASHINGTON/slides/Booker%20T%20Washington%20addressing%20the%20crowd%20at%20Christiansburg%20Industrial%20Institute,%2025%20June%201910,%20Christiansburg%20Institute%20Collection.jpg>

^{viii} http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/media_content/m-5190.jpg

^{ix} <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAtuskegee.jpg>

^x <http://www.twainquotes.com/BTWashington1906.jpg>

xi http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/media_players/v_btw_hi.html

Text to be annotated	Type of annotation	Annotation text
colored	definition	A school for African-Americans
shanty	definition	Shack – poor quality building
hygiene	definition	cleanliness
virtues	Definition	Values – he wanted to teach them why hard work made them better, stronger people
challenging the standing of blacks in the south	Historical thinking question	Mr. Washington did not want to teach blacks they should be equal to whites or treated better by whites. Why do you think he might avoid this idea at his school?
prominent	Definition	Important and powerful
Andrew Carnegie	Historical background information	One of the wealthiest businessmen in America who made his money in steel.
testament	definition	As a statement or example