

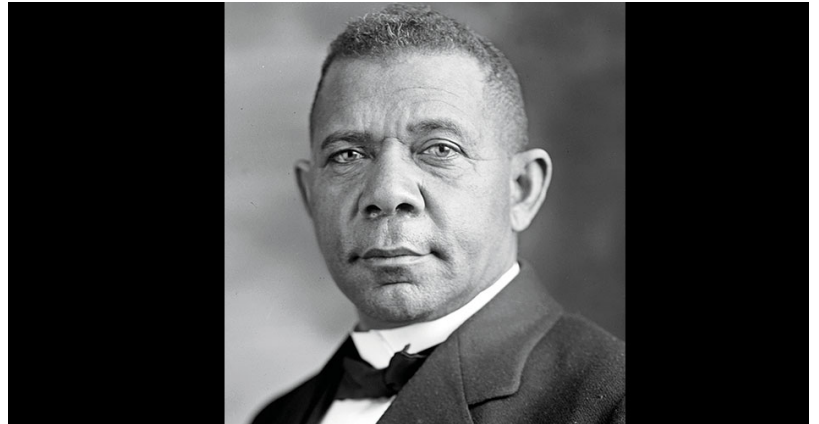


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Emancipation by Example

There is no question that there are injustices in the world, and that all of us, over our lifetimes, should hope to leave the world a better place than it would otherwise have been without us — no matter how small that difference may be. But how best to accomplish this? Through violent and bloody revolution? Or through patiently doing our duty in all aspects of our lives to the best of our abilities?



Harris & Ewing
Harris & Ewing

Booker T. Washington, the subject of this essay, chose the latter path, and through his hard work, persistence, and genius, he not only rose “up from slavery” in the wake of the Civil War, he also became an emancipator by example, one who left the world a far better place than it otherwise would have been. His way for achieving social justice is not the way of today’s Black Lives Matter revolutionaries who never experienced the slavery or racial discrimination that Booker T. Washington did. But it is the correct way, both during his time and today.

This article originally appeared in the November 22, 1999 issue of The New American. Will Grigg, who passed away in 2017, was a senior editor of The New American from 1995-2006.

Although his most significant accomplishments took place in the late 19th century, Booker Taliaferro Washington (who died in 1915) committed his public life to an issue that has been particularly nettlesome in the 20th century — the question of race relations. Born into slavery on April 5, 1856 on the plantation of James Burroughs near Hale’s Ford, Virginia, Washington’s origins were so obscure that he knew neither his specific date of birth, nor the identity of his father. On one occasion, alluding to the skimpy knowledge of his origins, Washington wryly noted that he “felt assured that his birth was a certainty,” but could attest with reasonable certainty of little else in his background.

Well into adulthood, Washington was unsure even of the name with which he was born. “From the time when I could remember anything, I had simply been called ‘Booker,’” recalled Washington in his 1901 memoir *Up From Slavery*. “Before going to school it had never occurred to me that it was needful or appropriate to have an additional name. When I heard the school-roll called, I noticed that all of the children had at least two names, and some of them indulged in what seemed to me the extravagance of having three.” Knowing that a surname would be demanded of him, the youngster quickly improvised: When the teacher “asked me what my full name was, I calmly told him, ‘Booker Washington’ as if I had



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been called by that name all my life; and by that name I have since been known.”

After learning later in life that his mother had named him Booker Taliaferro, Washington adapted the long-lost surname as a middle name. With his characteristic gentle wit, Washington described what for many would be an unpleasant reflection upon illegitimacy and uncertain identity as an ironic blessing: “I think there are not many men in our country who have had the privilege of naming themselves in the way that I have.” Despite the fact that he was born onto a pile of rags on the dirt floor of a slave’s shack, Washington never expressed anything but gratitude for being born in America. While he acknowledged the “cruelty and moral wrong of slavery,” he reflected that “Providence so often uses men and institutions to accomplish his purpose.”

“I have never seen [a former slave] who did not want to be free, or one who would return to slavery,” observed Washington. He maintained that “the ten million Negroes inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose ancestors went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe.... When persons ask me in these days how, in the midst of what sometimes seem hopelessly discouraging conditions, I can have such faith in the future of my race in this country, I remind them of the wilderness through which and out of which, a good Providence has already led us.”

Propelled by an insatiable appetite for learning, blessed with personal discipline and a love of honest work, and guided by Christian principles, Washington ascended from the abysm of poverty, slavery, and ignorance to become the first widely recognized leader of black Americans. In that role, Washington championed racial reconciliation, equality of all Americans before the law, and ordered social progress for black Americans through thrift, industry, and education. “The great human love that in the end recognizes and rewards merit is elevating and universal,” opined Washington. “In the long run, the world is going to have the best, and any difference in race, religion, or previous history will not long keep the world from what it wants.”

For the first nine years of his life, Washington lived as “a slave among slaves,” in the words of biographer Louis R. Harlan. He was constantly barefoot until the age of eight, at which time he was given a pair of uncomfortable wooden shoes. Aside from a single pair of breeches, his only clothing was a flax shirt that scourged his skin like “a dozen or more chestnut burrs.” During his time as a slave, Washington recalled, he never once ate a regular sit-down meal. Harlan points out that the young Booker and his older brother John “ate what they could snatch from the kitchen fire, the Burroughs’ leftovers, or the livestock.”

While Washington did not minimize the “cruel wrongs” inflicted upon the slave population, he maintained that the harmful influence of the peculiar institution was “not by any means confined to the Negro.... The whole machinery of slavery was so constructed as to cause labor, as a rule, to be looked upon as a badge of degradation, of inferiority. Hence labor was something that both races on the slave plantation sought to escape. The slave system on our place, in a large measure, took the spirit of self-reliance and self-help out of the white people. My old master had many boys and girls, but not one, so far as I know, ever mastered a single trade or special line of productive industry.”



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At the bottom: At 10 years old, Booker T. Washington couldn't read or figure numbers, and he was only reluctantly allowed to go to school. From this humble beginning, he eventually ran a university.

Washington wrote of his mother "kneeling over her children and fervently praying ... that one day she and her children might be free." With the collapse of the South, the nine-year-old Booker was gathered along with the rest of Burroughs' servants to the master's house, where a military officer read the Emancipation Proclamation. Despite the fact that when the Proclamation was issued it was a cynical act of war propaganda, the Union's victory did bring liberty to Washington and his fellow slaves, and the moment was a poignant one for the youngster and his family. "My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks," recalled Washington. "She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but fearing she would never live to see."

The ecstasy of the newly liberated slaves was short-lived, Washington recalled, as a sobering sense of the responsibilities of freedom descended upon them. "The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children, seemed to take possession of them," wrote Washington. "It was very much like suddenly turning a youth of ten or twelve years out into the world to provide for himself. In a few hours the great question with which the Anglo-Saxon race had been grappling for centuries had been thrown upon these people to be solved. These were questions of a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches. Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters?" As Washington wisely concluded, to many of the newly liberated slaves, "it seemed that, now that they were in actual possession of it, freedom was a more serious thing than they had expected to find it."

Shortly after receiving his freedom, Booker, along with his mother and older brother, traveled to Malden, West Virginia, where Booker's stepfather was working in the local salt furnaces. The ten-year-old was unceremoniously roused from bed one morning and brought to work as a salt packer, shoveling crystallized salt into barrels and pounding it vigorously until the container held the required weight. From four in the morning until well after dark the youngster toiled at this task, and as he did so his curiosity was piqued by the figure used to mark his barrel — the number 18. Untutored as yet in either letters or numbers, Washington was nonetheless intrigued by the figure. "I soon learned to recognize



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that figure wherever I saw it, and after a while got to the point where I could make that figure, though I knew nothing about any other figures or letters,” he recalled in his memoir.

Washington had always longed to learn how to read, and determined as a small child that, “if I accomplished nothing else in life, I would in some way get enough education to enable me to read common books and newspapers.” Immediately upon settling in West Virginia, Booker prevailed upon his mother to get him a book — “an old copy of Webster’s ‘blue-back’ spelling book, which contained the alphabet.... I began at once to devour this book, and I think that it was the first one I ever had in my hands.” Since none of his black friends or co-workers could read, and because he was afraid of approaching any of the white population for help, Booker was required to teach himself. Within a few weeks, the young autodidact had “mastered the greater portion of the alphabet.” In this effort he had the constant support of his mother, who despite her illiteracy “had high ambitions for her children, and a large fund of good, hard, common sense.”

Booker also came to an early understanding of his spiritual needs and responsibilities. Given to playing marbles in the streets of Malden with his friends on Sundays, which offered the youngster his only respite from hard labor, Booker found himself one Sabbath morning being rebuked by an elderly man for failing to attend church. The account of the spiritual benefits of worship “so impressed Booker that he gave up his game and followed the old man,” recalls Louis Harlan. In short order, Booker was baptized by Elder Lewis Rice, pastor of the Tinkersville African Zion Baptist Church, where he was soon regarded as a pillar of the congregation.

As an adult, Washington reflected upon the spiritual benefits that flowed from the old man’s gentle rebuke. As a noted educator whose oratorical skills commanded audiences throughout the United States and Europe, Washington readily acknowledged that his eloquence was a divine gift: “I make it a rule never to go before an audience, on any occasion, without asking the blessing of God upon what I want to say.” He also wrote of his great love for the Bible, stating that “when I am at home, no matter how busy I am, I always make it a rule to read a chapter or a portion in the morning, before beginning the work of the day.”

The old man’s rebuke led to terrestrial benefits as well: Had Booker not been invited to church in Tinkersville that Sunday morning, he may not have had the opportunity to attend the Tinkersville school, which was established in Elder Rice’s home. “Father Rice,” as he was fondly known in West Virginia’s Kanawha Valley, was besieged with requests from black residents to start a school. In September 1865, a teacher materialized in the person of an 18-year-old Union veteran named William Davis, who had obtained a basic education shortly before enlisting in 1863. The Tinkersville school was a self-help project funded entirely by the poor black people of the village, without so much as a penny from the federal Freedmen’s Bureau or either county or local governments.

Unfortunately for Booker, his stepfather initially refused to allow him to attend school, insisting that the family was too poor to allow the youngster to live at home without working. “Booker’s disappointment at missing school became keener when he looked out from the salt-packing shed and saw other children passing happily to and from the school,” notes Louis Harlan. However, “I determined that I would learn something, anyway,” wrote Washington. “I applied myself with greater earnestness than ever to the mastering of what was in the ‘blue-black’ speller.” He also enrolled in a night-school class that Davis had primarily organized for adults. Through determination and discipline, and because he genuinely coveted any opportunity to learn, Booker learned much more at night — despite the rigors of his



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schedule — than more fortunate children were learning during the day.

“Finally I won,” recalled Washington, “and was permitted to go to the school in the day for a few months, with the understanding that I was to rise early in the morning and work in the furnace till nine o’clock, and return immediately after school closed in the afternoon for at least two more hours of work.” This posed a predicament, since school began at nine o’clock as well, and Booker resented the fact that his forced tardiness was cheating him of precious learning time. In order to solve this problem, the ingenuous youngster would move up the hands of the clock used by workers and supervisors to regulate their shifts. “I got the idea that the way for me to reach school on time was to move the clock hands from half-past eight up to the nine o’clock mark,” Washington ruefully confessed. Once his subterfuge was discovered by the furnace boss, the clock was safely locked away in a glass case. “I did not mean to inconvenience anybody,” wrote Washington. “I simply meant to reach that schoolhouse on time.”

Washington’s innocent ruse was born not out of an aversion to work, or an intent to defraud his employer, but out of a desire to learn. When, in his justly famous 1895 Atlanta Exposition address, he would admonish black Americans that “it is at the bottom of life we must begin, not at the top,” and urge them to find “as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem,” he was speaking with the earned moral authority of one whose life exemplified the self-help ethic.

In 1867, after spending a stint working in a West Virginia coal mine, Booker learned of an employment opening for a houseboy (at a wage of five dollars a month) in the household of General Lewis Ruffner and his wife, Viola. Mrs. Ruffner, a formidable matron of Vermont Yankee extraction, was noted for her granite disposition and exacting nature, and she had put to flight several houseboys who couldn’t measure up to her expectations. Shortly after being hired by the Ruffners, young Booker fled as well — only to return, chastened and willing to resume his labors. The young ex-slave and the Yankee aristocrat soon became close friends.



Grit, determination, and private backers: Booker T. Washington built the fledgling Tuskegee Institute from a couple of shoddy buildings into a thriving, expanding center of learning through hard work and the aid of good-hearted people. This is a path that he wanted other blacks to follow.

“From fearing Mrs. Ruffner I soon learned to look upon her as one of my best friends,” wrote Washington. “When she found that she could trust me she did so implicitly.” She also encouraged his



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efforts to educate himself, granting him daily leave during the winter months to attend a few hours of school and helping him acquire a private tutor to study at night. While living in the Ruffner household, Booker also began to assemble his first private library: He obtained a large, empty dry-goods box, placed some shelves in it, “and began putting into it every kind of book that I could get my hands upon, and called it my ‘library.’”

Mrs. Ruffner’s demanding personality also helped refine Booker’s work habits, and taught him the value of tidiness and order — traits that would serve him well as an educator and administrator. “I soon began to learn that, first of all, she wanted everything kept clean about her, that she wanted things done promptly and systematically, and that at [the] bottom of everything she wanted absolute honesty and frankness,” recalled Washington. “Nothing must be sloven or slipshod; every door, every fence, must be kept in repair.” From his perspective, “the lessons that I learned in the home of Mrs. Ruffner were as valuable to me as any education I have ever gotten anywhere since.”

Just as important was the genuine friendship that grew between Booker and his employer. Viola Ruffner, a shy and melancholy woman married to a man 20 years her senior, had few close friends, and according to one close relative knew “nothing of domestic happiness.” At the time that Booker was hired as a houseboy, Viola Ruffner’s son was a cadet at West Point and her daughter was away at boarding school. Louis Harlan comments that Booker was “a godsend” to Mrs. Ruffner. “The black youth became the chief beneficiary of the energy, intellectual vigor, and sense of purpose of a frustrated New England schoolmarm.” It is likely that Mrs. Ruffner took an almost maternal interest in the bright, eager, hardworking boy.

“A remarkable bond of affection and trust grew up between the gentle-spoken black boy and the sharp-tongued white woman,” continues Harlan. “The lonely woman even may have made a confidant of the boy and poured out to him all of her loneliness and bitterness.” After Booker obtained renown for his work as an educator and social activist, Mrs. Ruffner fondly recalled that Booker was “quiet, determined to make good, and never wasteful of time”: “His conduct has always been without fault, and what more can you wish? He seemed peculiarly determined to emerge from his obscurity. He was ever restless, uneasy, as if knowing that contentment would mean inaction. ‘Am I getting on?’ — that was his principal question.”

While living with the Ruffners, recalled Washington, “I saw one open battle take place at Malden between some of the colored and white people.” A payday altercation erupted between a white man named John Fewell and a black man named Tom Preston in which the latter “came out first best.” Fewell swore vengeance upon Preston, prompting Preston to file assault charges. By seeking legal redress at court, Preston provoked a local Ku Klux Klan contingent called “Gideon’s Band,” who swore to prevent Preston from appearing in court.

On the day of the trial, narrates Harlan, “ten Negroes armed with revolvers surrounded Tom Preston as he walked from Tinkersville to Malden. Six white men, friends of the defendant John Fewell, ordered the black men to leave town.” After a brief gun battle, Preston and his bodyguards ended up near the Ruffner home. General Ruffner, with the young Booker behind him, intervened to restore the peace. According to one account, the general told Preston and his defenders to accompany him to town, where “he would see that they should have a fair trial.” As General Ruffner tried to act as a mediator between the contending factions, he was struck from behind with a “brick-bat,” suffering an injury from which he never fully recovered, and the riot resumed.



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“As a young man,” wrote Washington later, “the acts of these lawless bands made a great impression upon me.” Among the lessons he took away from this experience was the futility of violent agitation as a means of bringing about social progress for black Americans. Although as a young man he witnessed firsthand the hateful depredations of the Klan, he understood that reciprocal hatred was not only self-defeating but sinful; he resolved that he “would permit no man, no matter what his color might be, to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him.”

In 1872, Booker enrolled as a student at the Hampton, Virginia Normal and Agricultural Institute, where he worked as a janitor to earn his room and board. Upon arriving at Hampton, he recalled, he had “a surplus of exactly fifty cents with which to begin my education.” Hungry, poorly dressed, and long unbathed when he presented himself before the head teacher, “I did not, of course, make a very favorable impression upon her, and I could see at once that there were doubts in her mind about the wisdom of admitting me as a student.” After keeping Booker on tenterhooks while several other students were processed, the head teacher informed him that “the adjoining recitation-room needs sweeping. Take the broom and sweep it.”

“It occurred to me that here was my chance,” recalled Washington. He eagerly grabbed the broom and, with the fastidiousness he had learned from Viola Ruffner, “swept the recitation-room three times. Then I got a dusting-cloth and I dusted it four times.” Having banished every speck of dust from the room, he invited an inspection by the head teacher. After surveying Booker’s handiwork, the teacher calmly informed the anxious young man, “I guess you’ll do to enter the institution.” “I was one of the happiest souls on earth,” recalled Washington. “The sweeping of that room was my college examination, and never did any youth pass an examination for entrance into Harvard or Yale that gave him more genuine satisfaction. I have passed several examinations since then, but I have always felt that this was the best one I ever passed.”

During his three years at the Hampton Institute, Booker came to admire the school’s superintendent, General Samuel C. Armstrong, whom he came to regard as “the noblest, rarest human being that it has ever been my privilege to meet.” “The older I grow, the more I am convinced that there is no education which one can get from books and costly apparatus that is equal to that which can be gotten from contact with great men and women,” wrote Washington, and in his view General Armstrong was such a man. The general was “Christlike” in his capacity for selfless service, Washington recalled: “I do not believe he ever had a selfish thought.... Although he fought the Southern white man in the Civil War, I never heard him utter a bitter word against him afterward. On the other hand, he was constantly seeking to find ways by which he could be of service to the Southern whites.”

After his graduation from the Hampton Institute, Washington was offered an opportunity by General Armstrong to serve as a “house father” to 75 American Indians who were part of a special educational program. Although there were a few black students at Hampton who resented the presence of the Indians, recalled Washington, most of the Negro students “gladly took the Indians as roommates, in order that they might teach them to speak English and to acquire civilized habits.”

It was while he worked with Indian students that Washington “had one or two experiences which illustrate the curious workings of caste in America.” When one of the Indian students took ill, Booker was required to take him to Washington, D.C., where he would be taken under the care of the Interior Department. During the steamboat trip, Washington and his ailing Indian charge presented themselves at the dining saloon for dinner, only to be politely informed “that the Indian could be served, but I could



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not.” Without rancor, but with a discernible note of cultured sarcasm, Washington commented: “I could never understand how he knew just where to draw the color line, since the Indian and I were about the same complexion. The steward, however, seemed to be an expert in this matter.” The same useless expertise was displayed by the clerk at the Washington hotel to which the weary travelers repaired upon their arrival in the capital city.

Reflecting upon such incidents, Washington wrote that “the time to test a true gentleman is to observe him when he is in contact with individuals of a race that is less fortunate than his own. This is illustrated in no better way than by observing the conduct of the old-school type of Southern gentleman” in social settings involving black people. To illustrate, Booker referred to the familiar incident in which George Washington, meeting a black man who lifted his hat in greeting, reciprocated the polite tribute. When he was criticized by some of his friends for his gesture, Washington — artfully using against them their prejudices, which he did not share — replied: “Do you suppose that I am going to permit a poor, ignorant, colored man to be more polite than I am?”

Despite occasional incidents of the kind he experienced during his first trip to Washington, Booker reported that “in all my contact with the white people of the South I have never received a single personal insult.” After becoming head of Alabama’s Tuskegee Institute, Washington found that white Southerners treated him with respect and appreciation. Thus it is not surprising that Washington was a critic of the policy of military occupation and social engineering known to history as the “Reconstruction” of the South.

“I think ... that the opportunity to freely exercise [the franchise and other] political rights will not come in any large degree through outside or artificial forcing, but will be accorded to the Negro by Southern white people themselves, and that they will protect him in the exercise of those rights,” observed Washington at the dawn of the 20th century. “Just as soon as the South gets over the old feeling that it is being forced by ‘foreigners,’ or ‘aliens,’ to do something which it does not want to do, I believe that the change in the direction that I have indicated is going to begin. In fact, there are indications that it is already beginning.”

Washington was also critical of the way in which “Reconstruction” cultivated dependence on the part of black Southerners. “I felt that the Reconstruction policy, so far as it related to my race, was in a large measure on a false foundation, which was artificial and forced. In many cases it seemed to me that the ignorance of my race was being used as a tool with which to help white men into office, and that there was an element in the North which wanted to punish the Southern white men by forcing the Negro into positions over the heads of the Southern whites. I felt that the Negro would be the one to suffer for this in the end.”

Indeed, by becoming wards of the central government, contended Washington, blacks were as much victims of Reconstruction as were the whites who were being punished: “During the whole of the Reconstruction period our people throughout the South looked to the Federal Government for everything, very much as a child looks to its mother.” This was intolerable to someone such as Washington, who fervently believed in the value and virtue of work and individual effort. From his perspective, the way to mitigate the South’s racial predicament was for blacks and whites to engage in honorable and productive commerce, and thus create a society based upon merit. With regard to the franchise, Washington supported non-racial literacy requirements and insisted that “each state that finds it necessary to change the law bearing upon the franchise [must] make the law apply with



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absolute honesty, and without opportunity for double dealing or evasion, to both races alike.”

Despite the fact that his labors consumed nearly all of his time, Washington made time for his family. Since he had never known his father or even known the pleasure of a sit-down meal, Washington strictly regulated his time in order to fulfill his duties as a husband and father to his four children. His home life was not without tragedy, however, as death claimed his first two wives at a very young age.

In 1881, after several years of teaching and a brief stint as a student at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C., Booker was selected to head the newly established Tuskegee Institute, which at the time boasted assets totaling two converted buildings (one of them an old hen-house) and almost no money. With the help of generous donors in both the North and South, and through the application of the industry for which he became properly famous, Booker built Tuskegee into a thriving, expanding center of learning. At the time of his death in 1915, Tuskegee encompassed over 100 well-equipped buildings, a teaching staff of 200, an enrollment of 1,500 black students studying 38 trades and professions, and an endowment of \$2 million. Washington also pointed out that although Tuskegee was strictly non-denominational, the education it provided was “thoroughly Christian and the spiritual training of students is not neglected.”

As he traveled the country raising funds for Tuskegee, Washington found himself in demand as an orator. In September 1895, Washington was invited to attend the Atlanta Cotton States and Industrial Exposition, one of the most significant gatherings of political, religious, and industrial leaders in the post-war South. Although Washington was never deeply involved in partisan politics, he was acutely aware of the exposition’s potential political fallout, and that the prospects for the Tuskegee Institute could depend upon the reception that his speech received. He was also sensible of the potential impact his speech could have on race relations in a South that was still deeply injured from the war and Reconstruction.



The great divider: Black leader W.E.B. Dubois, who lived a comfortable life and benefited greatly from white patronage, depised whites. Many blacks chose his vision over that of the unifier Booker T. Washington.

As he strode to the dais at the exposition on September 18, 1895, Washington bore a burden he had not sought, and he dispatched it by speaking candidly about the need for black and white Southerners to



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join in the mutually enriching work of economic development. He urged Southern blacks to “cast down your bucket where you are”: “Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man’s chance in the commercial world.... Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor and put our brains and skill into the common occupations of life.”

He also admonished white Southerners to “cast down [their] bucket where [they] are” by encouraging blacks to seek education and productive employment, remembering that blacks have “tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South.” Given the opportunity, black Southerners would be willing to “stand by [white Southerners] ... interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one.” Washington’s speech was greeted with a prolonged ovation, and earned laudatory notices from newspapers across the country. Clark Howell, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, expressed the view of millions of Americans in a telegram to Washington in which he referred to the address as “a platform upon which blacks and whites can stand with full justice to each other.”

Within a few years, a far different approach to “social progress” would be championed by one of Washington’s chief antagonists, William Edward Burghardt DuBois. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and raised in modest, if comfortable, middle-class surroundings, W.E.B. DuBois was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which rejected Washington’s vision of progress through industry, literacy, and racial conciliation. The NAACP’s preferred strategy was political confrontation and social agitation, and its program reflected the Marxist worldview of DuBois and his comrades.

Where Washington resolved never to succumb to racial resentment, DuBois — who had never known the privations and brutality of slave life, and whose career benefited from the patronage of wealthy white philanthropists — resolved at Harvard to “disdain and forget as far as possible that outer, whiter world.” In a 1909 editorial for the NAACP organ *Crisis*, DuBois wrote that “the most ordinary Negro is a distinct gentleman, but it takes extraordinary training and opportunity to make the average white man anything but a hog.” In 1911, DuBois joined the Socialist Party; a few years later — as DuBois recalled in a 1961 letter applying for membership in the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) — he “hailed the Russian Revolution of 1917.” In that same letter, which was sent to Gus Hall, the Soviet quisling who headed the CPUSA, DuBois proclaimed that communism “is the only way of human life.... In the end Communism will triumph. I want to help bring that day.”

W.E.B. DuBois despised Washington and execrated him as a tool of white capitalists. It is also not surprising that the modern “civil rights” movement drew from DuBois’ vision — kept alive by the campus network of “W.E.B. DuBois Clubs,” which were organized by the CPUSA as front groups in 1959 — rather than that of Booker T. Washington. In his introduction to the 1967 edition of *Up From Slavery*, Professor Clarence A. Andrews of the University of Iowa paid fealty to the prevailing prejudices of our unfortunate age: “I know where I stand — my heart is with Booker T. Washington but my brain is with DuBois.” In 1991, the U.S. Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp featuring the likeness of



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DuBois, who died in 1963 in Ghana as an honored guest of Marxist dictator Kwame Nkrumah.

It is almost certain that black Americans, and the country as a whole, would have fared much better had the vision of Booker T. Washington prevailed. To the extent that the values he championed and personified are followed, those who do so find that America remains a land of opportunity for everyone, irrespective of race or color. Washington himself remained industrious until literally the last day that God gave him — November 14, 1915, when he expired at Tuskegee, a -casualty, at age 59, of overwork.



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