

Booker T. Washington

“I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed.” Born as a slave in 1856, Booker Taliaferro seemed like he had little promise for his life except working at a plantation and being beat for not performing to his full duties. Even though it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write Booker T. wanted nothing more than to learn. As a young child on a plantation he would glance through the schoolhouse windows wishing that he was able to do learn just as the white children were able to.

After the civil war was over 9 year old Booker T. and his mother were finally free and moved to West Virginia where his step-father, freedman Washington Ferguson, was located. Still a young boy he went to work with his step-father in order to support their household. Booker’s mother knew that her son longed to learn so she decided to buy him a book. Booker T. would get up early before work every day to learn from his book and this is where he taught himself how to read and write basic words. Around this time in his life is when he decided to take his step-father’s first name as his last changing his name from Booker Taliaferro to Booker T. Washington. At the age of ten Booker T. Washington began working as a houseboy for a rich family who grew a liking for him. The family discovered his love for education and encouraged the young man to become further educated.

In 1872 Washington left home to further his education at the Hampton Institute. He ended up being awarded a scholarship to pay for his tuition because headmaster Armstrong

noticed how hardworking Washington was and believed that newly freed slaves should receive a practical education. Washington graduated in 1875 with high marks and then began teaching.

In 1881 he and a few others opened the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Tuskegee held many of Washington's morals and beliefs such as patience, enterprise, and thrift. He stated that African American success would take time and so would acceptance. Washington stressed that if African Americans would work hard and gain financial independence then they would finally be accepted and gain respect by the white community.

Some people did not like that Washington wanted to quietly gain acceptance and respect from the white community stating that he should put his foot down for their rights instead. Washington believed that segregation was ok as long as they were awarded and allowed economic progress, educational opportunity, and justice in the courts.

Washington was invited to the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. He was the first African American to gain entrance to the White House. President's Roosevelt and Taft looked to Washington for advice on racial matters during their times as president.

Some people think of Booker T. Washington as being a traitor because he took a backseat to segregation, they even think he wasn't brave enough to stand up for equal rights. Then on the other hand some people think of him as a hero for his strength, hard work, and for what he actually did to try to gain equal rights. At first I didn't admire the fact that he took a backseat to segregation but after reading more of his story and some thought, I think that it actually takes a brave man to do what Washington did. Washington didn't want to worsen the bad opinions that most white people had of African Americans, instead he wanted to change them to good opinions. Instead of fighting he wanted to prove himself and his fellow African American's equal by showing that they could be as great as any white man. It is unfortunate that he or any

other African American ever had to feel that they had to prove themselves as being equal but it is how history goes.

I don't think Washington took the "easy" way out when it came to battling segregation and equal rights because I can only imagine how hard it was to endure some of the things that African American's had to endure during Washington's time. He was born a slave and ended his life being extremely successful. I have concluded that Washington still fought for equal rights no matter what other people may say. As I stated before, it takes a brave man to go through the things he went through. He still remained a hard worker no matter what obstacle was placed in front of him. Washington was a teacher and wanted to be a good example for his students and peers. I believe he was a great example of what a man should be at all times. I admire Booker T. Washington because of the strength he showed during the difficult times he was brought up in.

Works Cited

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