

Booker T. Washington

*The Atlanta Exposition Address,
September 18, 1895*

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Background

- Washington was born into slavery in 1856
- He was freed in 1865 at the end of the Civil War
- Founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama in 1881 to educate African Americans- spent his life improving school
- School initially emphasized industrial, skilled trade education rather than traditional college-level liberal arts studies
- He thought former slaves would gain acceptance through education and financial independence

The Atlanta Exposition Address- 1895

- Washington became a popular spokesperson for the African American community so he was asked to give an address on the topic of race relations
- Presented before a predominantly white audience
- This speech became his most famous articulation of his educational philosophy
- Speech has been recognized as one of the most influential speeches in American history

Highlights of Speech

- African Americans should secure constitutional rights through economic and moral advancement rather than legal and political action
- Argued that economic progress for African Americans must precede full political equality
- Achieve equality through hard work and self-improvement
- Accepted the separation of blacks and whites

Famous Quote #1

“In all things purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”

- He felt that both races could win this way because essentially blacks and whites could live together, but at the same time apart- come to a mutual understanding.
- He was trying to accommodate everyone through his conservative approach.
- His speech pleased many whites and he gained financial support for his school.

Famous Quote #2

“Cast down your bucket where you are”

- Urged African Americans and whites to work together for economic advancement
- He was saying that everyone needed to make the most out of the situation they were in, in order to make a better life for themselves

Famous Quote #3

“No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top.”

- He felt that people must learn what is truly important, and what leads to true wealth, not just riches.
- A foundation must be established to be able to build on and grow-Washington insisted that he achieved his position through hard work.
- He wanted black people to not feel ashamed of using their hands, but rather to have respect for what they were creating.

Critics

- W.E.B. Du Bois didn't agree with Washington that education should focus on economic empowerment and practical skills- he felt this curriculum was too narrow
- Du Bois felt that schools should focus on intellectual empowerment- a more academic curriculum
- Many people criticized Washington because they felt his speech undermined the quest for racial equality
- It almost seemed that he was endorsing separate development of the races

Critics Cont...

- They felt that Washington was accommodating injustice- Du Bois felt that he was accepting the alleged inferiority of the African American race
- They felt that he was a black leader chosen by whites to please them

Conclusion

- Washington is still known as one of the most influential black men of his time
- His life was devoted to the improvement of the African American
- He is best remembered for helping black Americans rise up from the economic slavery that held them down even after they were legally free citizens
- He played an essential role in helping the African American community participate fully in American life

Questions or Comments

If you would like to listen to his
actual speech:

- <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/88>.

Further Reading

- *Up From Slavery* an autobiography by Booker T. Washington
- *The Story of the Negro: Rise of the Race from Slavery: Volumes I and II* by Booker T. Washington
- *The Negro Problem* by Booker T. Washington
- *The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to his Moral and Religious Development* by Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington Symposium in Chicago June 4-6, 2006

- Web-site

<http://www.newcoalition.org/btw2006/welcome.cfm>

- Listen to the speakers at the event

<http://www.fromtheheartland.org/live/btw-audio.html>

References

- Schultz, F. (2000). *Sources: Notable selections in education*. New York: McGraw-Hill Dushkin.
- Johnson, J. A., Musial, D. Hall, G.E., Gollnick, D. M., & Dupuis, V.L. (2005). *Introduction to the foundations of American education*. 14th ed. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Beck, Sanderson. (n.d.) *Booker T. Washington and Character Education at Tuskegee Institute 1881-1915*. Retrieved March 29, 2008, from <http://san.beck.org/BTW.html>
- Norrell, Robert J. (2004, May 15). Booker T. Washington: Understanding the Wizard of Tuskegee. *New Coalition News and Views*. Retrieved March 29, 2008, from <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artld=15014>