

PREFACE

IT IS not hyperbole to say that Booker T. Washington was a great American. For twenty years before his death he had been the most useful, as well as the most distinguished, member of his race in the world, and one of the most useful, as well as one of the most distinguished, of American citizens of any race.

Eminent though his services were to the people of his own color, the white men of our Republic were almost as much indebted to him, both directly and indirectly. They were indebted to him directly, because of the work he did on behalf of industrial education for the Negro, thus giving impetus to the work for the industrial education of the White Man, which is, at least, as necessary; and, moreover, every successful effort to turn the thoughts of the natural leaders of the Negro race into the fields of business endeavor, of agricultural effort, of every species of success in private life, is not only to their advantage, but to the advantage of the White Man, as tending to remove the friction and trouble that inevitably come throughout the South at this time in any Negro district where the Negroes turn for their advancement primarily to political life.

The indirect indebtedness of the White Race to Booker

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T. Washington is due to the simple fact that here in America we are all in the end going up or down together; and therefore, in the long run, the man who makes a substantial contribution toward uplifting any part of the community has helped to uplift all of the community. Wherever in our land the Negro remains uneducated, and liable to criminal suggestion, it is absolutely certain that the whites will themselves tend to tread the paths of barbarism; and wherever we find the colored people as a whole engaged in successful work to better themselves, and respecting both themselves and others, there we shall also find the tone of the white community high.

The patriotic white man with an interest in the welfare of this country is almost as heavily indebted to Booker T. Washington as the colored men themselves.

If there is any lesson, more essential than any other, for this country to learn, it is the lesson that the enjoyment of rights should be made conditional upon the performance of duty. For one failure in the history of our country which is due to the people not asserting their rights, there are hundreds due to their not performing their duties. This is just as true of the White Man as it is of the Colored Man. But it is a lesson even more important to be taught the Colored Man, because the Negro starts at the bottom of the ladder and will never develop the strength to climb even a single rung if he follow the lead of those who dwell only upon their rights and not upon their duties. He has a hard road to travel anyhow. He is certain to be treated with much injustice, and although he will encounter

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among white men a number who wish to help him upward and onward, he will encounter only too many who, if they do him no bodily harm, yet show a brutal lack of consideration for him. Nevertheless his one safety lies in steadily keeping in view that the law of service is the great law of life, above all in this Republic, and that no man of color can benefit either himself or the rest of his race, unless he proves by his life his adherence to this law. Such a life is not easy for the White Man, and it is very much less easy for the Black Man; but it is even more important for the Black Man, and for the Black Man's people, that he should lead it.

As nearly as any man I have ever met, Booker T. Washington lived up to Micah's verse, "What more doth the Lord require to thee than to do Justice and love Mercy and walk humbly with thy God." He did justice to every man. He did justice to those to whom it was a hard thing to do justice. He showed mercy; and this meant that he showed mercy not only to the poor, and to those beneath him, but that he showed mercy by an understanding of the shortcomings of those who failed to do him justice, and failed to do his race justice. He always understood and acted upon the belief that the Black Man could not rise if he so acted as to incur the enmity and hatred of the White Man; that it was of prime importance to the well-being of the Black Man to earn the good will of his white neighbor, and that the bulk of the Black Men who dwell in the Southern States must realize that the White Men who are their immediate physical neighbors

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are beyond all others those whose good will and respect it is of vital consequence that the Black Men of the South should secure.

He was never led away, as the educated Negro so often is led away, into the pursuit of fantastic visions; into the drawing up of plans fit only for a world of two dimensions. He kept his high ideals, always; but he never forgot for a moment that he was living in an actual world of three dimensions, in a world of unpleasant facts, where those unpleasant facts have to be faced; and he made the best possible out of a bad situation from which there was no ideal best to be obtained. And he walked humbly with his God.

To a very extraordinary degree he combined humility and dignity; and I think that the explanation of this extraordinary degree of success in a very difficult combination was due to the fact that at the bottom his humility was really the outward expression, not of a servile attitude toward any man, but of the spiritual fact that in very truth he walked humbly with his God.

Nowhere was Booker T. Washington's wisdom shown better than in the mixture of moderation and firmness with which he took precisely the right position as to the part the Black Man should try to take in politics. He put the whole case in a nut-shell in the following sentences:

“In my opinion it is a fatal mistake to teach the young black man and the young white man that the dominance of the white race in the South rests upon any other basis than absolute justice to the weaker man. It is a mistake

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to cultivate in the mind of any individual or group of individuals the feeling and belief that their happiness rests upon the misery of some one else, or their wealth by the poverty of some one else. I do not advocate that the Negro make politics or the holding of office an important thing in his life. I do urge, in the interests of fair play for everybody, that a Negro who prepares himself in property, in intelligence, and in character to cast a ballot, and desires to do so, should have the opportunity."

In other words, while he did not believe that political activity should play an important part among Negroes as a whole, he did believe that in the interests of the White, as well as in the interests of the Colored, race, the upright, honest, intelligent Black Man or Colored Man should be given the right to cast a ballot if he possessed the qualities which, if possessed by a White Man, would make that White Man a valuable addition to the suffrage-exercising class.

No man, White or Black, was more keenly alive than Booker T. Washington to the threat of the South, and to the whole country, and especially to the Black Man himself, contained in the mass of ignorant, propertyless, semi-vicious Black voters, wholly lacking in the character which alone fits a race for self-government, who nevertheless have been given the ballot in certain Southern States.

In my many conversations and consultations with him it is, I believe, not an exaggeration to say that one-half the time we were discussing methods for keeping out of office, and out of all political power, the ignorant, semi-criminal,

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shiftless Black Man who, when manipulated by the able and unscrupulous politician, Black or White, is so dreadful a menace to our political institutions. But he felt very strongly, and I felt no less strongly, that one of the most efficient ways of warring against this evil type was to show the Negro that, if he turned his back on that type, and fitted himself to be a self-respecting citizen, doing his part in sustaining the common burdens of good citizenship, he would be freely accorded by his White neighbors the privileges and rights of good citizenship. Surely there can be no objection to this. Surely there can be no serious objection thus to keep open the door of hope for the thoroughly decent, upright, self-respecting man, no matter what his color.

In the same way, while Booker T. Washington firmly believed that the attention of the Colored race should be riveted, not on political life, but on success sought in the fields of honest business endeavor, he also felt, and I agreed with him, that it was to the interest of both races that there should be appointments to office of Black Men whose characters and abilities were such that if they were White Men their appointments would be hailed as being well above the average, and creditable from every standpoint. He also felt, and I agreed with him, that it was essential that these appointments should be made relatively most numerous in the North—for it is worse than useless to preach virtue to others, unless the preachers themselves practise it; which means that the Northern communities, which pride themselves on possessing the proper attitude

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toward the Negro, should show this attitude by their own acts within their own borders.

I profited very much by my association with Booker T. Washington. I owed him much along many different lines. I valued greatly his friendship and respect; and when he died I mourned his loss as a patriot and an American.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

Sagamore Hill,

August 28, 1916.

Booker T. Washington

Builder of a Civilization

By
Emmett J. Scott
and
Lyman Beecher Stowe



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