



Up from Slavery

Booker T. Washington

Download now

Read Online ➔

Up from Slavery

Booker T. Washington

Up from Slavery Booker T. Washington

Born in a Virginia slave hut, Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) rose to become the most influential spokesman for African Americans of his day. In this eloquently written book, he describes events in a remarkable life that began in bondage and culminated in worldwide recognition for his many accomplishments. In simply written yet stirring passages, he tells of his impoverished childhood and youth, the unrelenting struggle for an education, early teaching assignments, his selection in 1881 to head Tuskegee Institute, and more.

A firm believer in the value of education as the best route to advancement, Washington disapproved of civil-rights agitation and in so doing earned the opposition of many black intellectuals. Yet, he is today regarded as a major figure in the struggle for equal rights, one who founded a number of organizations to further the cause and who worked tirelessly to educate and unite African Americans.

Up from Slavery Details

Date : Published October 4th 1995 by Dover Publications (first published 1900)

ISBN : 9780486287386

Author : Booker T. Washington

Format : Paperback 176 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Biography, Classics, Autobiography, Cultural, African American, Memoir

 [Download Up from Slavery ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Up from Slavery ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Up from Slavery Booker T. Washington

From Reader Review Up from Slavery for online ebook

Skylar Burris says

It's interesting that with all the emphasis on "multiculturalism" when I was going through school, we never actually read any first source books like "Up From Slavery." However, I can see why some modern educators might want to avoid assigning this book: it does violence to a certain brand of philosophy because of its profound anti-victimization message and its focus on individual responsibility, the power of merit to supplant racism, and the necessity of climbing gradually rather than expecting to be catapulted instantaneously into an equality of outcome. Booker T. Washington doesn't sound like a proponent of affirmative action when he says, "The wisest among my race understand that agitations of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing."

Nor did Washington seem to have much tolerance for those who claimed they could not succeed because of their disadvantages. He sums up his attitude and his life success in one line: "I have begun everything with the idea that I could succeed, and I never had much patience with the multitudes of people who are always ready to explain why one cannot succeed." Washington was a great believer in the power of merit and repeatedly says that "merit, no matter under what skin it found is, in the long run, recognized and rewarded."

In "Up From Slavery," Washington insists that no amount of political agitation will elevate any race permanently if it does not first secure a foundation in "property, industry, skill, economy, intelligence, and character." As early as the Reconstruction, Washington was bemoaning that in D.C. "among a large class there seemed to be a dependence upon the Government for every conceivable thing...I...have often wished...I might remove...these people...and plant them upon the soil...where all nations and races that have ever succeeded have gotten their start, a start that at first may be slow and toilsome, but one that is nevertheless real." This attitude may explain why Washington saw fit to require labor of his Tuskegee students. Talking about prejudice does little to overcome prejudice, but, he says, the "actual sight of a first-class house that a Negro has built is ten times more potent than pages of discussion about a house that he ought to build, or perhaps could build." Thus Tuskegee students, no matter what their financial position, were required to do things such as building their dormitories with their own hands and growing their own food.

Some have been critical of Washington's belief that liberal education must be combined with vocational education, but he did not want his students to grow too proud to use their hands, and he desired to teach them the beauty and dignity of labor. He also acknowledged that the mass of people cannot all make their livings as doctors and lawyers and intellectuals. "No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem." So students learned not only liberal arts, but skills such as brick making and farming. "The individual who can do something that the world wants done," said Washington, "will, in the end, make his way regardless of his race."

Washington's account of his life, from his childhood in slavery (covered only briefly) through his education to his rise in prominence as an educator, shows an amazing lack of resentment (and even some degree of pity) for the white men who oppressed his race. Indeed, he considers the white man to, in a sense, have suffered from the institution of slavery also, for it destroyed his merit by taking "the spirit of self-reliance and self-help out of" him. Washington magnanimity is owed, perhaps, to his mentor, from whom he learned "that great men cultivate love, and that only little men cherish a spirit of hatred." This is not to say he never criticizes the white man, but he explains, "I early learned that it is a hard matter to convert an individual by

abusing him, and that this is more often accomplished by giving credit for all the praiseworthy actions performed than by calling attention alone to all the evil done." He says that more can be learned from coming into contact with great men and women than from books, and he would likely be appalled by the modern educational tendency to focus on the flaws rather than the virtues of historical leaders.

Washington's philosophy and manner of presenting it has occasionally earned him disapprobation. Du Bois said that in this book, Washington soft-pedaled the horrors of slavery, promoted stereotypes of blacks, and was less than honest about the racism he encountered. Perhaps Washington did not dwell on these issues because he believed "success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed." At any rate, this is Washington's story as he himself tells it, with "no attempt at embellishment," and whether or not you agree with his philosophy on life, it is hard not to find the tale inspirational and uplifting.

Washington has often been accused of "pandering" to a white audiences, and I think this may be because of the inability of ordinary people to comprehend the greatness of character that is able to let go so utterly of resentment and bitterness and to understand that we are all in the same boat, and that what I do to keep you down is likely to injure me as well.

The book was not always a gripping read; there is a lot of mundane detail; it isn't a literary masterpiece, and the autobiographer often repeats himself, but Washington is such an admirable figure to me and has so many great moral insights into life, that I often found myself wanting to underline the text. I agree with Washington that we learn most by studying great men and women, and I wish when I was in school we had studied more in-depth the lives of more people like Booker T. Washington. But greatness was not something we were much encouraged to meditate on in our "multicultural" education: prejudice, inequities, class consciousness, war, oppression, human weakness, and, alone on the positive side, occasional minority accomplishments, but not GREATNESS of CHARACTER. It's a shame, because the characters of great men and women do inspire.

Sheryl Tribble says

It amazes me how many people *still* blow off Booker T. Washington as an "Uncle Tom." There is no doubt in my mind that when Washington said, "I pity from the bottom of my heart any individual who is so unfortunate as to get into the habit of holding race prejudice," he knew full well that the primary goal of a racist is to feel superior to someone, and that therefore his pity would offend them more than anything else he could offer or say.

Or how about this one -- "In my contact with people I find that, as a rule, it is only the little narrow people who live for themselves, who never read good books, who do not travel, who never open up their souls in a way to permit them to come into contact with other souls -- with that great outside world. No man whose vision is bounded by color can come into contact with what is highest and best in the world." Time and again, in this book historians generally consider aimed at a white audience, Washington makes the point that people who judge others on the basis of race are sad, pathetic losers that he feels sorry for. This worked because many of his most powerful supporters agreed with him -- but it also worked because Washington was so clearly none of those things. Washington was well read, widely traveled, and had devoted his life to a form of service. He had a great vision for his people, and by the time this book hit print he had been making

enormous strides toward the success of this vision for twenty years.

So when Washington said he "pitied" racists, it was clearly not an empty statement or a childish insult. Washington knew his Bible very, very well. I believe he was also speaking the truth when he said, "I would permit no man, no matter what his colour might be, to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him." He knew God cared enough about a "man from Ethiopia" that he sent Philip to explain the Bible to him. He knew that, in Christ, there is "neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free." He didn't doubt that racism was wrong, and he didn't doubt his personal value. While he didn't necessarily expect to see it in his lifetime, he believed that African Americans would one day be recognized as equal, not only before the law, but socially.

But he also knew he was a "sheep in the midst of wolves," and that he needed to be "wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove." While I didn't know it the first time I read this book as a child, having read the book I was not at all surprised to hear that Washington had a "secret life" of supporting and encouraging legal equality for black people; that this is what he believed in was clear to me from the first, and also that he was enough of a politician not to publicly fight a battle that might cost him his war.

Back in the day, Washington was often called Moses or Joshua, but he recognized that God did not call His People to conquer by force anymore, and hadn't since long before the time of Christ. Rather, Washington recommended -- and followed -- the bottom-up policies of the early Christians. While he didn't turn down opportunities for legal protection, his primary goal was to convince everyday, ordinary people that blacks were the equal of whites, and he intended doing so by educating blacks to prove their worth.

While he is often identified with the Social Gospel movement, Washington believed individual transformation -- raising up educated Christians who believe in, and are capable of, hard work in the service of God -- was a better route than social transformation. William Dean Howells asked, "What if [the amiability of Washington's words] should veil a sense of our absurdities, and there should be in our polite inferiors the potential for something like contempt for us?" Howells concludes that Washington does not have contempt for whites, and I agree with him, however I suspect Washington really had no time for the idea that he was Howells' inferior, or that blacks were inferior to whites. Washington knew, if Howells didn't, that some "help" is just another way for racists to feel superior to those they're supposedly helping.

Unlike many who identified with the Social Gospel movement, Washington honestly believed that black people, given similar opportunities, could be the equal of whites. He admired and respected "the common man," and with Martin Luther respected any man who worked hard at whatever work he had been given. He believed in empowering the powerless by actually enabling them to take charge of their own lives. He recognized that help from the powerful was necessary, but also that charity could destroy independence must be the goal.

Washington knew that men are selfish and sinful, but also that capitalism works to minimize the damage that does: "... there is something in human nature which always makes an individual recognize and reward merit, no matter under what colour of skin merit is found... it is the visible, the tangible, that goes a long way in softening prejudices. The actual sight of a first-class house that a Negro has built is ten times more potent than pages of discussion about a house that he ought to build, or perhaps could build.... The individual who can do something that the world wants done will, in the end, make his way regardless of his race."

This, I think, is why he is so often dismissed as an Uncle Tom. He not only believed in people's ability to rise above race and to accomplish things within a racist society -- he *demonstrated* that ability, accomplishing enormous things within a society generally hostile to his goals. While he recognizes his own and his people's lack of resources, he also expects them to make the best use of the resources they have. That combination

invariably gets the Uncle Tom label from those who don't believe black people are the equal of white.

As a kid, I thought people called some blacks "Uncle Toms" because they'd never read Stowe's original novel. Now, I think many people who use that insult recognize that Uncle Tom was the book's hero -- but they either reject Christianity or hate the idea that blacks should aspire to such a high standard.

Lisa says

This book made me feel like a bit of an asshole. I'm a frequent whiner, my favourite topics usually being how other people are annoying and not getting enough reading time. Booker T. Washington, despite having much more justified complaints than mine, was most definitely not a whiner.

Born into slavery - exactly when he doesn't know - following its abolition, and despite a lack of any money and sometimes even a roof over his head, Washington would not only pursue the education he fiercely wanted but would go on to become an educator himself, as well as something of a celebrity.

Starting with a handful of ramshackle buildings and a small pool of students, Washington built what would become the Tuskegee Institute with his bare hands (literally, alongside those of his students as part of his philosophy that each student should learn a practical trade alongside their other studies) and, in part due to these Herculean efforts, he would also go on to become a much sought after public speaker. On the strength of the addresses reproduced here, it's easy to see why.

An incredibly driven man who apparently didn't take a vacation in 18 years of running the Institute, both this book and his addresses also displayed an astonishing lack of bitterness or resentment towards the people and society that had kept his race in bondage for so long. Where I'd have been ranting non-stop about how hateful everybody was, Washington spoke of hope, and reconciliation instead of repercussions.

A fantastic example of grace and strength, Booker T Washington has ensured that, at least for the next week, I won't whine just because the lady in the canteen made me wait five minutes before giving me my sandwich. I may even be inspired to make my own sandwiches.

David says

This second ghost-written autobiography of Booker T. Washington presents the carefully crafted public persona that he wanted. Beneath the mask of a humble, saintly, acetic and patient Negro is a power-hungry, self-aggrandizing man. Washington played his cards close to the vest and was sure that he never offended white people from the North or the South. He curried favor with captains of industry such as Andrew Carnegie and Roger Baldwin who eventually set him up for life. Nevertheless, Washington created an enduring black institution that still exists--Tuskegee University; he also created an ideology of self-help that was adopted by both Marcus Garvey and Elijah Muhammad.

When Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote the poem, "We Wear the Mask", he must have had Washington in mind because to this day no one knows who the real Booker T. Washington was: clever manipulator, servile Uncle Tom, or "Wizard of Tuskegee." Even Ralph Ellison alludes to Washington and Tuskegee in his magnum opus, "Invisible Man." Love him or loathe him, Booker T. Washington was one of the most important

African Americans of the 20th Century. And his autobiography is must reading. One should read DuBois's "The Souls of Black Folk" for contrast.

Laurel Hicks says

One of America's finest.

Christy says

On the one hand, this is a really interesting look at the culture of the South during and just after the period of Reconstruction; on the other hand, however, Washington's view of that culture is certainly affected by his wholehearted endorsement of the American Dream, the Horatio Alger myth, and capitalism. While it's important to acknowledge the value of hard work and perseverance and while Washington himself did a great deal of good for African Americans, working for years to develop the Tuskegee Institute and working behind the scenes to help individual African Americans, his attitude that anyone who works hard can succeed and his refusal to truly acknowledge the really very serious racial problems the U.S. still faced (lynching, Jim Crow laws, etc.) makes his argument about hard work and cleanliness (yes, cleanliness--he goes on and on about the importance of brushing one's teeth, bathing regularly, learning table manners, and becoming accustomed to sleeping between the sheets) difficult to accept.

Sierra Abrams says

?Booker T. Washington: once a slave, beat down and told he could do nothing, accomplish nothing; now an example to all men, white and colored, raised above others. Why? Hard work and a desire to do good in this world. He accomplished more than a lot, from getting into a school by sweeping and cleaning a room, to teaching at a night school, to starting Tuskegee, to speaking at huge events at which no black man had ever spoken. He met great men, did great things, built a great community, and loved greatly.

He wrote this autobiography about his truly great life. He wrote it simply, giving facts in a very interesting way (one thing that he felt was important while giving speeches). I had a hard time staying interested because I was very busy while reading it and felt like I had to rush to get it done. However, I liked it enough to know that I'll read it again in a less-busy time and really immerse myself in it. There's so much to learn, so much to discover in a life like Washington's. While reading it I couldn't help but be thankful for everything in my life. I was born with many luxuries given to me. Booker T. Washington started out with the clothes on his back and a dirt floor to sleep on. Education was a piece of paradise to him; food was a luxury beyond all comparison. I have always had both of those, in abundance.

One word to describe this book would be thankful. Not the word I would normally use to describe a book, but really, it is. Booker T. Washington's thanks resonates throughout the whole story. Even when he was hungry and on the streets – I could almost taste his thanks whenever he'd receive a meal or a warm place to stay.

Wonderful. Recommended to all who love a good autobiography, and even to those who don't.

Mykie says

Booker T. Washington's auto-biography pretty much disgusted me. I use such a strong word here because I was disturbed so many times throughout the read. I just can't bring myself to feel anything other than pure disgust as a result of reading what he referred to as his 'auto-biography'. This was less of an auto-biography and more of a documentation that served two purposes:

- 1.) To describe how he created the Tuskegee Institute
- 2.) To thank all of the white folks who assisted in the above- referenced effort

I went back and forth on what to say in this review because I do not want it to be mistaken that I do not appreciate Mr. Washington or his efforts. I still admire the monumental things he did for his people in response to his passion for education. I clearly recognize the efforts of, and hold sincere appreciation for, Booker T. Washington as a pioneer in my history as well as American history as a whole.

But the book rubbed me in all the wrong ways. Here we have a man who was born into the institution of slavery. Here we have a man who was born nameless, was denied an education for most of his life and who was discriminated against tremendously because he was black.

And then he comes up with this auto-biography where he pretty much sweeps the impacts of slavery and the aftermaths of slavery under the rug as if it wasn't that bad. He comes up with a whole book praising certain white individuals for teaching him basic things like how to be clean, how to sweep a floor and how to survive. GIVE ME A BREAK! You cannot convince me that you were born into slavery on a plantation with your birth mother, who was also a slave, and hundreds of other slaves, but you weren't exposed to or didn't learn to appreciate hard work, cleanliness and survival until you were free and ran into a white person who just so happened to let their guard down and let you in. That really disturbs me to my core. At no point in this book does he give credit to his mother for hard work and survival. He never highlights anything done or said by fellow slaves that encouraged him. He jumps straight into praise of white folks at the beginning all the way to the end of this book. Which leads to my suspicions that the intention of, and motivation for, this book had very little, if anything , to do with highlighting his life story. I am solid in my belief that the motivation for this book was to either secure more funding for the University or to gain additional recognition for his contributions to it. Almost like a literary pat on his own back. Either way, it's disturbing.

Additionally, Mr. Washington continually made mockeries of his fellow black brothers and sisters and former slaves. Almost like he looked down on them and thought he was better than them. This was equally disturbing.

Those are my two cents.

But I do want to mention, again, that my comments are in reference to the book and do not mirror how I feel about Mr. Washington or his efforts and accolades. I do find it admirable that he did so much with this life after slavery. I do appreciate the role he played in bringing education to the South for former slaves. I admire his dedication to his cause. But I strongly disliked most of his book.

Shanae says

I think *Up From Slavery* is one of the most amazing autobiographies ever written. Booker T. Washington's autobiography was essential to creating the New Negro, the Black American who emerged today. I think *Up From Slavery* is a humorous and motivational work of strength, determination and perseverance.

Scott Rhee says

While I admired Booker T. Washington's ability to see the world so optimistically in his autobiography "Up from Slavery", it would be a lie to say that I was so greatly impressed by Washington's story that I would recommend its placement on school reading lists. Considering the plethora of fascinating slave narratives out there, being reprinted and regaining popularity thanks to award-winning films like "Django Unchained" and "12 Years a Slave", Washington's memoir about his financial and political struggles during the foundation of his famous Tuskegee Institute seems almost tepid in comparison.

My technical criticism with the book is that it is rather dry and slow-paced and lacking in in-depth introspection. Washington spends only the first few chapters talking about his childhood spent as a slave in Virginia, his adolescence during and after the Civil War, and the Reconstruction years in which he attended Hampton University, which was then called the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. I found these chapters to be enlightening and up-lifting, although I would have liked to have seen more.

The remainder of the book, unfortunately, reads more like a business manual than an autobiography, with Washington writing about the finer points of fund-raising and political deal-making. He is also a chronic name-dropper, quick to point out and praise the many (white) donors and patrons who helped to fund his Tuskegee Institute. Certain parts of the book seem devoted solely to listing names of donors. Other parts of the book are, inexplicably, devoted to self-aggrandizing excerpts from various newspaper and magazine articles. It strikes me as being strangely narcissistic, a strong disconnect from Washington's public persona of a soft-spoken, humble man.

He also seems to have more interest and pleasure in talking about money and the minutiae of starting a college than he does in anything personal. Indeed, his entire marriage to his first wife, Fannie Smith, is given only two paragraphs in the book. Granted, it was a short marriage---they were wedded in 1882, and she passed away in 1884---and their union produced a daughter, Portia. This is literally the extent of the information he relates about his first marriage. After having read "Up From Slavery", I still don't have a strong impression of the man's emotional and spiritual side. His narrative has an acute dearth of personality.

Don't get me wrong: Washington's story is an inspirational one. It is hard not to be inspired by the story of a young black man born a slave in 1856 and becoming the most vocal and prominent member of the black community until his death in 1915.

And yet, controversy regarding some aspects of his philosophy on racial relations in the U.S. had a divisive effect within the black community, one that is still felt today.

There is no question that Washington was one of the most influential and important black men of his time. "Up From Slavery" was a nationwide bestseller, in both the North and the South. Blacks and whites alike found inspiration and hope for more positive race relations in the future in his words. It's easy to see why.

Washington seems to subscribe to the philosophy of letting bygones be bygones, especially in regards to the treatment of black people by whites under slavery. He believed in a philosophy of appeasement when it came to whites, a philosophy not shared by a contingent of the black community.

In his most famous speech---and, arguably, one of the most important speeches in American history, according to some historians---during the Atlanta Exposition of 1895, Washington set the stage for the Atlanta Compromise, an agreement later negotiated between black and white community leaders in the South that would give blacks basic education and due process rights under the law as long as blacks agreed to work quietly, accept segregation, and not push for social equality.

Washington, in the speech, said, “The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and the progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house. (p.223)”

While many black people at the time couldn’t fault the logic of Washington’s words, many critics felt that his speech was a win-win for white supremacists and led to the cruelty of Jim Crow laws.

In essence, critics argued, Washington was telling black people to work hard, start at the bottom, don’t get too uppity, and one day white people may treat you with some semblance of respect. This meritocratic mindset---work hard and you will achieve success---wasn’t realistic for black people, critics argued, especially when the system was rigged: White people had the advantages, and they weren’t going to give them up willingly.

Clearly, Washington’s views were antithetical to the subsequent militant views propounded by Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X. Washington probably would not have even agreed with affirmative action, as it went against his view that black people must help themselves and not rely on any special accommodations from white people.

Yet, I can’t help but think that Washington was wiser than many critics allow. Certainly, some of his views may have been flawed and/or did not factor in the possibility that many powerful whites wanted to see black people fail for no reason other than the fact that they were racist white supremacists. Regardless, Washington’s approach may have been the best approach *for the time*.

Tensions ran high so soon after the Civil War. Blacks and whites alike were confused and frightened. Washington’s focus on education and self-help for the black community was definitely a useful approach. Washington knew, too (possibly from personal experience), that taking an antagonistic approach to the white-dominated society at the time was akin to David facing a Goliath while blind-folded and possessing no weapons. Better to ingratiate one’s self with Goliath while secretly building up an arsenal.

Despite its flaws, “Up From Slavery” is still an important book. I still wouldn’t campaign for its placement on school reading lists, especially next to more lively and entertaining reads such as Frederick Douglas’s autobiography, but it’s definitely worthy supplementary reading for students of black history and literature.

Alieda says

Booker T Washington was a very admirable figure, but his book is pretty dull. Besides, his silences about major issues, such as racial segregation, forced disenfranchisement, violence against black people (lynchings), and violent racial uprisings in the south at this time, are, I think, loud silences which beg the question of who his audience is intended to be. Rather than as an honest autobiography, I read this book as an overt plea to the upper class whites, for funding for his school. It was more of a "this is what I've been through, this is what I've achieved, this is why you should donate money to this cause." Hardly any personal information (i.e., thoughts, feelings, fears, friendships, etc.), almost no anger... The narrative was altogether very stiff and forced.

Evelyn says

Booker T. Washington is officially added to my list of favorite people. His positive and nonjudgmental attitude is exemplary in so many ways. His way of stepping back, seeing a situation for what it really is, unprejudiced by pride or excessive passion, is truly amazing. His insights are so valuable that I think this book should be required reading for everyone.

Washington was born a slave, and was about 8 years old when Emancipation came. Life was little better afterwards, though, for a while. He still had to work hard all day, and his living conditions were similar to what they had before. With freedom comes responsibility as well as opportunity. His tireless efforts to get an education are just amazing, along with the people who helped him along the way. He never expected to receive something for nothing, but he worked hard to make sure he merited the very best of opportunities. One of my favorite stories is his college entrance exam. He had traveled to the Hampton Institute (some 500 miles away from his home) on foot mostly, sleeping in the street and eating next to nothing. He showed up looking like a "loafer or tramp", and was not immediately admitted. Washington was determined to "impress [Miss Mary F. Mackie, the head teacher] in all the ways [he] could with [his] worthiness." Finally, Miss Mackie asked him to sweep a recitation room, and Washington knew instantly that here was his chance to prove his merit, his work ethic, and his eagerness to be admitted to the school.

"I swept the recitation-room three times. Then I got a dusting-cloth and I dusted it four times. All the woodwork around the walls, every bench, table, and desk, I went over four times with my dusting cloth. Besides, every piece of furniture had been moved and every closet and corner in the room had been thoroughly cleaned. I had the feeling that in a large measure my future depended upon the impression I made upon the teacher in the cleaning of that room."

His cleaning job so impressed Miss Mackie that he was admitted to the college, and offered a job as the school janitor which he was very happy to accept so that he might earn a little money to help with expenses. Washington says that Miss Mackie "proved to be one of my strongest and most helpful friends".

After college, he taught school in his hometown, he taught at the Hampton Institute, and finally he was asked to start a college in Alabama, which he calls his "life's work". He also became the most famous orator for race relations in the United States at the time. What he accomplished was simply amazing, and his work ethic is inspiring. One certainly feels that a man (or woman) can accomplish great things if they are willing to work hard and put up with the dirt and hardships that come with the job. I'll end with a quote:

"I believe that any man's life will be filled with constant, unexpected encouragements...if he makes up his mind to do his level best each day of his life-- that is, tries to make each day reach as nearly as possible the high-water mark of pure, unselfish, useful living. I pity the man, black or white, who has never experienced the joy and satisfaction that come to one by reason of an effort to assist in making some one else more useful and more happy."

Vicky Kaseorg says

One of the most inspiring books I have read in a long time. Refusing to accept his struggles and poverty and humble beginning as a slave to prevent him from leading a worthy life, this incredible man excels in all he does. If I were feeling sorry for myself and in a pity party, this book would snap me out of it with a resounding smack. Love the message that hard work, perseverance, Godliness, righteousness, and kindness can really change the world.

Chrissie says

I enjoyed the first half quite a bit, the latter half much less. I am rating the book, not the man, and my rating only expresses how I personally reacted to the book! I am of the 21st century.

This is an autobiography and it is published long ago - in 1900! Booker T. Washington lived from 1856-1915. He was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia. The exact year of his birth is not known. Some say 1856; he guesses maybe 1858 or 1859. Neither can we identify his father; the guess is he was white. During the Reconstruction Booker was still a youth. He worked at a corn mill and later in a coal mine, got himself educated at Hampton Institute, became a teacher, an author, an orator particularly famed for his 1895 Atlanta Exposition speech and even met with President McKinley. He founded the Tuskegee Institute, a black college in Alabama. He received a Master of Arts Honorary Degree from Harvard in 1896. Clearly this is a man worth acclaim and a man of which it is interesting to learn a bit about.

It was the description of his life as a slave and the first years following the Declaration of Emancipation that captivated me. The small details, like not knowing where to sleep when given two sheets, like picking a surname, like never sitting down to a meal or how it feels to wear a flax shirt. Getting an education at Hampton Institute was quite an ordeal, but he was determined. I was rooting for him.

Much of this book is devoted to Booker's philosophizing. I admire the man and his moral fortitude. I admire the importance he lays on self-reliance. I agree with his belief in the dignity of physical labor. I agree that education must be accomplished through use of one's hands, head and heart. I agree that those who are happiest do the most for others. I agree that more can be achieved through praise than through criticism. I do think he had a knack for saying things elegantly.

However, as Booker works toward establishing the Tuskegee Institute he has to convince others to donate, to contribute funds. He did in fact get money from Andrew Carnegie. He had the strong belief that given the facts, benefactors would contribute to the cause. The book begins to sound like a promotional sales pitch, and he repeats the same moral dicta over and over and over again. I do agree with much of what he says, but it became a preachy, repetitive rant and so exaggeratedly optimistic. (He states the KKK had disappeared!) Maybe in 1900 people could still be optimistic? I don't know. Anyhow, at book's end I was totally fed up!

Was the latter half of the book written for the purpose of impressing others of his accomplishments and so more donations?!

The audiobook is narrated by Noah Waterman. The recording sound sometimes echoes and changes volume, but I could understand the spoken words. Neither bad, nor spectacular.

Tryn says

No matter how modestly this man tries to tell his story, the facts of his life shine with the luster of greatness. Booker T. Washington spent his early childhood as a slave on a plantation in the south. After the Emancipation Proclamation was read from the porch steps of the “Big House,” Booker’s ambitions to gain an education and make something of himself propelled him through every obstacle to his goal. Booker T. Washington was a tireless promoter of education for his race and of Tuskegee, the school for blacks which he founded in Alabama. He spent his entire adult life in these two causes and made great strides in elevating the sights and prospects of his people.

I had never really considered what it must have taken to raise the mindset of an enslaved people once they had freedom. While the human soul craves liberty, it does not automatically know how to use that liberty to the highest ends. Booker T. Washington’s approach to education of ex-slaves was comprehensive. He wanted to teach them everything about how to live civilized, useful lives of service and industry. Along with book learning, he taught them use a toothbrush, to sleep between the sheets of a bed, to bathe daily, to keep their clothing clean and mended, to love labor and avoid indolence, to learn marketable life-skills such as carpentry and brick-making, to acquire property, to vote sensibly, to worship and pray to God, and to live moral lives.

I found my admiration for Booker T. Washington growing with the turn of every page. He was practical, thrifty, energetic, articulate, earnest, hard-working, selfless, diplomatic, always hopeful and optimistic. He was also a sought-after public speaker with an ability to sway many to his cause and bring an audience into complete accord with him. I wish I could have heard him speak in person, but I’m grateful that I had a chance to hear his voice through this well-told story of his own inspiring life.
