

Booker T. Washington

For Booker Taliaferro Washington, born April 5th 1856, life didn't start out so well. Booker T. Washington was born on a tobacco farm in Franklin County, Virginia, to a world of slavery and segregation. By the time he died on November 14th 1915 Booker T. Washington had educated the American people, been an orator, an author and most notably a fierce leader of the nation's African-American community from the 1890's onwards. Booker T. Washington was born with nothing but the will to make the world a better place, which he accomplished and is remembered for.

Educating a slave was considered a crime at this time. Booker did go to school, not to learn as he would have liked, but to carry the books for one of James Burroughs's daughters. In Booker T Washington's book *Up from Slavery* he says "I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study would be about the same as getting into paradise."

In 1865, after the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery, Booker's family moved to Malden, West Virginia to be with Booker's stepfather. After being refused the right to learn and study as a slave, Booker had a great desire to learn, and attended school in Malden. Booker worked in a salt mine, starting each day before dawn so he could earn money and have time to go to school.



He was so desperate to learn that at the age of 16, Booker walked 500 miles back to Virginia to enroll in a new school for black students. At first, he didn't make a very good first impression on the head teacher with his ragged clothes and country ways. It was only after he cleaned a room to her satisfaction that he was allowed to stay at the school. Booker went on to teach at Hampton, he then became the principal and leading force behind the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, which he founded in 1881.

Booker T Washington never forgot his roots and remained loyal to his philosophy of hard work. From his book *Up from Slavery*, Booker says 'There was no period of my life that was devoted to play. From the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labor.'

In 1881 Booker became recognized as the nation's foremost black educator and one of the most influential men of his generation. Booker T. Washington knew that the end of slavery legally didn't mean the end of the fight for his people. Booker knew freedom only began the hard journey African Americans had ahead for them in becoming equal citizens.

In the last season of his life, Booker T. Washington openly attacked the social disease of racism. In 1915, Booker, along with others, protested against the stereotypical portrayal of blacks in the film *Birth of a Nation*.

At the premature age of 59, Booker T Washington died, but in a few decades Booker had broken through the obstacles of a corrupt society and helped African Americans break free from the economic slavery and injustice that lingered long after the laws had been changed.