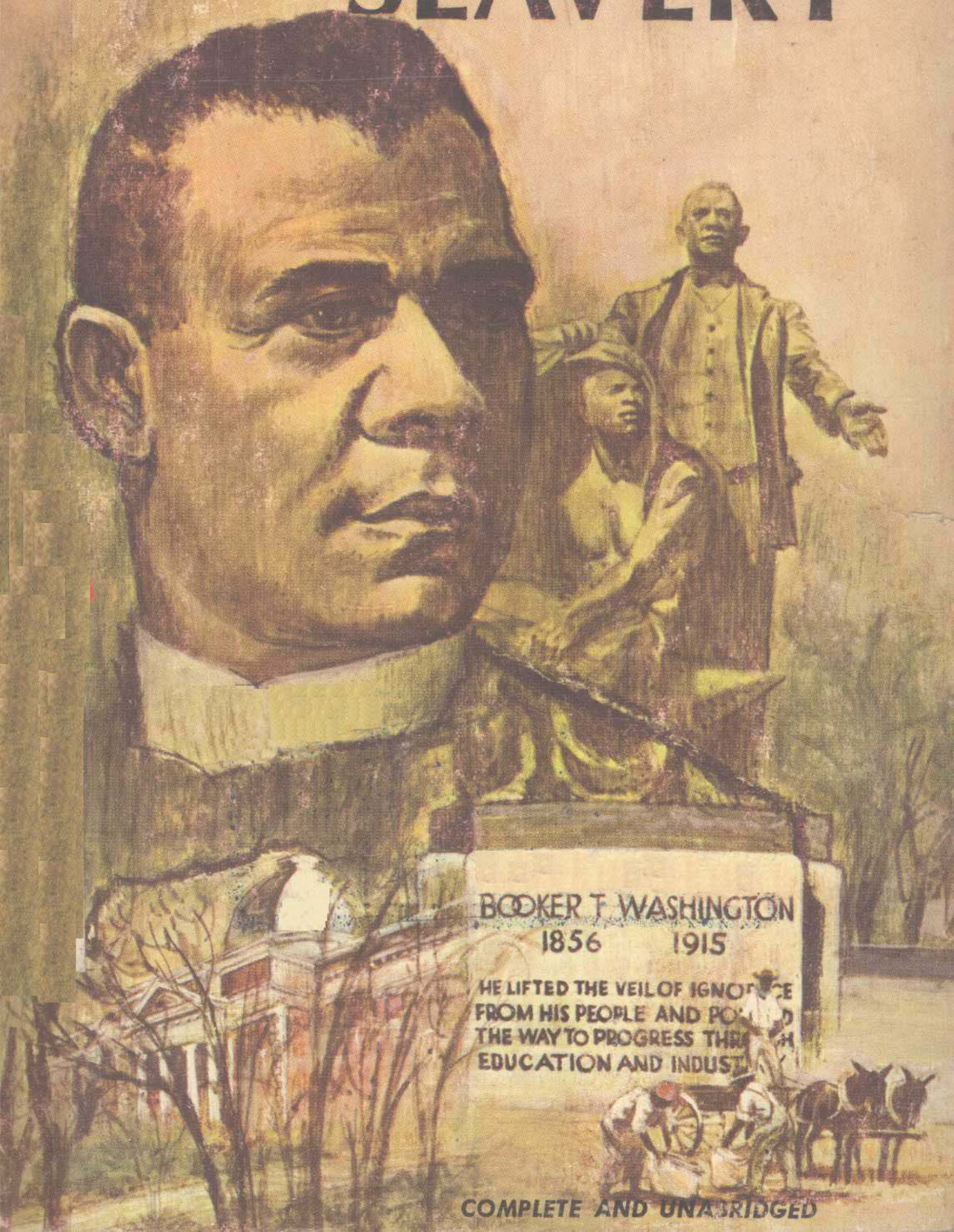


BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Introduction by
Dr. Clarence A. Andrews

UP FROM SLAVERY



BOOKER T. WASHINGTON
1856 1915

HE LIFTED THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE
FROM HIS PEOPLE AND POINTED
THE WAY TO PROGRESS THROUGH
EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

UP FROM SLAVERY

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON



AIRMONT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
22 EAST 60TH STREET • NEW YORK 10022

An Airmont Classic
specially selected for the Airmont Library
from the immortal literature of the world

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Preface

This volume is the outgrowth of a series of articles, dealing with incidents in my life, which were published consecutively in the *Outlook*. While they were appearing in that magazine I was constantly surprised at the number of requests which came to me from all parts of the country, asking that the articles be permanently preserved in book form. I am most grateful to the *Outlook* for permission to gratify these requests.

I have tried to tell a simple, straightforward story, with no attempt at embellishment. My regret is that what I have attempted to do has been done so imperfectly. The greater part of my time and strength is required for the executive work connected with the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, and in securing the money necessary for the support of the institution. Much of what I have said has been written on board trains, or at hotels or railroad stations while I have been waiting for trains, or during the moments that I could spare from my work while at Tuskegee. Without the painstaking and generous assistance of Mr. Max Bennett Thrasher I could not have succeeded in any satisfactory degree.

This volume is dedicated to my wife,
MARGARET JAMES WASHINGTON,
and to my brother,
JOHN H. WASHINGTON,
whose patience, fidelity, and hard work
have gone far to make the work
at Tuskegee successful.

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UP FROM SLAVERY

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Introduction

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the eyes of that portion of mankind which constituted the lower classes of Europe and Asia looked to the developing new nations in North America and saw freedom and opportunity there. All around feudalism was beginning to suffer its final death throes, but its oppression, its grinding poverty, its political restrictions bore down on men more than ever. So one by one, family by family, the oppressed and poor of Europe (and some from Asia) uprooted themselves and made their painful way to the New World.

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Thus sang the poet of the New World, and her words shone brightly from the colossal figure in New York harbor which looked toward Europe and became the symbol for the hopes and aspirations of the twenty-five million people who emigrated to the United States from 1800 to 1910.

In their new home they often found themselves in ghettos not unlike those of the old world, and for many poverty remained a fact of life. Yet there were differences; a man could vote; there were all those vast lands to the west, and there a man could become his own master; nuggets of gold littered the watercourses of Colorado and California. Moreover, there was opportunity; Abraham Lincoln, the son of poor, ignorant parents, had educated himself and become the President of the United States; Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller had begun as poor boys and had become two of the world's richest men.

For those to whom such worldly success seemed momentarily denied, there was still the opportunity to share the experiences of these men vicariously through books. There were, for example, the *Personal Memoirs* of Ulysses S. Grant, a farm boy who had become President; *Successward* (1895) by Edward Bok, a poor boy who became one of America's great editors; *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. In fiction, book after book extolled the possibilities; a man named Horatio Alger wrote more than one hundred books (and sold over thirty million copies of them) about poor boys who, through luck and pluck, made it to the top—or at least part way.

Such books usually made a strong case for the middle-class virtues of thrift, hard work, prudence, honesty, and morality. And whatever the facts of the individual case, the general theme was uplift—along with feudalism had gone the feudal notion of the great chain of being; a man need no longer remain in the place where he had been born; he could raise himself, by his own bootstraps if necessary.

But Lincoln, Franklin, Bok, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Grant, and the heroes of Alger's books were white-skinned; what hope could their histories hold out to the more than two million members of that other ethnic group which (after 1865) found itself free (and often homeless) in the land of opportunity? Torn and uprooted from intricate, well-organized economy patterns, from well-developed political systems, from complex cultures, the ex-African (provided he survived the cross-oceanic journey in the hell-holds of the slave ships)

found himself no longer a human being, a person, but, instead, an animal, a chattel to be bought and sold and taxed. Released from slavery—that is to say, released from his status as a chattel, as a piece of property—he yet found himself regarded as more animal than man, as something closer to the apes than to the angels. Without status, usually without education, often even with no rôle of any kind—even if he could read, what identification could he find with the heroes of the books his white neighbors were reading?

There had, of course, been one hero whom the Negro might emulate. He was Frederick Douglass (1817-1895), who had become a free Negro, a participant in the Abolitionist movements, a counselor to Presidents, a great orator. Douglass had argued for violence on the part of the Negro against the white: "blood must flow: . . . only the Negro's strong white arm" would help the Negro earn that place in America to which he was rightfully entitled. For Negroes who could read or who could listen, there was Douglass's autobiography, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1882).

But in the year in which Douglass died, a new Negro figure arose to capture the imaginations of his fellows and to become (until he died in 1915) the chief spokesman for the race. His rise came with an address which he gave at an exposition at Atlanta, Georgia (you will find it in Chapter 14 of this book). In no time at all, he was in great demand all over the continent as a speaker, and soon editors and publishers were after him for his story.

That story—it is the book before you—first appeared in print in an influential periodical, *The Outlook*, which at that time (as it was for forty-seven years) was being edited by the great liberal editor, Lyman Abbott. The story was not the result of an easy gestation process. Washington had already completed one attempt at autobiography, *The Story of My Life and Work*, a disconnected collection of speeches, letters, and news stories, barely connected by a narrative. When pressed by Abbott for an autobiography to be serialized, he replied that he did not believe the events of his life would be of any interest to the public. Pushed by

Abbott (and by Theodore Roosevelt as well), he dictated an essay of three and a half pages and promised more the next day. The editors liked the simple, straightforward style and the promise of a true Horatio-Alger kind of story—from rags to riches, from a dirt-floored cabin to acceptance at the Court of St. James, from slavery to a position as the nominal leader of his race. They kept after Washington, and he kept responding—writing in stolen fragments of time on odds and ends of paper. He was not happy with what he was doing—and his editors were unhappy, too, and kept pointing out the gaps in chronology between chapters.

After the story had been serialized in *The Outlook*, it was published in book form and immediately became a best seller. Hundreds of thousands of copies were printed in English; soon these were followed by copies in the western European languages, in Hindustani and some dozen other tongues as well, and even in Braille. Today, in a more cynical age, the reasons for its success may not be readily apparent. But readers of that time liked its plain revelations of intimate facts, its record of a triumph of a will to overcome and a spirit of perseverance over the most severe obstacles which must have ever faced a man (one thinks of Helen Keller, for instance), its sense of immediacy—Washington was no remote figure out of the past, but a man whose career still had fifteen years to run—its spirit of unselfishness—other books had recorded the success stories of men who had worked primarily to better their own conditions; Washington's autobiography was a record of the life of a man who had succeeded by helping others—in a way, it was the story of a man who had become one with Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi.

But shortly after publication it became apparent that *Up From Slavery* was more than the record of the triumph of its author over the only true feudal system this continent has ever known; it was also the statement of the personal philosophies of the most influential Negro in the United States or, possibly, the world. And it was over those philosophies that a battle soon raged; and it rages today wherever in the United States there is concern over the relationships between Negroes and whites.

What irritated Washington's critics (among whom was W. E. B. DuBois) were these instances: his apparent willingness to fawn over middle- and upper-class whites because they were actual or possible contributors to his Tuskegee program, his "Uncle Tom" attitude toward his own race as shown, for example, by this sample of Negro dialect:

"O Lawd, de cotton am so grassy, de work am so hard, and the sun am so hot dat I b'lieve dis darky am called to preach!"

his deprecatory attitude toward many Negro ministers as shown in the above quotation, his attitudes of conciliation toward Southern whites, his refusal to demand social and political equality for all members of his race (though he enjoyed the former for himself), and his apparent anti-intellectualism as reflected in his efforts to train Negroes primarily in the mechanic skills and in his attitudes toward Negroes who pursued humanistic educations.

One aspect of the criticism of Washington may be seen in this statement by W. E. B. DuBois in 1903:

As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years [since 1895] there have occurred:

1. The disenfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.
3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

These movements are not, to be sure, direct results of Mr. Washington's teachings; but his propaganda has, without a shadow of a doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment.

Primarily, criticism of Washington stemmed from his 1895 "Atlanta Exposition address," particularly from passages such as these:

As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching by the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-

dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defence of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.

Washington reported that as soon as he had finished his address the Governor of Georgia "rushed across the platform" to shake his hand. But a newspaper reporter wrote that the Negroes in the mixed audience were in tears—the implication being that they had been "sold down the river" once more, and this time by a member of their own race who had become accepted as their spokesman.

The most severe of Washington's critics did not question his good faith, his unselfishness, his sincerity. "I believe Booker T. Washington's heart is right," one critic wrote in 1906; but he then added:

. . . in fawning, cringing and groveling before the white man he has cost his race their rights and that twenty years hence, as he looks back and sees the harm his course has done his race, he will be brokenhearted over it.

Washington has his supporters, however. In general, they point out that, given the time, the place, the conditions, Washington followed the best possible course. "How many all-white American cities today (1967) would permit a Negro to come in and organize a school for Negroes along the lines of Tuskegee?" is one question put by his supporters.

The reader of *Up From Slavery* will have to make choices, take a position. I know where I stand—my heart is with Booker T. Washington but my brain is with DuBois. Incidentally, the reader who would like to see both sides of the situation is referred to *Booker T. Washington and His Critics: The Problem of Negro Leadership* (D. C. Heath

and Company: Boston, 1962). Or he might turn to two biographies: Samuel R. Spencer, Jr.'s *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life* (Little, Brown and Company, 1955); or Basil Mathews' *Booker T. Washington* (Harvard, 1948).

What happened to the man whose life story is only partially recorded in this book? He went on to build Tuskegee into an institution which had at his death, in 1915, over one hundred well-equipped buildings, a faculty of almost two hundred teaching nearly forty trades and professions to more than fifteen hundred students, an endowment of some two million dollars. He had traveled widely in Europe, where he recorded that he saw people living in conditions far worse than any in the United States, he had received an honorary Master of Arts degree from Harvard, he had become one of the most influential Americans. His bust is now in the Hall of Fame.

If the American Dream is now a thing of the past, at least it once existed. And Booker Taliaferro Washington, born a slave, a Negro, the humblest of the humble, once made that Dream come true. And he did it by devotion to virtues which no longer are extolled so highly as they once were—the virtues of cleanliness, godliness, thrift, perseverance, hard work, and honesty.

In all fairness, it must be asked—what have his detractors offered as a substitute for these rules of behavior?

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