



# The Third Path to Greatness

*By Charles Alexander*

**No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.**

**~ Booker T. Washington**

It is said that some are born to greatness, while others have greatness thrust upon them. One of the greatest men ever to call himself an American fits neither description. It is ridiculous to assert that one born into slavery is likewise born to greatness; and it isn't as though Booker T. Washington found himself in the right place at the right time. He literally created a pathway of his own to greatness.

Booker Talafierro, who later adopted the surname "Washington", was born a slave on the James Burroughs plantation in what was then known as Hales Ford, in Franklin County, on or about the 5th of April in 1856. Like so many others, he had hopes and dreams of a life free of the shackles of servitude, but like very few others, he harnessed a belief in himself and an enduring faith in God, achieving a degree of success that was well beyond anything that he dared imagine.

Although born a slave, he was reportedly the son of a nearby white plantation owner, whose identity remains a mystery. Since his mother was black and a slave, that pedigree defined him also in those terms. His good fortune, if he had any, was that he was still a child when the civil war ended and he was granted his freedom. What followed was one of the most remarkable stories of courage, perseverance, and personal strength in the history of this country.