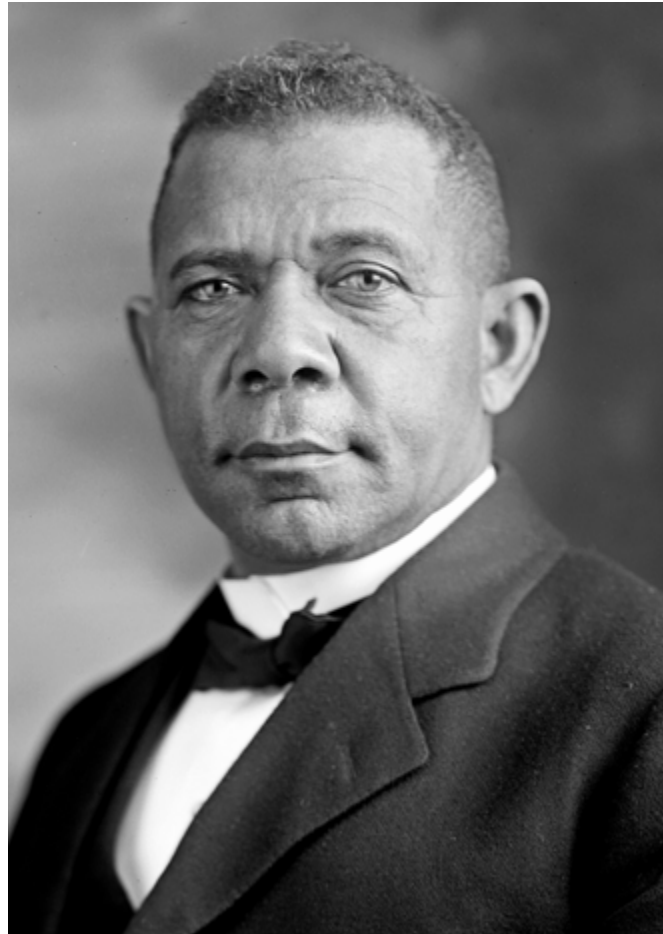


between the races. He viewed racism as a despicable, but inevitable obstacle to overcome, and he chose to conquer it by going to whatever lengths necessary to prove his worth. He was therefore criticized as being too conciliatory, and his detractors faulted him for not being more politically active or militant in the cause of civil rights.

Washington's vision was that if the members of his race were to demonstrate not only competence but true value and worth to society, eventually they would not only be tolerated, but warmly accepted by their white brethren. He likewise feared that political agitating and/or militant demands for civil rights would produce resentment and fear. He argued that by making themselves truly valuable, members of his race could give their white neighbors a basis not only for tolerating them, but for accepting them and appreciating their presence, to the extent that eventually, they would become necessary and desired members of the nation's social fabric. In Up From Slavery, He quotes himself from one of his many speeches on this topic:

In this address I said that the whole future of the Negro rested largely upon the question as to whether or not he should make himself, through his skill, intelligence, and character, of such undeniable value to the community in which he lived that the community could

not dispense with his presence. I said that any individual who learned to do something better than anybody else--learned to do a common thing in an uncommon manner--had solved his problem, regardless of the colour of his skin, and that in proportion as the Negro learned to produce what other people wanted and must have, in the same proportion would he be respected.



In his autobiography, Washington mentions that sometimes his words were received poorly, and/or misinterpreted by some people. This, he reports, was often resolved by putting his words into proper context, and in some cases, offering clarification of his meaning.

One had only to look at the man's

extraordinary accomplishments to see that there was more than a little method to his alleged madness. A visit to Tuskegee itself, and observation of the wonderful relationship that the school had with its white and black neighbors, would doubtless illustrate Washington's theories well beyond any simple words that he could muster.

Today, Booker T. Washington is remembered and honored here, at the place of his birth, with a national monument to his memory. Situated on the site of the old Burroughs Plantation, where he was born, the Booker T. Washington National Monument features a Plantation Trail, with a recreation of the log cabin where he spent his early years, a nature trail, picnic facilities, and a visitor center with exhibits chronicling his rise from slavery to educator, and ultimately, a national leader.

The park is located on Rt 122 just East of Westlake Corner, and is open seven days a week, year-round, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Closed Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1.)

Tourists and school groups are encouraged to prepare with a visit to the park's website: <http://www.nps.gov/archive/bowa/home.htm>

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