Up From Slavery

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Booker T. Washington was born into slavery in Franklin County, Virginia, on a plantation near Hale's Ford. Upon emancipation in 1865, Washington's mother moved their family to join her husband who had escaped from slavery. Washington, desiring an education, worked his way to enrollment at the Hampton Institute, a college for black Americans. With his formal education Washington took a position at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, and developed a curriculum for vocational and technical education for black Americans. His promotion of physical labor, vocational education, and gradual racial uplift gained attention in the United States, and he eventually became one of the foremost conservative educational philosophers in America. Washington died in 1915 at the age of 59 of heart failure.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As the title suggests, Washington's autobiography is historically marked by the rise and establishment of former black slaves in American society. Washington's autobiography begins with emancipation, or the freeing of slaves upon the Union Army's victory over the Southern Confederates in Virginia in 1865. While the end of the Civil War in Appomattox, VA on April 9, 1865 (and the Emancipation Proclamation before that) is often attributed as the official end of American slavery, Washington was most likely freed only when the Union Army passed through the plantation on which he lived. Since most Southerners were hesitant to free their slaves, emancipation was actualized once the Union Army occupied the South. As a result, some slaves were freed before the war officially ended, and some were freed after the April 9th surrender. After Emancipation, Washington's autobiography primarily details the issues of the Reconstruction Era. At the beginning of Reconstruction, a federally mandated rebuilding period enforced by President Andrew Johnson's administration, black Americans made swift strides toward assimilating into American society. Due to the federal military occupation in the South and the passing of the "Reconstruction Amendments" to the U.S. Constitution, black Americans were granted protection and were able to exercise the right to vote, the right to run for office, the right to establish public business, and the right to own property. However, these accomplishments were soon erased, as Presidents Grant and Hayes removed federal troops from the South, leaving black Americans with little protection against Southern white racists who regained power through violence, intimidation, and economic control. Lynchings, or non-legal public executions of blacks, increased in the period after Reconstruction and the infamous Jim Crow laws enforced legal segregation and political subjugation. For the most part, black Americans were stripped of all political rights and economic progress after Reconstruction, and most political leaders on the Right and Left saw it as a failure—including Washington, who believed that the political uplift of black Americans by the government was much too swift to be ultimately successful. Jim Crow laws and post-Reconstruction racial subjugation remained the status quo of race relations through the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th century in the U.S., until the Civil Rights campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s helped to end segregation and voting suppression of African-Americans.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The literary work most closely related to *Up From Slavery* is W.E.B. Du Bois' sociological commentary, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois was Washington's greatest contemporary critic, and his book provided an argument for the importance of classical education for black Americans as well as promoting the social theory of double consciousness, the idea that black Americans have to reconcile their black identities with the views of white society. Washington's autobiography was also satirized in the first portion of Ralph Ellison's seminal novel, *Invisible Man* (1952).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Up From Slavery*
- **When Written:** Late 1800s
- **Where Written:** Tuskegee, Alabama
- **When Published:** 1901
- **Literary Period:** Early African American Literature
- **Genre:** Autobiography
- **Setting:** 19th Century America, primarily in Hampton, VA and Tuskegee, AL
- **Climax:** Washington delivers his famous "Atlanta Exposition Address."
- **Antagonist:** Racism, liberal black Americans, and uneducated black Americans serve as symbolic antagonists to Washington's educational philosophy.
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Other accounts. *Up from Slavery* was not Washington's only autobiography. In 1900, a year before the publication of the autobiography, Washington published another account of his

life titled *The Story of My Life and Work* written with the help of a ghost writer. Despite positive sales, Washington disliked the general style of the writing and its editing, so he decided to publish *Up from Slavery* a year later.

Formidable opponents. Washington's speech to the Atlanta Exposition became an important factor in W. E. B. Du Bois' seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois, Washington's main political rival, offered a whole chapter titled "The Atlanta Compromise" devoted to refuting Washington's address. Du Bois' opposition to Washington's ideology of gradual racial progress eventually led him to found the NAACP in 1909.

PLOT SUMMARY

Booker T. Washington, one of America's most famous conservative educational philosophers, recounts his rise from slavery to establish the Tuskegee Institute, a vocational school for black Americans. Washington begins his autobiography by describing the squalor of his childhood as a slave in Franklin County, VA. On the plantation, Washington was subjected to hard labor every day as a young child and performed tasks like cleaning the yard, bringing water to the slaves in the field, and delivering corn to be milled. The forced labor of Washington's childhood in slavery came to an end upon Emancipation in 1965, and his mother moved the family to meet her husband (Washington's stepfather), an escaped slave, in West Virginia.

However, the difficulty of Washington's early life did not end with his Emancipation. Faced with no money, no resources, and no education, Washington was forced to work in the salt-mines at the age of 10. After long days of toil, often starting as early as 4 am, Washington would come home and teach himself how to read using an old copy of a Webster's "blueback" reader that his mother had given him. Young Washington's newly gained literacy inspired in him a thirst for education, a thirst that would drive him away from the salt mines and toward the Hampton Institute, a recently established school for black Americans. However, Washington did not have enough money to pay for tuition, so he took a job as a house servant with Mrs. Viola Ruffner, whose husband, General Ruffner, owned the salt furnace and coal mine. It was in Mrs. Ruffner's house that Washington learned the importance of general organization and cleanliness. With contributions from Mrs. Ruffner, his brother John Washington, and the black community in West Virginia, Washington set out to enroll in the Hampton Institute.

But Washington's enthusiasm was quickly tempered when he ran out of money upon his arrival to the university. With no way to pay tuition, Washington set out to impress the head teacher, Miss Mary F. Mackie, by sweeping out one of the school's lecture halls. Miss Mackie was so impressed by the thoroughness of Washington's sweeping job that she immediately granted him admission to the institute and hired him as janitor to provide him with a means to pay his tuition. Washington applied the same work ethic to his education as he did to his position as school janitor, and in the process he attracted the attention of important figures like the school's benefactor and ex-Union Army General, General Armstrong.

General Armstrong was so impressed with Washington's work ethic and dedication to education that when he was called upon to provide a leader for a new black school in Tuskegee, Alabama, Armstrong immediately called upon Washington. Although located in a crucible of racial tensions in the Deep South, Washington's development of the Tuskegee Institute as a practical vocational school for black Americans found acceptance from all citizens in the area. The institute provided black Americans with a means by which to develop wealth and find belonging in their respective communities. Simultaneously, Washington believed that the uplift of black Americans was best accomplished by labor, an ideology that confirmed many white Americans' belief that black Americans were designed to be a subservient laboring class. Although problematic, this approach to education achieved relative racial harmony in the area around Tuskegee.

However, the Institute was not without its problems. Washington faced opposition from black students coming to the school in hopes of a formal education, black parents who felt that their children were not receiving a proper classical education, black leaders who felt that Washington's conservative approach was harmful to the race, white racists who felt than any education of black Americans was a violation of American social code, and deficiencies in fundraising which kept the school with sub-par facilities and resources. Washington claims to have overcome all of these obstacles with his hard work and personal labor for the success of the school. Indeed, the school not only survived, but it thrived under his leadership, increasing in enrollment, facilities, staff, and general reputation.

Washington's career culminated with his infamous "Atlanta Exposition Address," a short speech given to the Atlanta Exposition in 1895 (with its transcription included in the book). In this address, Washington introduces his "cast down your bucket where you are" parable, in which he encourages African Americans not to strive for social uplift through migration or political action, but rather to find social acceptance through excellence in labor. The speech gained the attention of white leaders like the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and President Grover Cleveland, who publicly supported Washington and his ideals. Washington ends his narrative with a reflection on his life, particularly his times at Tuskegee, and he suggests that others can find the success that he has found if they apply themselves to a life of hard work and find dignity in labor.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Booker T. Washington – Booker Taliaferro Washington is the central figure and author of *Up From Slavery*, and the text details his progress from being born as a slave to becoming one of America's foremost educational thinkers and black conservative political figures. Washington was of mixed racial descent, as his father was a white plantation owner and his mother was a black slave. Washington was born into slavery in Virginia in 1856, but throughout his life he also lived in Malden, West Virginia and eventually Tuskegee, Alabama, where he founded his famous Tuskegee Institute. Washington's central character trait is his dedication to hard work, which in his words is the sole explanation for his success. He is guided by the belief that honesty, hard labor, and practical education can help anyone find success in America, and he believes that racial progress can only be accomplished through gradual gains in individual communities, not through political activism or federal sanctions.

Washington's Mother – Washington's mother, who remains nameless in the narrative, is credited for her devotion to her family and her support of Washington's educational aspirations during and after slavery. Washington's mother was born into slavery and moved the family to West Virginia after Emancipation. She was in relatively poor health, and she died after Washington's second year at the Hampton Institute. It is Washington's mother who acquires his first book for him, and also who sews him a **homespun cap** for school.

Washington's Stepfather – Washington's stepfather is not named in the narrative, but he is the reason that the family moves to West Virginia upon Emancipation. It is unclear how his stepfather and his mother met, but we know that they met sometime while they were enslaved. His presence in the narrative is largely marked by his discouragement of Washington's desire to get an education and his encouragement of Washington to help support the family by working in the coal mines.

General Samuel C. Armstrong – General Armstrong, a retired Union Army general turned philanthropist and educator, is Washington's mentor and personal idol. Armstrong is the founder of the Hampton Institute, one of the first black institutions for higher learning in the U.S. as well as the college attended by Washington. Washington describes Armstrong as a flawless and selfless leader who is deeply concerned with the development and uplift of black Americans.

General J. F. B. Marshall – General Marshall is another retired Union Army benefactor of the Hampton Institute, and he expresses a specific interest in Washington's education. Marshal allows Washington to continue at the institute on credit until Washington can come up with the money to pay tuition, and later in their relationship, Marshall provides a large personal donation to the Tuskegee Institute. Marshall is portrayed as being kind and generous, and a personal friend to Washington.

Mrs. Ruffner – Mrs. Viola Ruffner is wife of General Ruffner, the owner of the West Virginia salt-furnace and coal mine that employed many newly freed black Americans. Washington was employed by the Ruffners as a live-in servant, and he credits his time working for Mrs. Ruffner as key to his development of a strong work ethic and cleanliness. She is described as particular and severe, yet compassionate and sympathetic to Washington's desire for an education.

Miss Mackie – Ms. Mary F. Mackie is the head teacher at the Hampton Institute, and a Northern white woman from an established family who had migrated South to work for the Institute. She conducts Washington's "sweeping" examination, in which his educational fitness for the institute is judged by his ability to thoroughly sweep a room. To Washington, Miss Mackie represents the joy that labor can bring an individual, regardless of their social status.

Olivia A. Davidson – Miss Davidson, Washington's second wife, is a teacher at the Tuskegee Institute. Washington admires her for her dedication to the school, as well as her dedication to hard work in her fundraising efforts. He credits Miss Davidson for the success of the school, and he even suggests that her death was brought about by her dedication to the Institute.

Miss Margaret James Murray ("Mrs. Washington") – Miss Murray is Washington's third wife, who he married in 1893. They met at Tuskegee when she was a teacher and a lady principal. Miss Murray's personality and appearance are not specifically mentioned, but she is described as a hard worker for the Institute and a good companion to Washington. She accompanies him to some of the more major events in his narrative, including his Atlanta Exposition Address and his vacation to Europe.

W. E. B. Du Bois – Although Du Bois only appears once and he is mentioned only in passing, he figures prominently into the historical and critical reception of Washington's ideology. Du Bois and Washington were public political and philosophical rivals. Du Bois vehemently opposed Washington's proposition of gradual racial uplift and industrial education for black Americans, and he even dedicated a chapter of his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, to refuting Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address."

MINOR CHARACTERS

John Washington – John Washington is Booker T. Washington's brother. He is simply described as being generous and hard working. With the help of Washington's instruction, John was able to get an education at the Hampton

Institute and eventually serve as Superintendent of Industries at Tuskegee.

Amanda Washington – Booker's sister. She was born in slavery and moves with the family to West Virginia. She does not play a large role in the narrative, but Washington does suggest that she was not prepared to help with the upkeep of the house after the death of their mother.

James Washington – James was adopted into the Washington family after they moved to West Virginia. Not much information is given about James, but Washington helped to educate him and secure him a position as postmaster at Tuskegee.

Ms. Nathalie Lord – Miss Nathalie Lord is an instructor at Hampton who helps Washington to refine his skills in public speaking. It is under her instruction that Washington first realizes that he has the potential to become an excellent public speaker.

Mr. George W. Campbell – George Campbell is the ex-slave owner from Tuskegee who, along with Mr. Lewis Adams, wrote General Armstrong requesting a teacher to lead the black school in Tuskegee. Washington believes that Mr. Campbell, despite his former slave holdings, is a kind, honest, and hard-working man.

Mr. Lewis Adams – Mr. Adams is an ex-slave in Tuskegee who wrote to General Armstrong with Mr. Campbell requesting a teacher for the black school. Washington uses Mr. Adams as a model of the potential of vocational education by attributing Mr. Adams' mental prowess to his ability to work with his hands.

General Ruffner – General Ruffner is the owner of the salt-furnace and coal mine in West Virginia and husband of Mrs. Viola Ruffner, Washington's employer.

Fannie N. Smith – Fannie Smith is Washington's first wife, and is mentioned in connection with the birth of his first daughter, Portia M. Washington.

Portia M. Washington – Portia is Washington's oldest daughter by his first wife Fannie Smith. She does not figure strongly into the narrative, but Washington mentions that she excelled at dressmaking and music performance.

Baker Taliaferro Washington – Baker is Washington's oldest son by his second wife, Olivia Davidson. He does not figure strongly into the narrative, but Washington mentions that he excelled at brickmaking at a young age and greatly enjoyed working in the industries.

Ernest Davidson Washington – Ernest is Washington's youngest son by his second wife, Olivia Davidson. He does not figure strongly into the narrative, but Washington mentions that from a young age Ernest aspired to be a doctor and spent much of his childhood learning at the Tuskegee doctor's office.

Andrew Carnegie – Andrew Carnegie is a famous philanthropist and steel tycoon who expresses interest in and ultimately donates to the Tuskegee Institute after Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address."

President Grover Cleveland – Washington attracts the attention of President Cleveland after his "Atlanta Exposition Address." President Cleveland admires Washington's conservative stance on racial progress and uplift, and the two men develop a friendship. Washington admires Cleveland's interest in race relations and his apparent dedication to helping black Americans.

President William McKinley – Washington implored President McKinley to visit Tuskegee as a sign of good faith amidst some tense national race riots. McKinley agreed, and he and Washington strike up a friendship. Washington describes McKinley as being kind, considerate, and deeply concerned about the plight of black Americans.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE DIGNITY OF LABOR

Perhaps the most developed theme in *Up From Slavery* is that of finding dignity in labor. Washington believes that slavery has given black Americans a distorted perception of labor—that it is a degrading rather than an uplifting and honorable practice. Through his education program at Tuskegee Institute, speeches, and testaments from his own life, Washington wishes to reverse the perception of labor as dishonorable, since he believes that finding dignity in labor will help to uplift not only black Americans but also people of all races.

Specifically, Washington believes that laboring for oneself or one's community can help to grant both "independence" and "self-reliance" to black Americans. He is deeply critical of those who pursue an education to avoid or circumvent physical labor. Washington feels that engaging in hard labor is the truest form of education, and that book learning and scholastic pursuits are useless unless paired with some sort of practical purpose. By connecting labor with the ideals of self-reliance and independence, Washington is attempting to appeal both to those looking to promote racial uplift—the development or assimilation of black people into American society—and to those dedicated to the ideals of American exceptionalism and individuality. He also connects these ideals to the philosophies of American Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who argued that individuality and

independence are quintessential parts of the American social tradition. Washington is connecting with a wide audience here, claiming that both blacks and whites in the country can find the value in labor if it is connected to these American ideals.

Further, Washington suggests that labor is not just valuable for "utility" but also for "beauty and dignity." Many African-Americans were skeptical of Washington's theory of racial uplift, which advocated for black people to stay where they are and attempt to excel at labor and vocations that were thought of as undignified and reserved for the lower classes, such as carpentry, blacksmithing, farming, etc. However, he suggests that the dignity and poise that are traditionally attributed to the arts and upper class professions can be acquired through labor as well as through these "higher" pursuits. In the famous "Atlanta Exposition Address," which he includes towards the end of his narrative, Washington tells the mixed-race audience that there is "as much dignity in tilling a field as writing a poem." He claims that there ought to be as much value and beauty placed in physical labor as there is in writing a poem, practicing law, holding a government position, etc. Many black Americans saw labor as degrading, because as slaves they were inhumanly forced to labor without any pay, but Washington sees labor as a way by which to restore dignity to black people from the degrading practices of slavery.

Washington goes further than just suggesting that labor is valuable in its power to restore beauty and dignity to black Americans, and he suggests that labor is valuable to *all* people, regardless of race. Washington wishes that all men would attempt "to make each day reach as nearly as possible the high-water mark of pure, unselfish, useful living," and he pities anyone, no matter their race, "who has never experienced the joy and satisfaction…of an effort to assist in making some one else more useful and more happy." In other words, in Washington's view, the ideal American, and truly the ideal human, will find fulfillment in the practice of labor and service for others. This idea of universal joy in labor fits Washington's ethic of racial uplift, for he believes that gradual uplift may be acquired by devotedly laboring in one's place and working one's way up to a higher place in what he believes is America's "meritocracy." More broadly, Washington believes that, if all Americans labored with the same mindset that he is advocating, the entire country would experience a form of improvement and enlightenment.

For Washington, labor is not simply a sector of economic development, a form of racial uplift, or a necessary burden of life. Rather, labor is the ideal mode of personal improvement, one that endows upon the laborer political, social, and economic independence as well as joy, beauty, and self-worth. While many critics opposed Washington's ideas of labor as problematic for African Americans—because his ideas suggested that race and political equality are secondary concerns to personal development and individual freedom—Washington persisted and applied these ideals to his life, his speeches, and his educational leadership. To Washington, physical labor was the most effective means by which to not just achieve racial equality, but also to elevate humanity.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Booker T. Washington believed deeply in the importance of education in the development of young people. He suggests that African Americans were "crippled" when they were freed by the federal government but had no means by which to educate themselves. He attributes this lack of education to the failures of the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. After the war, many black people made quick strides into the political and economic spheres, but during Reconstruction they ultimately failed to advance due to racist state policies, a lack of political protection, and, according to Washington, a severe lack of capabilities. Washington dedicated his life to educating African Americans, resulting ultimately in the development and institution of one of the oldest black institutions of higher learning in the nation, the Tuskegee institute. However, Washington's ideal education does not consist of "mere book learning," as he felt that many poor blacks attempt to get an education to avoid lifelong physical labor. Rather, Washington's curriculum at the Institute consisted of equal parts book learning and vocational practices. Students spent most of their mornings and afternoons learning a trade such as blacksmithing, brickmaking, or carpentry, and their early afternoons and evenings studying. As a result, Washington hoped to produce students with "practical skills" that they could use to serve and ultimately better their communities.

Washington was against what he called "mere book learning," and he believed that this type of education does little to nothing for the betterment of the race. In his autobiography, Washington expresses a deep distaste for those who attempt to avoid labor by getting an education. He suggests that prolonged study without vocational training is ultimately useless to a race that needs to focus on lifting itself out of the depths of slavery and into mainstream American society. Many students would come to Tuskegee looking to study books in languages such as Greek, Latin, and French, and they would be horrified once they found out that they would be asked to learn a vocation in addition to their book studies. Washington criticizes such students. He believes that students are proud of their book learning for the wrong reasons, as "the bigger the book and the longer the name of the subject, the prouder they felt of their accomplishment." However, he feels that these students merit no particular distinction, because although they have mastered these languages and subjects, they have nothing with which to serve their communities and fellow man.

Vocational learning is also equally, if not more, valuable to

training in the arts and sciences, according to Washington. He believes that vocational training is not just important for attendees at Tuskegee, but that it is the best means by which to propel their development as students and citizens. In the "Atlanta Exposition Address," Washington pushes vocational training to the top priority of his educational philosophy. He states, "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." Washington believes that access and training in the arts is of less importance than the opportunity to labor and earn one's own money. While such a belief departed from the tradition of Western education, which advocated for an education primarily in the arts and sciences, it remained in line with Western white society's racial ideology promoting the idea of blacks being relegated to physical labor. As a result, the large white portion of the audience was sated by Washington's educational ideology and his suggestions. Since Washington believed racial uplift to be a gradual process, his promotion of vocational education upheld current racial hierarchies while attempting to find personal and individual improvement through merit and labor.

Since his view of vocational learning did not challenge America's racial hierarchy, Washington believed that vocational learning could help African Americans find value in the complex racial relations at the time. According to Washington, racial protests, political agitation, and pushes toward full equality were foolish because African Americans of the time were not prepared for full equality. In fact, he believed that the newly freed slaves had not been prepared for emancipation, for they had no formal education, social training, or sense of propriety. Washington suggests that many of the racial tensions in the U.S. at the turn of the century were a result of such unpreparedness. He saw vocational learning as the solution to this problem, as it would help black Americans to find economic value "where they were" without disturbing racial tensions. As a result, whites were not threatened by Washington's ideology, as it largely reinforced the notion that African Americans had the responsibility to economically contribute to and support their communities.

To Washington, vocational education was the perfect solution to the maelstrom of political problems in the U.S. at the time in which he was writing. It helped to promote the development of individual freedom; it provided an intermediate means to move from the depths of slavery to the heights of freedom; and it helped blacks to find belonging in their communities without agitating the fragile racial fears of whites. His promotion of vocational learning attracted many critics, however. Perhaps the most notable of these was W.E.B. Du Bois, who saw Washington's educational model as not only problematic, but also harmful to the entire race. Aside from its problematic implications of black Americans as a constant "laboring class" and white Americans as innocent of racism, Washington's model also seemed to promote the same "separate but equal" ideology as the racist Jim Crow laws, which legally mandated social segregation and political suppression of black Americans. Washington, on the other hand, saw vocational education as the perfect means by which to uplift his students, fellow citizens, and country out of the racial and economic squalor at the turn of the century.

MERITOCRACY

Washington wished to promote a society that measured the worth of people not by the color of their skin or their class but by their measurable contributions to society. This ideal meritocracy, or society in which merit is the defining attribute of worth, gives equal opportunity to all citizens if they apply themselves to their labor.

This theme is a key aspect of Washington's perspective on race relations; he felt that if African Americans demonstrated their dedication to excellence and hard work, they would develop quickly as a "civilized" race. Washington believed that merit through labor would erase racial tensions, because white Americans would be forced to admit the value of black Americans in their societal contributions, which would in turn dispel misconceptions of the racial inferiority of blacks held by American society. Washington also believed that ascribing to such a meritocracy could eliminate class injustice, as distinctions would be drawn around merit rather than wealth. This type of philosophy is often referred to as a "bootstraps" philosophy, because it invokes the American trope of pulling oneself up to a higher place in society by one's bootstraps. In other words, Washington believed in the idea that in American society, if someone works hard, that person has the opportunity to succeed. While there are many critics of this ideology of meritocracy—mostly because it does not necessarily account for racial disadvantages embedded in American political, economic, and social spheres—Washington nevertheless is a part of a long and robust tradition of American thinkers who support and promote the concept of a meritocracy.

Washington's meritocracy is not based on social status reached but obstacles overcome. Washington admits that as a young man, he held envy towards white boys who had few obstacles in their way of becoming Congressmen, doctors, and lawyers. He felt stifled by his racial identity, and he lamented the large obstacles in the way of the black American. However, he says that after establishing the Tuskegee Institute and becoming an American public figure, his envy for the white man has dissipated. In his perspective, the African American citizen actually has an *advantage* in American society, because in Washington's meritocracy, "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 trying to succeed."

Washington acknowledges that the black citizen has to work harder and encounter more obstacles than the white citizen, but he claims that this distinguishes the black citizen as being able to achieve a greater degree of relative success, which, to Washington, is an honor higher than position or achievement. Washington's idea of meritocracy, then, is built on progress, not result.

Washington's meritocracy also denies the presence of luck in finding success. Washington particularly denies that luck had any role in finding the robust funds that he was able to acquire in fundraising for the Tuskegee Institute. He provides this axiom in relation to his fundraising: "Nothing ever comes to one that is worth having, except as a result of hard work." In other words, Tuskegee has earned the money that it has raised through hard work, and whatever success in fundraising that the university has found is a result of its merit, not luck or any outside factors. To Washington, attributing luck to success is demeaning to the hard work and merit of individuals.

Washington does not just suggest that merit is important to social progress, but he also believes that meritocracy is a part of human nature. Washington thinks that all humans value individual merit, regardless of race or class. He even suggests that merit can eclipse racial bias. In his "Atlanta Exposition Address," Washington claims, "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." Washington goes on to say that visible and tangible evidence of hard work helps to "soften prejudices." This tenet of Washington's meritocracy is intimately linked to his views of racial progress, for he believes that African Americans will be racially elevated once they demonstrate their value to society, and that racial prejudice is simply a misconception of white America about the inferiority of the black American. Ultimately Washington feels that merit is a universal value that trumps prejudice of any kind and that will ensure equality for all Americans.

Washington believed deeply in the concept of a meritocracy, and he felt that his own life demonstrated the unlimited potential for any Americans who were willing to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Born in slavery, working in coal mines, becoming a janitor at the Hampton institute, enrolling in college, and rising to be one of the most influential minds in race relations and education in America, Washington's experience testified that hard work and personal betterment could help one overcome almost any obstacle. While many other thinkers criticized Washington for downplaying the role that racism—both overt and embedded in the structure of society—played in limiting the success of black people in America, he saw his rise from slavery to prominence as irrefutable evidence of the fairness of living by merit. His measure of worth did not privilege social position and had no room for luck or circumstance, but it raised hard work and labor as the ultimate evidence of individual merit. According to Washington, if merit is accepted as the ultimate measure of man, America can take serious progressive strides to overcome racial prejudice, class inequality, and social harmony.

GRADUAL RACIAL PROGRESS

The most controversial theme of *Up From Slavery* is Washington's repeated promotion of the idea of gradual racial progress. Washington's views on elevating African Americans from the depths of slavery suggested that swift progress that is enforced by the government could actually be harmful to African Americans, because it pushes them to become independent citizens without being prepared to act as such. He discouraged any sort of political action outside of voting and running for office, and he felt that black Americans would find much more progress through excelling in labor and vocational professions than in direct political protest or action.

Many black thinkers at the time, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, found this view distasteful, as black Americans had been used for 250 years as degraded human labor, and the proposal to continue as a laboring class seemed a regression rather than a progression. However, others found Washington's proposition attractive in its simplicity and attainability. Black leaders on the left continually spoke of the high ideals of liberty and true equality, which to some ex-slaves and newly emancipated children seemed to be abstract and unattainable ideals. Washington's gradual uplift through labor served as a practical goal that most people could envision. Likewise, white Americans widely accepted Washington's version of racial progress, because it did not challenge the widely held racist assumption that black Americans were designed by God to be a laboring class. While catering to white racism was not Washington's goal, he did believe that avoiding backlash from white power-structures until black Americans could prove their merit was another advantage of his ideas. So although Washington's views can be seen as problematic, his belief in gradual racial progress served as a kind of compromise between a white America that as a whole did not support racial uplift and a black America that wished to be recognized as sovereign and free citizens of the United States.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Washington believed that racial progress does not come from political agitation. In his early years in West Virginia, he saw many mine labor strikes ending with miners exhausting their savings in the duration of a strike and being forced to return to work penniless, no better off than before. He thought this was wasteful, because if miners were able to work over time and maintain their savings, they would perhaps be able to retire early or get an education and a less hazardous job. Washington essentially sees political protest simply as a waste of resources and time. Washington also believes that "agitations of questions of social equality" are

a waste of time and "the extremest folly." For him, progress will only be found "as the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing." Many of the primary political goals of African American leaders at the time seemed useless and artificial to him, and he believed that the only way to truly uplift the race was through self-improvement and hard work. To Washington, political agitation or protest was a sign of regression, not the sign of strides towards racial progress.

Washington instead suggests that the full exercise of political rights will be the result of "slow growth, not an overnight, gourd-vine affair." Washington is stating that racial progress will be gradual, and that patience and striving toward growth over time will be the true development of the race. To Washington, striving to gain full and immediate rights will agitate whites who hold onto racist views of the political and social role of black Americans, as well as disadvantage black Americans because they are not developed or "prepared" enough to have full and equal rights. To him, these rights need to be earned by merit through labor, not by reward from the government or American society.

To achieve true racial uplift, Washington believed black Americans should "cast down your bucket where you are." This phrase is Washington's most infamous and is often what he is remembered for, both in its delivery in the "Atlanta Exposition Address" and in his racial ideology in general. At the beginning of the address, Washington tells a parable of a ship lost at sea with its sailors dying of thirst, only to discover that the ship has found its way to the Amazon River, a source of fresh water. When the ship calls out for fresh water from another ship, the other ship replies, "Cast down your bucket where you are." In Washington's eyes, this is the true goal of race relations in the United States. He wishes for black Americans to cast down their buckets where they are as carpenters, blacksmiths, farmers, sharecroppers, etc., and excel in their professions to build merit through labor.

This ideology is opposed both to the first Great Migration—the migration of newly freed blacks to the North after the Civil War—and to the striving of black Americans to hold positions higher in society, such as lawyers, doctors, or Congressmen. He felt that both of these things crippled black Americans. The Great Migration fractured black communities in the South, and in his eyes African Americans were not prepared socially and mentally to fill high positions in society. Thus he promotes finding contentment in one's own situation, without searching to elevate political status outside of labor and work. He believes that if black Americans labor together, white Americans will universally acknowledge their work and dissolve racial prejudices that govern their political views.

While Washington's views on racial progress are optimistic and hopeful, they are often seen as problematic. His perspective mirrored much of the racist rhetoric of the time that suggested that black Americans needed to "stay in their place" as laborers, and that social equality would make them feel like they were better than whites. Many people, upon hearing Washington's "cast down your bucket" parable, were deeply troubled and felt that Washington was regressive in his racial views. But many others, both black and white, felt that Washington's views were reasonable in that they provided real and practical goals that black Americans could strive for without agitating white aggression. With the backdrop of the almost constant lynchings in the South, finding peace and racial harmony, even if it meant striving only towards labor, was an attractive concept for many Southerners. Despite pushback, Washington became one of the foremost leaders in race relations and education in the U.S. because of these cautious and conservative views, and his popularity helped to fund his school at Tuskegee and even received attention from President Grover Cleveland. So while some of his proposals are certainly problematic, Washington's promotion of gradual racial progress at least aimed to provide a solution to soothe the angry, racist sentiments of white Americans while arming black Americans with practical and attainable aims and hope.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE HOMESPUN CAP

To Washington, the homespun cap made by his mother symbolizes the importance of thriftiness and resourcefulness. As a child, Washington wanted a cap to wear to school because he was envious of the caps of the other children. Rather than buying a new cap and going into debt, his mother made one out of two pieces of scrap cloth from around the house. Washington points out that other boys who had store bought caps had no greater advantage in life because of them, and some even ended up in the penitentiary. To Washington, the store bought cap symbolizes that money and appearance do no develop good character in a person, while the homespun cap symbolizes that thrift and labor instill strong character and promise of a good future.

BRICKS

Washington had great difficulty in making bricks for the buildings at the Tuskegee Institute with no money and no experience in brick building. Washington had trouble finding a location to build the bricks, constructing a working kiln, burning bricks properly, and earning the funds to continue building kilns. However, Washington perfected brick building on his fourth try, and at the time that the autobiography was written, Tuskegee was producing some of

the best bricks in the region. Washington sees the brick as a symbol of the fruit of hard labor and perseverance. When others quit brick building after the initial failures, Washington continued to develop the trade and learn from his mistakes. For Washington, the brick is then an emblem of the fruit of hard labor and the joy that one can find in it.

HENRY O. TANNER

Washington uses the black American painter, Henry O. Tanner, as a symbol of the racial equality that can be found in a true meritocracy. Tanner's work was famous in art circles for its excellence and high quality. To Washington, Tanner's work erases any sort of racial divide because both black and white art critics could see its value. Tanner himself then symbolizes Washington's meritocracy, or the idea that all Americans, regardless of race or class, can find success if they work hard enough. Washington believed that merit is the ultimate social standard of value, not race or class as some of his contemporaries suggested, and Henry O. Tanner's art serves as a symbol of the importance of merit in Washington's America.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Up From Slavery* published in 1986.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"The whole machinery of slavery was so constructed as to cause labour, as a rule, to be looked upon as a badge of degradation, of inferiority, Hence labour was something that both races on the slave plantation sought to escape.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Given in the context of Washington's description of his childhood in slavery, this quote is Washington's analysis of the lasting problems of slavery. He sees the perceived degradation of labor to be one of the greatest evils that came out of slavery, because in his educational and personal philosophy, labor is both dignified and necessary to demonstrate one's merit. In Washington's view, this degradation of labor affected both white Americans and black slaves equally in slavery. However, slavery itself was seen as a badge of degradation for the slave, and labor was a by-product of the dehumanization that the institution projected upon black slaves. While white slave owners may have been "disadvantaged" by their lack of ability to labor themselves, they certainly benefitted from the forced work and labor of their slaves. Washington seems to be ignoring that the degradation of slavery wasn't solely connected to labor, and that white slave owners were in no way affected in the same way by this degradation as the black slaves.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"I have learned that 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.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage Washington describes the envy he felt towards some of his white peers because they were able to accomplish their goals with greater ease than he and his black peers. However, later in life this envy has disappeared, because Washington began to believe that success is not a position but an overcoming of obstacles. He even goes so far as to say that black Americans are *advantaged* in society because they have more obstacles to overcome. This is problematic, of course, because it downplays the political and economic barriers that black people faced at the end of the 19th century, and attempts to construe them as actually to black Americans' benefit. Furthermore, as is typical of Washington, this idea places no responsibility on the white people erecting and upholding those barriers.

This quote gives the reader great insight into Washington's conception of a meritocracy, because it shows that he does not simply measure merit by social position but he measures it by the relative social uplift of individuals. Such a concept of a meritocracy is probably a result of his own rise from slavery, and his narrative highlights the small steps of success and small surmounting of obstacles throughout the narrative, which in sum contribute to his overall merit, success, and sense of accomplishment.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Without asking as to whether I had any money, the man at the desk firmly refused to even consider the matter of providing me with food or lodging. This was my first experience in finding out what the colour of my skin meant. In some way I managed to keep warm by walking about, and so got through the night. My whole soul was so bent upon reaching Hampton that I did not have time to cherish any bitterness toward the hotel-keeper.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Washington gives us this passage in the midst of his journey to Hampton to get an education. This quote gives us a rare commentary from Washington on actual racial disadvantages. Throughout the narrative, Washington is quick to deny the significance of racism and racist practices in America, so a passage like this one in which he details the racial subjugation of segregation is significant. However, despite his frustration at the inn keeper's racial discrimination, Washington downplays the entire incident by claiming that his hope and determination to get an education eclipsed any sort of anger that could have resulted from the incident. Washington was very much against blaming race as an actual barrier for individual accomplishment, so his claim that he brushed off racial discrimination fits into his overall worldview.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ The education that I received at Hampton out of the text-books was but a small part of what I learned there...Before the end of the year, I think I began learning that those who are happiest are those who do the most for others. This lesson I have tried to carry with me ever since.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is a part of Washington's reflection of his first year as a student at Hampton. This passage is quite significant because it shows an early development of Washington's educational and philosophical theory of vocational education. Throughout the rest of the narrative, Washington will be deeply skeptical of "book-learning," or intellectual practices simply for the sake of learning. Washington rather values service and active vocational learning, even if that means downplaying the importance of formally intellectual activities in education. This idea of service-based learning will show up in all facets of his ideology, including education, politics, and race relations.

❝ At Hampton I not only learned that it was not a disgrace to labour, but learned to love labour, not alone for its financial value, but for labour's own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants done brings. At that institution I got my first taste what it meant to live a life of unselfishness, my first knowledge of the fact that the happiest individuals are those who do the most to make others useful and happy.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

Like the previous quote, this quote occurs in the passages reflecting upon Washington's first year at Hampton. This passage is one of the earliest connections between Washington's ideology of the dignity of labor and his educational philosophy. He believed that labor should always be a part of educational curriculum and that students who do not engage in labor are receiving a deficient education. Washington was deeply skeptical of professions that did not include manual labor, so he felt that intellectuals, teachers, ministers, and other non-laboring professions needed to demonstrate their merit through engagement with hard labor. He believed that engaging in labor was a form of "unselfishness" and that labor, not other forms of freedom and autonomy, brought true happiness and agency to those who practice it.

Chapter 5 Quotes

The central government gave them freedom, and the whole Nation had been enriched for more than two centuries by the labour of the Negro. Even as a youth, and later in manhood, I had the feeling that it was cruelly wrong of the central government…to fail to make some provision for the general education of our people in addition to what the states might do, so that the people would be the better prepared for the duties of citizenship.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in Washington's analysis of the shortcomings of the Reconstruction period, or the time after the Civil War in which the Federal government attempted and failed to repair physical and social damages in the South. This quote is significant because Washington places the blame of some of the failures of Reconstruction on the *lack* of government action rather than on government action itself. Washington saw many of the political policies of Reconstruction that attempted to grant civil freedoms to newly emancipated black Americans as contrived and artificial, so this passage is remarkable in that he is actually claiming that the government did not do enough in its educational programs to insure the uplift of black Americans. This is one of the few, if not the only, left-leaning ideological declarations of Washington in his entire narrative.

I felt that the Reconstruction policy, so far as it related to my race, was in a large measure on a false foundation, was artificial and forced. In many cases it seemed to me that the ignorance of my race was being used as a tool with which to help white men into office, and that there was an element in the North which wanted to punish the Southern white men by forcing the Negro into positions over the heads of Southern whites. I felt that the Negro would be the one to suffer for this in the end. Besides, the general political agitation drew the attention of our people away from the more fundamental matters of perfecting themselves in the industries at their doors and in securing property.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84-85

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, occurring in the same passage of Reconstruction analysis as the previous, is more in tune with Washington's general political and ideological leanings. Washington considered political agitation useless and dangerous, and he thought that it would only lead to worse tensions between the races. Throughout the narrative, he also consistently and repetitively defends white Southerners against the perceived prejudices of the North. A major construction throughout his work is to show that white Southerners are not as racist or violent as the North thinks. While this is certainly true for some Southerners, it is impossible to deny the historical record of overt and violent racism in the South at the time. Washington ignores such records of racism, and he rather believes that hard work and labor will overcome deeply encoded societal racial tensions.

Chapter 6 Quotes

My experience has been that the time to test a true gentleman is to observe him when he is in contact with individuals of a race that is less fortunate than his own. This is illustrated in no better way than by observing the conduct of the old-school type of Southern gentleman when he is in contact with his former slaves or their descendants.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in Washington's description of the introduction of American Indian students at the Hampton Institute. He is defending the character of white Southerners, and he says that their merit is measured by their treatment of those "lesser" than them. His primary example of such a Southern gentleman is George Washington, who was also a slave owner. In such an analysis, Washington is ignoring the inherent racism that is naturally a part of the practice of owning slaves, which all of these former slave owners would have experienced to a degree. Note that Washington does not mention the merit or character of those who were subjected to the subjugation of slavery, but rather the merit and character of those upholding the practice. Such a construction of merit in his ideology—a construction that generally only applies to

white Southerners or wealthy white Northerners—will appear again and again throughout the narrative.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ I am glad to add, however, that at the present time, the disposition to vote against the white man merely because he is white is largely disappearing, and the race is learning to vote from principle, for what the voter considers to be for the best interests of both races.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is a part of Washington's initial description of the people of Tuskegee when he arrived in Alabama. According to Washington, many black people at the time would vote a straight ticket for black candidates, or, if no black candidates were on the ballot, they would vote the opposite of conservative white Southerners. Washington believed that voting was an action that should only be executed upon purely political principles and that race was not a factor in determining whom one should vote for. To vote based on race, according to Washington, was unprincipled and biased. Washington doesn't address the fact that voting for black candidates, or at least the opposite of their white neighbors, was often the only way to secure that the interests of newly emancipated black Americans would be represented in lawmaking and policy development. This quote serves as a key aspect of Washington's racial ideology, as he felt that the idea of black political interests was useless and divisive, and that the only true way to social change was through hard labor and assimilation to white culture.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ In fact, one of the saddest things I saw during the month of travel which I have described was a young man, who had attended some high school, sitting down in a one-room cabin, with grease on his clothing, filth all around him, and weeds in the yard and garden, engaged in studying a French grammar.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

Washington provides this passage in his description of the material conditions of the black Americans in rural Alabama. This young man, studying French in the midst of filth and squalor, is a foil to Washington's educational philosophy. To Washington, the young man is ignoring greater material problems around him to pursue book learning, which he sees as a largely vain action. That learning French may provide personal fulfillment or pleasure, or success in international business, teaching, or other non-laboring professions does not occur to Washington. He provides this specific example to show how he felt that most of the people in the countryside around Tuskegee were backwards in their priorities, and that the Institute and his educational philosophy would be able to set them on the right track to social and economic uplift.

❝ We wanted to teach the students how to bathe, how to care for their teeth and clothing. We wanted to teach them what to eat, and how to eat it properly and how to care for their rooms. Aside from this, we wanted to give them such a practical knowledge of some one industry together with the spirit of industry, thrift, and economy, that they would be sure of knowing how to make a living after they had left us. We wanted to teach them to study actual things instead of mere books alone.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, provided at the end of Washington's discussion of the founding of the Tuskegee Institute, is perhaps the clearest and most concise picture of Washington's educational philosophy in one passage. Washington's education combines personal hygiene, manners, general order and cleanliness, industry, and economy. Notice that Washington does not include "books" in his priorities of education. He does say that they will not study "mere books alone," so we can assume that at least some book learning was accomplished at Tuskegee; however, Washington makes it quite clear that book-learning is a secondary priority, if a priority at all at the Institute. The Tuskegee

Institute was designed for the development of practical skills, not for getting the traditional education that would be found in white schools at the time.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ While I was making this Christmas visit, I met an old coloured man who was one of the numerous local preachers, who tried to convince me, from the experience Adam had in the Garden of Eden, that God had cursed all labour, and that, therefore, it was a sin for any man to work. For that reason this man sought to do as little work as possible. He seemed at that time to be supremely happy, because he was living, as he expressed it, through one week that was free from sin.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

This quote refers to Washington's visits in and around Tuskegee at the beginning of the Institute. Washington often uses people as examples of his ideology, and this man represents what Washington felt was the widespread and "backward" belief of many Americans, both black and white. That this man felt that labor was sinful or cursed was completely antithetical to Washington's notion of the dignity of labor. This quote also is representative of Washington's general belief about ministers; he feels that many black Americans became ministers simply to avoid labor and that their intentions in religious service were impure. Thus this minister serves as an archetype of Washington's distrust of ministers in general and as an exemplar of (what he sees as) the widespread opposition to labor.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ From the very beginning, at Tuskegee, I was determined to have the students do not only the agricultural and domestic work, but to have them erect their own buildings. My plan was to have them, while performing this service, taught the latest and best methods of labour, so that the school would not only get the benefit of their efforts, but the students themselves would be taught to see not only utility to labour, but beauty and dignity; would be taught, in fact, how to lift labour up from mere drudgery and toil, and would learn to love work for its own sake. My plan was not to teach them to work in the old way, but to show them how to make the forces of nature—air, water, steam, electricity, horse-power—assist them in their labour.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is given in Washington's description of the curriculum of the Institute after it had been established for some time. It highlights his recurring axiom that labor is the most important educational tool and that above all else, students will learn through engagement with the practice of labor. While such a perspective is traditional and conservative, Washington sees it as a progressive view, claiming that he teaches students to innovate in their labor to do things in the most efficient way possible. Thus in his eyes, progression of the race is progression in labor. Many black Americans were hesitant to accept such a view, as it seemed to place them permanently in the laboring class, which was not valued in American social hierarchy. Many people felt that this promotion of labor was regressive rather than progressive. It is also notable that there is no mention of the beauty and dignity in traditional education, and Washington excludes book learning from his theories of uplift, labor, and vocational education.

❝ My experience is that 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. I have found, too, that the visible, the tangible, that goes a long ways in softening prejudices.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is given after Washington recounts the Institute's struggle in brickmaking, which concluded with the establishment of a widely respected and robust brickmaking program at Tuskegee. This passage is an explicit declaration of Washington's ideology of meritocracy and gradual racial uplift. He believed that merit, achieved through labor, erases racial divisions and prejudices, and so all black Americans should seek to prove their worth to white Americans through labor and mastery of trades. In Washington's perspective, if black Americans prove their merit through labor, white Americans will drop all racial prejudice, and black Americans will find a place in society. Washington feels that merit is of greater social value than race in America at the time. However, there is no sociological or historical evidence that backs up such a claim, and Washington's idyllic and harmonious racial future was never realized in America, despite black Americans being economically relegated to the working and laboring class for another 100 years.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ It is now long ago that I learned this lesson from General Armstrong and resolved that I would permit no man, no matter that his colour might be, to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him. With God's help, I believe that I have completely rid myself of any ill feeling toward the Southern white man for any wrong that he may have inflicted upon my race…The wrong to the Negro is temporary, but to the morals of the white man the injury is permanent.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker), General Samuel C. Armstrong

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165-166

Explanation and Analysis

The lesson that Washington says he learned from General Armstrong was that every person should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of personal background. Washington claimed that despite his service as a general in the Civil War, General Armstrong held no contempt for the Southern white man or any other type of person. Washington felt that black Americans should follow Armstrong's example and not hold contempt for their former masters or overtly racist neighbors. Washington also repeats his oft-mentioned notion that racism hurts white people more than it does black people, a notion that is problematic when analyzed through the long-term debilitating effects that racism has had on solely the black community throughout history. Washington believes that forgiveness will lead to the abolishment of racial prejudice in white communities, not that the abolishment of racial prejudice ought to come *before* forgiveness. Many white thinkers at the time were eager to accept Washington's ideas, as they seemed to ask more of the victims of the widespread overt racism of the time than the perpetrators of such racism.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Some people may say that it was Tuskegee's good luck that brought to us this gift of fifty thousand dollars. No, it was not luck. It was hard work. Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is provided during Washington's explanation of his fundraising processes for Tuskegee. Some people felt that Washington's ability to accrue a large amount of funds in a short amount of time was a result of luck. Washington is hesitant to admit that luck is a factor in Tuskegee's success, as that is not a part of his ideological system of belief. Washington, rather, wants to attribute the success of Tuskegee to his, his staff's, and his students' hard work and labor. To Washington, attributing luck to success is inappropriate because in his eyes, success is only a result of hard work (as he says here in a now-famous phrase). Luck is not a factor of individual or corporate accomplishment in the eyes of Washington. In his ideology, labor and hard work are the only ways to prove one's merit and find success, and attributing luck to success cheapens it.

Chapter 13 Quotes

Now, whenever I hear any one advocating measures that are meant to curtail the development of another, I pity the individual who would do this. I know that the one who makes this mistake does so because of his own lack of opportunity for the highest kind of growth. I pity him because I know that he is trying to stop the progress of the world, and because I now that in time the development and the ceaseless advance of humanity will make him ashamed of his weak and narrow position.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203-204

Explanation and Analysis

Before Washington provides this passage, he claims that he used to feel bitterness toward people who tried to hold black Americans back on account of their race. However, he claims that now this bitterness has gone away because, as he has repeated throughout his narrative, he believes that racism hurts white Americans much more than black Americans, since it creates a lasting moral decrepitude in its perpetrators. This passage is very similar to the quote that he gives about racial bitterness in chapter 11 concerning General Armstrong. As stated before, the idea that one should not hold bitter feelings towards perpetrators of racism is problematic and puts the responsibility of reconciliation on victims instead of oppressors. Such an idea was largely rejected by the black community in spite of Washington's arguments.

Chapter 14 Quotes

To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are"—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.

Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection, it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial work…

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 219-220

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, delivered at the beginning of Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address," contains some of the language that Washington is most famous for, namely, the idea of "casting down your bucket where you are." This phrase became iconic of Washington's theory of gradual racial uplift, and eventually it became emblematic of black conservative racial theory in general. Washington believed that black Americans needed to thrive in the positions that white society had given them, namely in labor and service industries. Many black Americans deeply rejected this idea, since it seemed to relegate them to similar roles that they held in slavery and to reinforce racial stereotypes of a black servant class. Nevertheless, Washington held this idea as the key to successful racial uplift in the country.

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life…No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, also a part of Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address," reinforces Washington's ideology of gradual racial uplift. He believed that the best way to prove black Americans' worth to white Americans was through hard labor, and that dignity can be found in labor. America's class system greatly valued bourgeois artistic production, such as poetry, and it did not value the laboring classes as dignified and important. Washington wishes to even out this construction so that those in the laboring class can be seen as equals to those in more upper class and genteel professions. Interestingly enough, this labor is mostly

applied to only black Americans in Washington's ideology, and white Americans were not explicitly asked to find as much dignity in labor as black Americans.

> The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to use must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

Washington felt that political agitation or direct political protest was foolish and only resulted in temporary change. This quote was given toward the middle of his Exposition address, and it is designed to satisfy some members of his white audience that would have frowned upon black Americans actively protesting the injustices and violence of racism in the South such as lynching, poll taxes, or segregation. Washington felt that such protests were "artificial" and forced people to bend to the will of others. He does not acknowledge that political action has been a part of most major political reforms in the country, including the founding of the U.S. itself. The ideology represented in this quote angered many black Americans because it seemed to ask them to remain silent in the face of injustice, but it also allowed Washington to walk a fine line of moderation between white Southerners, white Northerners, and black Americans of all regions.

> Say what we will, there is something in human nature which we cannot blot out, which makes one man, in the end, recognize and regard merit in another, regardless of colour or race.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

As discussed in the quote from chapter 10, Washington believes that merit overshadows all concerns of race in human nature. He delivers this quote toward the end of his Exposition address, and after discussing his views on the importance of the role of hard labor in gradual racial uplift, he suggests that as long as black Americans strive to demonstrate their merit to white Americans, race relations will greatly improve. Such an idea is problematic because it places the burden of change on those who are having power stripped from them by overtly racist actions, and those engaging in racism seem to have no burden of blame placed upon them. Like many of Washington's ideas, this idea angered many black Americans on the left and assuaged the fears of many white Americans on the right and the left. And like much of his address, this idea helps him to straddle the lines of the different racial and regional concerns held by his audience.

Chapter 15 Quotes

> There is a physical and mental and spiritual enjoyment that comes from a consciousness of being the absolute master of one's work, in all its details, that is very satisfactory and inspiring.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in Washington's discussion of his lack of rest and relaxation. He claims that he finds as much rest and satisfaction in excelling in his work as he would in taking time off or going on vacation. This quote provides us with an interesting glimpse into Washington's personal beliefs about his own work. Most of his narrative is governed by large, sweeping themes, and very rarely do we get a picture of Washington himself. Here we can see that he takes great pride in his work at Tuskegee, and that he sees himself as a "master" of his work. Thus he takes pride in his presentation and execution of excellence, both personally and in his affairs at school. While this idea does fit into his large ideology of the dignity of labor and meritocracy, it seems more personal than his other ideological passages in which his ideas fit neatly into preset themes or categories.

Chapter 16 Quotes

Luxuries had always seemed to me to be something meant for white people, not for my race. I had always regarded Europe, and London, and Paris, much as I regard heaven.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 272-273

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Washington is describing his perspective about his trip to Europe. Washington deeply admires white culture and Western civilization, so a trip to Europe is for him the pinnacle of cultural experience. In this quote, Washington's ideals of class and race blend together because Washington colors European culture as inherently superior to all other cultures, and as representative of wealth and prosperity. Europe even takes on a religious significance, as Washington likens it to heaven. Such a glorification of Europe and European ideals is problematic because it necessarily excludes the cultural contributions of black Americans and their distinct hybridity of European and African cultures. These cultural contributions, many of which have found prominence in American mainstream culture, are inherently secondary to Europe in Washington's ideology and worldview.

Chapter 17 Quotes

I believe that any man's life will be filled with constant, unexpected encouragements of this kind 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.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, occurring in the reflections of Washington's final chapter, crystallizes Washington's ideology of labor and personal merit. To him, personal merit is marked by three things: hard labor, unselfish work, and useful work. It is not enough simply to labor hard or work for others, but there must be utility and thrift associated with personal labor as well. To Washington, these three are markers of personal merit because they demonstrate work ethic alongside personal ethics, and labor simply for the sake of the accruing of personal wealth is not enough to demonstrate the true merit of a person. There must be an ethics of unselfish service in order for someone to truly demonstrate merit and ultimately find happiness. This principle is presented as a general axiom in this final chapter, but it colors Washington's other mentions of merit and labor and is a clear indicator of what Washington truly means when he is discussing those concepts earlier in the narrative.

That great human law that in the end recognizes and rewards merit is everlasting and universal.

Related Characters: Booker T. Washington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 318

Explanation and Analysis

While this quote is succinct, it is perhaps one of the best single-sentence summaries of Washington's narrative. It is provided toward the end of the last chapter, and it is exemplary of what Washington truly wishes to highlight in the closing passages of his text. For Washington, merit is more important than any of his other ideological concepts. In his eyes, merit transcends both race and class and can elevate anyone, regardless of their background, above their current societal status. Labor helps to demonstrate merit, and vocational education helps to encourage labor, but ultimately the demonstration of merit is the cornerstone to the structure of Washington's ideology. Thus this quote, although short and relatively simple, is of monumental importance in understanding the details of Washington's educational philosophy and racial ideology. According to Washington, merit, above all, is the most important indicator of personal and societal importance.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: A SLAVE AMONG SLAVES

Washington begins his autobiography by describing the destitute conditions of his childhood in slavery. He was born and raised on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia around 1858 or 1859. He is not quite sure when he was born, since his father was a slave owner and his mother was a slave, and there were no records kept of his birth. Washington never even knew his father's name, because he and his mother were sold when he was very young. He grew up living in the cabin that was used as the kitchen for the plantation, which had large cracks in the walls and a dirt floor. The cabin was unbearably hot in the summer from the kitchen stove and terribly cold in the winter from the cracks in the walls.

Washington begins his narrative in slavery not only to account for the chronological progression of his life, but also to show the depths from which he rose. A major purpose of the narrative is to show how hard labor, honesty, and thrift can achieve equality for newly freed black Americans. By detailing the adverse conditions in which he grew up, Washington is trying to show that any person can uplift themselves, no matter how low their social status. Note also that Washington's father was a white slave owner, showing the tragic prevalence of rape and broken families as part of the institution of slavery.

Washington's mother was unable to attend to her children for any long period of time because she was the plantation cook, and worked in the kitchen from early in the morning until late at night. Washington, along with his siblings, John and Amanda, would wake up late at night to their mother offering them a chicken stolen from the plantation.

While Washington does not condone his mother's stealing, he believes that it is simply evidence of what the practice of slavery can do to one's moral character. He does not blame his mother for her transgression, and he uses this as further evidence of the evils of slavery.

Like his mother with her constant labor, Washington had no time for sports or leisure as a child because he was always expected to be working. Although he was too young to labor in the fields with the other slaves, he was expected to complete physically trying tasks like cleaning the yard, bringing water to slaves in the field, and transporting corn to the mill. When the corn would fall off of the horse, Washington was too small to lift it back up, so he was forced to wait until a passerby could assist him. Often he would wait all day, and he felt helpless and frightened by the prospect of traveling back in the dark.

Once again, Washington demonstrates the hardships of his childhood in slavery. However, it's particularly notable that he does not reject the labor requirements of his master. Washington sees labor not only as a necessary part of life, but also as a dignifying and noble practice. He only finds it unreasonable that he was required to complete tasks that he was physically unequipped to complete.

Washington had no formal education, and his only interaction with schooling was when he would carry his white mistress's schoolbooks to school for her. He idolized education as a slave, and felt that studying in school would be the same as getting into paradise.

This passage is Washington's first mention of education in his narrative, and he suggests that he was enchanted by the idea of education at a young age. This sets the tone for his later quest for education in the mines in West Virginia and at the Hampton Institute.

Washington's first knowledge of the fact of slavery came when he awoke to his mother praying that Lincoln's armies would be successful in their military campaigns. Washington marvels at how all of the slaves seemed to be up to date on war gossip and information, when they had no formal education and were illiterate. Slaves would often trade gossip, and slaves in the plantation house or in public areas like the post office would overhear important conversations and relay them orally to other slaves. Washington himself participated in this system. When he became old enough, he began to work in the plantation house as a house slave. There he overheard many conversations about freedom and the Civil War and internalized many of these conversations.

The "first realization of slavery" is a recurring element in many slave narratives and early African American autobiographies. Most people growing up in slavery did not know what "slavery" and "freedom" really meant because they rarely left the plantation or heard news from outside the plantation boundaries. Thus many narratives, spanning from early works such as the Life of Olaudah Equiano *in the late 18th century to Zora Neale Hurston's autobiographical essays in the early 20th century include a passage of "finding out" about slavery or racism as a key part of growing up and coming of age. This passage also highlights Washington's belief in the thriftiness of slaves despite their deprived social status and lack of education.*

The slaves on Washington's plantation were entirely deprived of material comfort. Often the slaves were fed only as an afterthought, late at night after the owners had already eaten. As the Civil War continued, food was scarce even for white people, but the slaves were not as greatly affected by the shortage because of their general deprivation. Clothing was also scarce for slaves. Washington was forced to wear wooden shoes and a rough and uncomfortable flax shirt, which was the only garment that he wore in his childhood.

Washington continues to describe the material depths of slavery to highlight how his theory of racial uplift and dignity in labor can work for someone starting at the bottom.

Despite the squalor of the slaves on the plantation, Washington states that he harbors no ill feelings toward white people. He claims that some slaves even felt deep bonds with their masters and were fiercely loyal to them. Slaves would medically care for their owners if wounded in the war, nurse their children, and protect their property upon the master's absence. Washington insists that this is a result of the general earnest and trustworthy nature of slaves.

Part of Washington's racial ideology is his insistence that black Americans hold no racial animosity towards white Americans, and that black Americans demonstrate virtue even in the depths of slavery or poverty. His concept of America's meritocracy, or the belief that societal value is placed on those who demonstrate their own goodness through hard work and success regardless of race, is built upon this idea of the general merit and virtue of black Americans.

To demonstrate such trustworthiness, Washington tells a parable of a slave who had a deal with his master in which the slave was allowed to labor for whoever he pleased as long as he paid the master for his body. However, upon Emancipation, the slave still owed approximately $300 to the master. The slave walked from Ohio back to his master's house in Virginia, and repaid the man in full. But although slaves felt a bond to their masters, Washington claims that they still felt a desire to attain freedom.

In this example, Washington reiterates his point about the general virtue of slaves in spite of the degradation of the institution of slavery. Washington also again emphasizes the potentially strong bonds between black enslaved people and white slave owners.

On the subject of slavery, Washington believes that white and black people benefited equally from the institution. While he does not condone the practice of slavery and sees it as an evil institution, he also sees it as a method for black people to be introduced to civilization. Further, he believes that newly freed slaves in America are better off than any other black people in the world. Citing black missionaries traveling to Africa to win new converts for Christianity, Washington espouses the belief that slavery developed black people into a civilized society. He also suggests that white people were at a disadvantage by requiring black slaves to do all of their trade work for them, because upon Emancipation these slaves became a skilled working class, leaving wealthy white citizens disabled in the new economy.

Much of Washington's racial ideology denies the lasting negative effects of slavery on black Americans. After Emancipation, many black leaders saw the social, educational, and economic deficits of newly freed slaves, and they placed the blame both on slavery and racist white slave owners. Washington flips this narrative, suggesting that slavery did not necessarily hold black Americans back. In fact, he claims that it actually helped black Americans, introducing them to Christianity and Western civilization, both of which he greatly admired. In this flipped narrative, white Americans were hurt the most by slavery, both in the evidence of their moral decrepitude and their lack of affinity for labor and hard work. There is little to no sociological and economic evidence to support Washington's claims, but they are a foundation for his ideology of racial uplift.

Washington concludes the chapter by recounting the day of Emancipation at the plantation. There was an aura of freedom, for the slaves knew for months through their "grape-vine telegraph" (the system of spreading news orally) that the Confederates were facing impending defeat and that Emancipation now was no longer a question of "if" but "when." There was great anticipation among the slaves, especially when they were sent a message to convene at the plantation house the next morning.

This is largely a transitional passage that marks Washington's first movement upward out of slavery toward freedom and success. He also briefly gives some interesting information about how slaves worked around their lack of freedom and education to still stay informed.

Most slaves did not sleep that night, and in the morning they all gathered around the veranda. A Union soldier was present, and he began to give a speech and read a long paper, something Washington assumes is the Emancipation Proclamation. Washington's mother explained to the slaves that they had been freed, and all of the slaves rejoiced. Some of the slaves pitied their former owners, as they were mourning the loss of property and possession. The rejoicing began to subside, however, and slaves were then faced with the weight of an uncertain future in freedom.

The hope and joy that Emancipation brought for many slaves came with a heavy burden: the burden of freedom. Washington reiterates the virtue of the slaves, as many of them felt compassion for their masters and did not hold hate or anger towards them. This chapter ends on a dark note, however, for Washington suggests that slaves will face a difficult and uncertain future in Emancipation, because freedom is a wonderful but difficult responsibility. He believes that labor and education are the only things that will lighten the burden of freedom from newly freed slaves.

CHAPTER 2: BOYHOOD DAYS

Upon Emancipation, most newly freed slaves felt that they must accomplish two things: first, they must choose a name for themselves, and second, they must leave the plantation at least briefly to experience true freedom. Most slaves dropped the names of their masters, which occupied the place of their surnames, and replaced them with names of Union military figures or U.S. presidents like Sherman or Lincoln. Few slaves changed their first name, and most kept the Anglicized slave name given to them upon enslavement. Almost all slaves left the plantation for a period, but older slaves tended to return to their old masters' houses and created work contracts so that they could remain in their old homes.

A key aspect of the institution of slavery was the forced Anglicized name given to all slaves upon arrival to America. Many slaves were resistant to give up their original African names because a name not only defines one's sense of self, but also can carry religious, historical, cultural, and national significance. Slaves would often secretly continue to use their African name or even openly defy their masters by refusing to accept their Anglicized name. Since names carry identity markers such as culture, religion, and history, newly freed slaves felt that one of the most important elements of beginning their journey toward societal uplift was self-naming. Yet, notably, their primary choices for new names (at least in Washington's account) were still white men—and sometimes even slave-owning white men (like George Washington himself).

Washington's mother decided to move their family to West Virginia to live with her husband, Washington and his brother John's stepfather, who ran away from his master years before and settled in West Virginia. The family walked hundreds of miles from Franklin County, Virginia to Malden, West Virginia with the few possessions that they had. Once they arrived, their new cabin was no better than their cabin on the plantation in Virginia, and the community of ex-slaves and poor whites was unkempt and dirty.

Washington includes the details about walking all of the way from Franklin County to Malden in order to emphasize the struggle and determination of his family to establish itself. The labor of walking is no obstacle to them as they move to attempt to find economic independence in the mines. Also note Washington's early preoccupation with cleanliness and order, particularly as indicators of moral character.

Washington's stepfather immediately put him to work in the salt-mines (a mine in which salt is removed from the natural springs and caves in the area and refined for commercial use). Despite the difficult working condition, Washington was introduced to his first real experience of book knowledge in the mines. Washington noticed that each worker's barrel was marked with an "18," and he memorized the pattern and began to recognize it in places outside of the mine. He had long had a desire to learn how to read, and once his family arrived in West Virginia, he had his mother acquire a Webster "blueback" reader to accomplish that goal.

While Washington seems to dislike working in the salt mine because it is constantly at odds with his desire for an education, he construes his time in the mine as an open opportunity. His first experience of reading was in the mine, and often he discusses the mine as a complement of labor to his book learning.

Washington struggled to learn the alphabet, but with practice he mastered a good portion of it. His education was furthered when a black teacher came to town to establish a school for Malden's black population. The town gathered together, and they decided that each family would house the new teacher for a day and pay a certain amount each month so that the school could be free for their children.

Washington's narrative repeatedly follows a similar construction to this passage. He introduces a problem and details his struggles with it, but his difficulties are always followed by success through labor or ingenuity. This narrative structure serves to emphasize Washington's belief that enough labor and merit will always help individuals find success. Washington rarely, if ever, documents outright failures.

Young and old newly freed black Americans took great interest in the school, and classes were conducted both in the daytime and at night to accommodate the great demand in the community. However, Washington was held back from the day school to work in the salt mine because his stepfather felt that the family needed the extra income. Washington was deeply disappointed, but with the help of his mother, arranged for the teacher to give him lessons after his long workday.

Washington suggests that the black community was deeply invested in education. Likewise, his personal value of education is demonstrated through his dedication to his studies despite full workdays. To Washington, nothing, not even a full time job of hard labor in the mines, should keep someone from getting an education. Education is only attained through hard work and dedication.

Washington was so successful at achieving academic growth in these lessons that he convinced his stepfather to allow him to leave the mines each day to attend school and then return to the mine in the afternoon. Washington would work from four in the morning until nine, attend school until it closed in the afternoon, and then work for at least two more hours. However, he often could not arrive at school on time because of the tightness of his schedule, so he decided to take action. Washington would go to the mines every day and set back the clock by 30 minutes in order to make it to school on time. However, his manager found out that someone was tampering with the clock, and the manager put a locked case around it. Although Washington felt a little bit guilty for being duplicitous with the mine clock, he felt that getting an education was more important than his shifts in the mine.

Again, Washington highlights that nothing can stand in the way of someone who wants an education if they work hard enough. His personal success was only achieved through relentless labor.

Even after Washington temporarily solved the problem of getting to school on time, he still faced obstacles in his education. While most students wore a hat or a cap to school, Washington did not have one. When he asked his mother if he could have a school cap, she was able to create a **homespun cap** out of scrap cloth around the house. Washington deeply admired his mother's thriftiness, and he saw her creation of the homespun cap as a symbolic gesture of the importance of thrift over wealth.

The "homespun cap" symbolizes the importance of personal labor and thrift. To Washington, there is no greater virtue than applying labor to fix a problem. Washington feels that going into debt for a school cap would have been foolish and vain, and he is proud that his mother demonstrated her own good judgment in her crafting of the cap. This is also an example of how Washington sees almost any kind of comfort or excess at all as being extravagant and wasteful.

Washington also did not have a full name. Before school he had simply been called "Booker," but during roll call he felt self-conscious about only having a first name. He chose Washington as his last name, and his mother had called him "Booker Taliaferro" as a child, so he adopted "Taliaferro" as his middle name. Washington felt that the opportunity to name himself was a special honor, and one that not many men have the chance to do.

As discussed before, choosing a name after being freed from slavery was an important symbolic move to establish personal and cultural identity. Washington kept his given middle name to retain his familial identity with his mother, and he followed the convention of choosing the last name of one of the founding fathers (even though George Washington himself was a slave owner).

Washington suggests in an aside that ancestry is an important part of society, and that it can motivate individuals to pursue success. Since black Americans have no ancestry as a result of slavery, they are at a distinct disadvantage. Washington suggests that instead of relying on ancestry to motivate them, black Americans must begin to form a legacy now for their future children by striving for excellence in American society.

Naming as a practice is one of the key ways to begin to establish the ancestral identity that Washington suggests. Legacy is largely associated with one's name, so the best way to form a legacy is to attach a name to a reputation of merit, virtue, and hard labor, according to Washington.

Washington resumes his narrative of his childhood difficulties, saying that he was unable to continue to attend day school because he had to go back to work in the salt furnace. He resorted to night school, but often he felt that his instructors were inadequate and knew little more than he did. During this time, Washington's family adopted an orphan boy, James B. Washington. After Washington worked in the salt furnace for a period, he was transferred to the coal mine. Washington was horrified by his time in the coal mine, finding the dirty, dark, and dangerous conditions to be detrimental to both his health and mental state.

While the salt mine is not terribly problematic to Washington despite its status as a constant impediment to his educational goals, he deeply dislikes the coal mine. Many newly freed black Americans went to work in coal mines after Emancipation. Whites did not want to work in the dark, dirty, and dangerous conditions in the mine, which often resulted in long term health problems as well as the danger of daily accidents. This type of labor was then the only kind available to most black Americans, so Washington's position was not atypical.

Washington claims that most children who grew up working in coal mines ended up physically and mentally ill and had little motivation to do anything other than continue working in the mines for the rest of their lives. Because of this, Washington envied white boys who seemed to have unlimited potential to achieve their dreams. Upon reflection, however, Washington decides that it is not the status or station in life that reflects one's merit, but the obstacles that one has to overcome. In this sense, Washington feels that black Americans have an advantage in society, because they have more obstacles to overcome and thus more opportunities to prove their merit.

Washington sees the coal mine as a symbol of the physical and mental impediments black Americans face. However, his rise from the coal mine to go attain an education is likewise symbolic of the success that black Americans can find due to their degraded position. To Washington, it is the number of obstacles overcome that truly marks progress and uplift. Thus in Washington's view, black Americans can make strides towards progress and still find merit in those strides without achieving social and economic equality to white Americans. This passage is then a kind of thesis statement for much of the book. Though Washington's argument is certainly flawed (and seems like it would be cold comfort to those who have may have overcome many obstacles, but still are forced to lead lives of great suffering and oppression), it is crucial to his narrative of meritocracy and racial uplift.

CHAPTER 3: THE STRUGGLE FOR AN EDUCATION

One day in the coal mine, Washington overheard two men talking about a school for black Americans in Virginia. Washington crept toward them through the darkness to hear more clearly, and was delighted to discover that the school catered to poor black folks as well, both by equipping students with a job to pay off their room and board and by teaching all students a trade. Washington heard that the name of this school was the Hampton Institute, and at that moment in the coal mine he resolved to attend that school no matter what obstacles faced him.

Like his time in the salt mine, Washington construes his time in the coal mine as difficult, but not without opportunity. After all, the coal mine provided him an opportunity to hear about the Hampton Institute, which he is now determined to attend. He also foreshadows some of the struggles that will come in his journey to get an education at Hampton, and he sets up another plot construction of problem-struggle-success.

Washington continued to work in the mine for a few months longer, but soon he heard of a position as a house servant that opened up in the home of General Lewis Ruffner, the owner of the mine. The job was to assist Mrs. Viola Ruffner, the General's wife, in attending to the house. Mrs. Ruffner had a reputation among servants for being particularly strict and severe, so when Washington initially took the job, he was quite afraid of her particularity. However, he quickly realized that she simply preferred to keep a systematically run, clean home, something that he respected.

This symbolic movement from the hard labor of the mines to the domestic labor at the Ruffners' is suggestive of the field vs. house slave paradigm in slavery. Field slaves, seen as having a lower status, were relegated to hard labor in the fields. House slaves, on the other hand, were generally seen as having a higher status in the slave hierarchy because of their position of relative comfort in the house and their access to more material resources. Similarly, Washington sees his position in the Ruffner house as an opportunity for personal uplift through the development of cleanliness and access to educational resources, in contrast to the material disparity of the mines. The problem with this kind of framework is that it was originally used in slavery to divide slaves against one another in order to prevent unification or rebellion. By repeating this framework, Washington can be seen as repeating some of the same divisive problems that are found in the field slave/house slave paradigm.

Mrs. Ruffner instilled in Washington a desire for cleanliness and orderliness that he adopted and applied to the rest of his life. Soon, Washington saw Mrs. Ruffner as not just a mentor, but also a best friend. She encouraged his education and allowed him to study at night. Washington even collected a small library of books while he was working at her house.

Mrs. Ruffner was an influential factor in Washington's ideas of meritocracy. He saw cleanliness, organization, and work ethic as key character traits that exemplify merit. Mrs. Ruffner also plays a key role in Washington's educational development by encouraging him to pursue book knowledge in conjunction with his household duties.

Despite his comfort and success serving in the Ruffner household, Washington still was determined to attend the Hampton Institute. In the fall of 1872, he began to collect funds in order to pay for his journey to get to the institute. Most of his money was taken by his stepfather to support the family, so Washington had little money on his own. His brother, John Washington, tried to give him some of his wages from the coal mine, but most of Washington's money ended up coming from older black people in the community. These older people took a special interest in ensuring that Washington had a chance at an education, and they would give him any small amount that they could afford, sometimes no more than a penny. After collecting funds along with his gifts from family and friends, Washington finally had enough to begin his journey to Hampton.

This passage begins a series of problem-struggle-solution constructions in the text, as Washington's journey to Hampton is fraught with difficulty. The problem of money is a recurring issue in the narrative, and Washington demonstrates in this passage how the generosity of his community and his family helped him to overcome it in this situation. By showing how his community rallied around him to support his dream of getting an education, Washington tries to relay that the black community recognizes the value of education, regardless of monetary burden.

Washington's journey would not be easy. There were no trains running from Malden to Virginia, so he had to piece together his transportation by taking both short train rides and stagecoaches. Partially into his 500-mile trip, he realized that he did not have enough money to make it the whole way to Hampton. In conjunction with his poverty, Washington says, his trip was full of hardship. He could not gain access to any hotels or accommodations on account of his skin color, and sometimes at night he would just have to walk back and forth outside to stay warm enough to make it until morning. He would often have to walk for portions of the journey and beg for rides in wagons at other times. After traveling for a number of days this way, Washington arrived in Richmond, just 82 miles away from Hampton.

This portion of Washington's account is designed to show the extreme conditions that he is willing to endure in order to get an education. He is willing to literally starve, freeze, or collapse from exhaustion simply to make it to Hampton. His narrative of such hardship is not to invoke sympathy in the reader, however. Its purpose is rather to show that, if one works hard enough, education can be attained, and no obstacles, even racial and class barriers, are too large to overcome.

But as soon as Washington arrived in Richmond, he ran out of money. He wandered the streets looking for food and lodging, but no one would help him. He walked around until around midnight and found a portion of the boarded sidewalk slightly raised above the rest. He looked around to ensure that no one was looking, crawled under the sidewalk, and went to sleep with his clothes sack as his pillow.

Washington also is not afraid to sacrifice his dignity in order to achieve his goals. He is even willing to sleep under a sidewalk, homeless and cold, if the result is a chance at an education.

In the morning Washington was able to find a ship captain in the harbor who would give him money in return for unloading the ship's cargo, and Washington was able to get enough money for breakfast. This captain allowed Washington to return the next morning and continue to unload cargo, and after a few weeks of sleeping under the sidewalk and working for the captain, Washington had enough money to pay his way to Hampton. Later in life, Washington was asked to return to Richmond to attend a reception, and it was held very near to the spot where he had slept under the sidewalk.

Washington's problem of homelessness and lack of money is, as is expected, again solved through hard labor. Washington works for weeks in the harbor, still sleeping under the sidewalk, to save enough money to pay his way to Hampton. The result, when Washington returns to Richmond years later for a reception, is his elevated status as Tuskegee principal and famous speaker. To him, anything is possible, even moving from sleeping under a sidewalk to speaking behind a podium, if one works hard and depends on one's merit.

After saving money for months, Washington had finally made it to the Hampton Institute. He felt a great sense of relief arriving at his destination, and he also felt that no obstacle could hold him back from accomplishing good in the world. Washington immediately presented himself to the head teacher for admission, but he was quite self-conscious of his appearance. Days of travel and labor in Richmond gave him a rather rugged look.

Even when Washington finally accomplishes his goal and makes it to Hampton, he is still concerned about his appearance. He wishes to look clean and professional to demonstrate his merit to the school. Throughout the rest of the narrative, Washington will repeatedly emphasize his belief that appearance is a key indicator of personal merit.

Washington was forced to wait as he watched the head teacher admit other students, and eventually she came out of her office and asked him to sweep the lecture hall next door. Washington took this task very seriously, sweeping the room three times and dusting it four times. The head teacher inspected the room, and when she was unable to find any dust or dirt, she admitted him to the Institute. Washington was elated—he had finally reached his goal of securing admission to Hampton.

Washington has no problem proving his worth through labor, and he takes joy in demonstrating his thoroughness and strong work ethic. He believes that his demonstration of worth and practical skills are what granted him admission to the school (while also ignoring the problematic aspect of a school admitting students entirely based on their sweeping ability). Thus his goal, the one that he was willing to starve and freeze for, was granted with his own hard labor and merit.

Miss Mary F. Mackie, the head teacher that conducted the "sweeping" examination, offered Washington a position as school janitor to provide him means by which to pay his room and board. Although this job was difficult, often requiring him to rise at 4 am to begin his work, Washington cherished the opportunity to prove his worth to the school. He appreciated the opportunity from Miss Mackie, and he felt that she was one of his closest friends and advisors.

Once again, Washington suggests that labor creates opportunity in life, and that people who apply themselves in labor can accomplish their goals. Success is founded in hard work.

Washington's greatest connection at Hampton, he says, was his relationship with General Samuel C. Armstrong, a retired Union General and benefactor of the school. To Washington, General Armstrong was a larger-than-life figure, greater than any man Washington had ever met. He was honored just be in the presence of General Armstrong. Washington particularly admired his work ethic, for even in old age and with crippling disabilities, Armstrong would work tirelessly for the schools that he supported. The students at Hampton all deeply admired Armstrong, and they would do anything that he requested. When the school ran out of dormitories and was forced to board students in tents outside during the winter, the older students readily volunteered—because Armstrong wished them to. According to Washington, pleasing General Armstrong eclipsed the discomfort of the cold students.

General Armstrong is the closest character in the narrative that Washington could consider a father figure, since Washington is physically alienated from his biological father and emotionally alienated by his stepfather, and doesn't even tell us the name of either. General Armstrong, however, fills this gap in Washington's narrative. Armstrong is hard working, strong in character, and deeply admired by all of his students, all traits that Washington wishes to emulate. To Washington, Armstrong is the ideal man, the archetype that demonstrates the true potential of dependence on merit and hard labor.

Washington felt that life at Hampton was like a constant revelation. Regular meals, bathing requirements, toothbrushes, and sheets were all foreign notions to Washington. The most valuable of these, he believes, is the use of the bath. Washington believes that regardless of their material wealth, all families should pursue regular bathing habits in order to promote cleanliness and respectability.

Washington never mentions any "book learning" that he engages in at Hampton. All of the educational lessons mentioned in his narrative have to do with practical purposes, such as his "sweeping" exam or the importance of the bath. Note that Washington again places a huge emphasis on appearing "respectable," seeing this as a mark of civilization and even moral character.

Although Washington secured a job as a janitor and was admitted to the Institute, his financial troubles did not end. He was required to pay ten dollars a month for his board coasts, which he accomplished through his hard work as a janitor. However, there was also a yearly tuition fee of seventy dollars, which Washington could not afford. In order to keep him at Hampton, though, General Armstrong secured money from a New England donor to pay his way through the school. Washington also did not have money for books or new clothes, so he would borrow books from libraries or peers, and wash his clothes at the end of each day in order to preserve them. Eventually, he was gifted second hand clothing from Northern donors. He was thus able to work for or acquire all of his basic needs.

Even though Washington's education was partially subsidized by a rich New England family, he insists that his labor in his janitorial position and his meticulous care for his belongings are what propelled him through Hampton's education program.

At Hampton, the students themselves were of all ages and from many different backgrounds. Washington describes the students as all being extremely hard-working and earnest people. Although some of the older students struggled with the book learning, all of the students worked together to form a supportive working community. Even the teachers would work day and night and year round to ensure that students were provided with the support and instruction that they needed. Washington deeply appreciated the services of his fellow students and his teachers during his time at Hampton.

Although much of Washington's narrative is about his personal and individual accomplishments through merit and hard labor, he also occasionally points out the labor of collective groups, such as the Hampton staff and students here. To Washington, labor not only fosters individual improvement and accomplishment, but community uplift as well. In this passage, the importance of labor is a collective rather than an individual concern.


CHAPTER 4: HELPING OTHERS

At the end of Washington's first year at Hampton, he was again confronted with a lack of funds with which to travel home. He was so poor that he did not even have enough money to go out of town to get a job. Homesick and desperate, he attempted to sell his coat for cash, but the buyer wanted to pay on a payment plan with installments, only putting down five cents. After all of the students and staff traveled to visit their families or secure summer jobs, Washington was left in Hampton to try to support himself through the summer.

One of Washington's most frequently recurring struggles is finding enough money. However, he believes that one can overcome any financial burden with the application of hard labor. Therefore whenever he discusses problems with money, he usually will follow with a description of how he worked to overcome these problems.

At the end of the school year, Washington still owed Hampton $16, and he resolved to pay it off by the end of the summer. He took a job as a waiter and began to cut back on all of his expenses in order to save as much as possible, but by the end of the summer, he still did not have the money. In the last week of his employment before he resumed school, he found a ten-dollar bill under a plate. Those ten dollars would solve almost all of his problems, but Washington felt that he should tell his manager, since it was his manager's restaurant. Much to Washington's dismay, his manager took the money as his own and did not reward Washington with anything. Once again, Washington was penniless, and he had to go back and face his debt without any money to offer.

Washington again highlights monetary obstacles that he has to overcome in order to succeed. This passage is the "struggle" section of Washington's problem-struggle-solution paradigm.

Despite his setbacks, Washington was not deterred. He was tired of people telling him how he could not succeed, and he was determined to find a way to re-enroll in the Institute on his own merit. His determination led him to meet with General J. F. B. Marshall, Hampton's treasurer, who granted him reentry into the Institute and trusted Washington to pay off the debt when he could.

Despite Washington's insistence that his accomplishments are only the result of hard work and perseverance, often Washington receives aid from those above him. Washington is always grateful and credits those who help him, but he is also insistent that it is only his labor and merit that allows him to accomplish his goals.

After his narrative of overcoming the obstacle of his debt, Washington begins to account for the most important lessons that he learned in his education during his second year at Hampton. Firstly, Washington claims that he learned much more from watching his teachers' selfless labor for their students than reading his books. Secondly, Washington claims to have learned quite a lot from working with the Institute's livestock and fowl (birds). Thirdly, in his lessons with Ms. Nathalie Lord, Washington learned the importance of the Bible, both in its lessons and in its literature.

These lessons are foundational in the formation of Washington's educational philosophy. He sees the selfless labor of his teachers and wants to emulate it. He learns the value of the industry of keeping stock and fowl (domesticated animals) as well as the importance of spiritual upkeep. These lessons will directly impact his formation of the Tuskegee curriculum later in the narrative.

Washington also attributes Ms. Lord with developing his ability as a public speaker. After finding out that Washington was gifted in oration, Lord began to give him private lessons in articulation, posture, and manner. These lessons, in conjunction with his time attending debate society meetings, helped to develop the public speaking skills that would grant him fame later in his life.

Although Ms. Lord does not play a major role in the narrative after this passage, her contribution to his development as a public speaker is deeply significant to Washington's later life. His public speaking ability is arguably one of the most significant qualities that he develops at Hampton.

At the end of his second year at Hampton, Washington was able to go home as a result of money sent by his mother and brother John as well as a gift from one of his teachers. Washington was met with great celebration back in Malden, and he was asked to visit and eat with each family in the town as well as speak at the church and the school.

Washington includes this passage to highlight just how much the black citizens of his hometown value education.

Washington returned, however, in the midst of a labor strike by the miners demanding higher wages and better treatment. Washington feels that the laborers' efforts were wasted on the strike, however, for the mining companies were able to hire temporary employees while the miners were striking, and most of the miners ran out of money rather quickly and were forced to return to the mines for no better wages. Washington sees this as a great waste of savings and as a foolish endeavor.

Washington repeatedly denounces political action throughout his narrative. He believes that this sort of activism only creates false and constructed forms of uplift for African Americans, and often these forms of progress crumble under pressure. Washington sees such actions as foolish and wasteful. He would much rather the miners prove their worth through excellent labor and hard work. However, Washington is drawing from one particular example, that of this worker's strike, and drawing very general conclusions from it. There is little historical evidence to back up this claim, and most sweeping reforms of labor rights were achieved through protest or political agitation.

During the first month of being back, Washington decided to go out to look for work. He traveled a considerable distance, and on his way back, he stopped in an abandoned house to rest. During the night, John found Washington and informed him that their mother had died during the night. Washington was heartbroken and felt lost. A large reason for his educational striving was to be able to provide for his mother's comfort. He was grieved that he would never be able to do so.

Washington's mother served as an anchor for him, connecting him to his hometown and his family. After her death, Washington focuses all of his energies on his career as an educator and rarely mentions his home life or his hometown.

Washington's mother's death left the family's home in confusion. Amanda, Washington's sister, was very young and did not know much about how to take care of a house, and Washington expected her to at least partially fill the role of homemaker. Even though food was scarce and the house was often messy, Washington was able to find work with his old friend Mrs. Ruffner and in a coal mine in order to support his struggling family. With his home in disrepair, it seemed unlikely that he would be able to return to Hampton.

Washington claims to have solved his family's crisis after his mother's death by labor and hard work. Although he does not explicitly say so, Washington most likely detested the uncleanliness of the house and its disarray, as he felt that a virtuous house was a clean house. It is significant that it is labor, not help from the community or familial bonding, that solves the problem. Also note that Amanda, as a woman, is assumed to act as the homemaker despite her youth and inexperience.

But through his persistence and hard work, Washington was able to secure enough money to return to Hampton. Three weeks before he was to return, Miss Mary F. Mackie, the teacher who conducted Washington's "sweeping" examination, wrote to him asking him to return two weeks early to assist her in preparing the school for the returning students. Washington saw this as an excellent opportunity to pay off his debt to the treasury, so he gladly agreed.

If Washington's mother's death is the problem and his hard labor in Malden the struggle, then Ms. Mackie's proposal is the solution in this iteration of the problem-struggle-solution paradigm. Washington was eager to labor with Miss Mackie and prove his worth both financially and academically.


Washington was shocked by Miss Mackie's work ethic and her willingness to work alongside him for long hours, despite her roots in upper class society. For Washington, Miss Mackie is the ultimate example of the importance of finding dignity in labor.

Throughout his narrative, Washington suggests that those in upper class society have gotten to their positions through their exemplary merit. So whenever he introduces a rich or famous person, he is always sure to explicitly mention that person's merit.

Washington's last year at Hampton was marked by two major "benefits." The first benefit was contact with General Armstrong, whose character Washington deeply wishes to emulate. The second benefit was finding out the "true" value of education: not that one should have a free and easy time, but that one should find dignity, strength, and self-reliance in labor.

Again, Washington highlights the merit of Armstrong by constructing him as a figure who is so virtuous that he is above reproach. This idea of the rich as inherently virtuous and deserving of their fortune fits into Washington's worldview and ideology, but is clearly very problematic. Many of the rich families that Washington names in the narrative, such as Rockefeller and Carnegie, acquired their wealth through a combination of inheritance, family connections, and questionable business and labor practices. So while Washington may believe that their wealth is indicative of their virtue, it is more indicative of their connections and lack of scruples.



When Washington graduated, he was once again out of money, so he took a job as a waiter in a hotel restaurant in Connecticut for the summer. However, Washington did not know how to wait tables properly at such an establishment, and after being scolded severely for poor service, he was demoted to dish washer. Washington was determined to learn how to succeed as a table waiter, though, so he worked at fixing his flaws and eventually was restored to his position. Since that time, he has been a guest multiple times at the same hotel.

Here there is another "problem-struggle-solution": Washington's problem was that he was unqualified to wait tables for a high-class hotel restaurant, and his struggle occurred when he was fired. However, his solution, like most of his solutions, comes through the application of hard work and improvement.

After the summer in Connecticut, Washington returned to Malden and was elected to teach at the black school. Washington believed that the curriculum should not just include book learning, so he worked from 8 am to 10 pm every day in order to give students lessons in hygiene and general cleanliness. Washington believes that the toothbrush, above all tools, is one of the most important to civilization.

Teaching in Malden provided Washington with his first opportunity to apply his educational philosophy. He worked long days to ensure that his students learned the importance of self-improvement and book learning. His claim that the toothbrush is the one of the most important tools demonstrates his feeling that appearance and cleanliness are both important factors in demonstrating merit.

There was so much interest in Washington's instruction that soon he had to open up a night school for both the young and old who were required to work during the day, as well as developing a reading room, running a debating society, teaching Sunday School, and giving private lessons. All of his classes were constantly filled with poor students eager for an education. For all of this work, Washington received little to no salary, but he was satisfied simply serving his community.

This night school is a precursor to the one that Washington will help to run at Hampton and the eventual night school that he will found at Tuskegee. Washington sees the grueling schedule of the night school as a test that can serve to prove the worth of poor students who cannot depend on their money for an education.

Washington was also able to provide for his brother John's education during this time, with private lessons and monetary support. John was able to attend the Hampton Institute and eventually secure a position as Superintendent of Industries at Tuskegee. Since John previously neglected his own education and material security to ensure that Washington had access to an education, Washington was more than willing to reciprocate with his aid upon his return to Malden. He was also able to secure his adopted brother James an education at Hampton and a position as postmaster at Tuskegee.

While Washington largely focused on his career after his mother's death, he still attempted to take care of his brothers by providing them with an education. To Washington, the best way to take care of his brothers was to educate them, as this education provided them with a means by which to raise their positions in society.

During his time in Malden, the Ku Klux Klan was at the height of its activity. Washington compares the Klan to the "patrollers" of slavery times: poor whites who would patrol the woods at night looking to harass slaves running errands for their masters or catch runaway slaves. As a witness of the violence and suppression aimed toward black Americans from the Klan, Washington calls this time "the darkest part of the Reconstruction days." Washington then pivots, however, and suggests that the days of the Klan are over, and that the South has evolved so much in its racial views that it would not ever permit organizations like the Klan to operate again. Washington even pushes this idea further, claiming that the Klan has been practically forgotten by both black and white Americans.

The Ku Klux Klan is an infamous racial group that protested the equality of black Americans through violence and intimidation. Washington is correct that after Reconstruction many chapters of the Klan disbanded because, for the most part, they were successful in disenfranchising black Americans from the right to vote, own property, or even exist in peace. However, Klan activity resumed in the early 20th century after the publication of this book, and the early 1900s saw some of the worst violence from the Klan, which lasted until well after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The Klan also still exists today, although it is nowhere near as popular or actively violent as it used to be. However, the Klan's continued activity demonstrates that Washington's vision of a racially harmonious future has not been realized to the extent that he claims.

CHAPTER 5: THE RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD

Washington defines the Reconstruction Period as the time between 1867-1878, which is also the time that he spent as a student at Hampton and teaching in Malden. He says that the period was governed by two major concerns for black people—first, a pursuit of Latin and Greek education, and second, a desire to run for political office.

Washington greatly disapproved of both of these concerns, as he felt that Greek and Latin education was useless to poor black Americans and that black Americans were not socially or educationally "developed" enough to run for office.

While Washington feels that the desire for education was noble, he believes that newly freed black Americans had no "proper conception" of what constituted a true education. According to Washington, most black people deemed Greek and Latin learning a marker of superiority, and education in general was seen as a means by which to be freed from labor.

Washington wished to instill the opposite ideology of these beliefs. He believed that black people should prove their worth as a working class first before they moved on to "higher" pursuits like Greek and Latin. He also detested that some black Americans were trying to avoid a life of labor, and felt that these people were simply being lazy. Western educational practices, however, still greatly valued Greek and Latin education and book learning, and used such an education as a mark of class and social status. Thus it is understandable that many black Americans wished to pursue that type of education in order to uplift themselves.

Washington states that most black people who received an education found work in either education or the ministry. Although some of these educated black Americans were excellent practitioners of their profession, Washington implies that most of them were no better off than their pupils or congregations. Some teachers could not even write their names.

Washington is deeply critical of black teachers because in his eyes, many black Americans pursued teaching simply so that they would not have to work in the fields. Since the institution of slavery connected labor with degradation, it is indeed true that many black Americans sought professions outside of manual labor during Reconstruction. However, it is quite a cynical conclusion of Washington's that most people wanted to be trained in teaching not to help poor black Americans or promote equal education (or simply because they enjoyed teaching or found it fulfilling), but to avoid labor as a result of laziness.

The ministry was no better off than the teaching profession. According to Washington, many newly educated black men would receive a "call" to preaching soon after they learned to read. In Washington's town, the "call" consisted of a process in which the individual received the call while in church, the news of the call would spread through the neighborhood, and then the individual would publicly yield to or resist the call. Because so many people expressed interest in the ministry after receiving an education and the "call," the population of ministers in churches exploded. Some churches had as many as 18 ministers for 200 congregants. Washington cynically states that he never received such a call, despite his dedication to receiving an education.

Washington also was very critical of the ministry, and he felt that most black pastors simply went into the profession or received a "call" to ministry in order to avoid labor. In all of Washington's critiques of black leaders, he fails to recognize that labor was formerly used as a tool for the subjugation and humiliation of black people in slavery. Many black people felt that avoiding labor was thus a way of establishing subjectivity and personhood after slavery. Washington, however, attributes those who avoid labor with laziness. He is particularly harsh toward ministers in this critique, because he feels that they should be held to a higher moral standard than others, and the greatest moral duty, according to Washington, is proving merit through labor.

After expressing disdain for the amount of black Americans getting an education for what Washington feels were the wrong reasons, he likens the status of black Americans during this period to infancy. He says that black people depended on the Federal Government like an infant on its mother, which he sees as a natural relationship, since the government granted black Americans their freedom. Washington feels that the Federal Government failed, however, in not providing a proper means to an education for black people, and many of the problems that he listed above were directly related to this dereliction of responsibility by the government. Washington feels that if there would have been a proper education provided to black Americans, they could be in a completely different sociological and economic state than they are now.

The call for a Federally provided education is perhaps one of Washington's more liberal ideas. He does admit that the government didn't do enough in terms of educational provision after the abolition of slavery. Similarly, most liberal educational thinkers suggest that the project of the Reconstruction Era did not go far enough for the uplift of newly freed slaves. On the subject of education, Washington agrees—arguably going against some of his other more rigid ideas of success being only the result of merit and labor.

Washington suggests that Reconstruction policy in general involved setting up, through a series of political and economic mistakes, a temporary bubble of progress that would pop as soon as the "artificial" supports were removed. He also feels that his race was being used as a political tool to get white people elected to office, and that the political agitation of the time simply created more unrest and problems for black people. Rather than depending upon the Federal Government for aid and support, Washington suggests that black Americans focus on bettering themselves through thriving in their already existing industries and owning more property.

Washington pivots from his liberally inflected advocacy of Federal education to a more conservative view of the Reconstruction era. Many conservative politicians and thinkers at the time felt that the Federal government was creating artificial racial progress by forcing Southerners to bend to the ideals of racial progress through army occupation and legislation. Conservative thinkers believed that black people needed to pursue uplift on their own if they were to be successful in establishing themselves in white society after slavery.

The alluring draw of political office at the time even tempted Washington, but he resisted because he felt that his calling to education was much more significant. He feels that an education of "hand, head, and heart" is much more valuable than holding political office, for many politicians at the time could not even read and had questionable morals. Washington tells the parable of hearing many brick-masons building a house and calling out "Hurry up Governor!" When Washington enquired as to what they meant by "governor," he found out that one of the masons was once the Lieutenant Governor of the state. Washington also qualifies his detraction of politicians by suggesting that although most politicians were unsavory, some politicians were noble people of good morals.

Washington believed that becoming a politician would be too far removed from the reality of race relations in the U.S. Washington distrusted any profession that did not advocate labor, especially ministers and politicians. Washington also held the conservative view that many black people were unprepared for office, and that they would surely ruin the country if they were to get elected because they did not have the experience or education to work in government. This view is certainly problematic, but Washington believed that black people must prove their worth in labor before moving forward to higher positions.

Because of the many "mistakes" committed by black people during Reconstruction, Southerners at the time of Washington's writing felt that such mistakes would be committed again if black people were again placed in positions of power. Washington argues the contrary—that black Americans have progressed greatly since Reconstruction and that the mistakes committed were natural to a race held in subjugation by slavery. Washington proposes that the true solution to the "race problem" is that each state needs to ensure that the law is applied fairly and equally to people of both races.

Around the turn of the century when Washington was writing, the practice of lynching as well as the infamous Jim Crow laws were in effect. The justice system often worked against black Americans, turning a blind eye and often even participating in the murderous lynchings. Many Southern laws were also constructed to prevent black Americans from owning property or voting, two rights Constitutionally guaranteed to them. Washington believed that the fair application of the law would ameliorate many racial issues.

At the end of Reconstruction in 1878, Washington decided to go to Washington D.C. for eight months to study. The institution at which Washington was studying did not promote industrial education, and despite the students' nice clothes, financial security, and academic superiority, he felt that the students at Hampton had an advantage over those at this school because they were taught self-reliance through labor. Although the students at the D.C. school were materially better off, Washington feels that Hampton's focus on the industries and labor provided a more well-rounded education.

Washington often uses foils, or constructed opposites, to demonstrate the virtues of his ideology. In this case, the D.C. school serves as a foil to Hampton. The school in the capital was materially and academically superior, but Washington thinks that the distinguishing factor of excellence that propels Hampton over this other school is self-reliance through labor.

Many black Americans saw Washington D.C. as an ideal place to live, Washington claims. Since a few African Americans held government positions, and the city had a large black population, black people enjoyed a life of relative easy and protection of the law. However, Washington felt that a great deal of these people were focused on superficial elements of life, and this morally bankrupted many of them, as they did not value labor and hard work.

Again, Washington sees some of the value of D.C.'s social environment, but he is critical of its perceived lack of appreciation for the value of labor.

To demonstrate this, Washington tells the parable of girls who would grow up working as laundry women with their mothers. However, after eight or so years of education, they would desire more things—nice hats, shoes, and clothes—but they would not have the means by which to provide those things. Washington feels that book learning is still valuable to them, but these girls would have been better off if they would have studied how to perfect the laundry industry as well.

Washington uses this parable to confirm that his educational ideology is the correct one—that book learning must be paired with industry if students are to find economic success. What Washington does not mention, however, is that his educational philosophy actually privileges labor over book learning. To him, studies are secondary to labor.

CHAPTER 6: BLACK RACE AND RED RACE

During Washington's time in the nation's capital, his home state of West Virginia was engaging in a debate of whether to move the capital from Wheeling to Charleston. Washington was asked to canvass the state in a group of representatives of the Charleston area, and after he accepted, his group was able to convince the state to move the capital to Charleston. During this time, Washington gained some local fame as a speaker, and he was tempted to enter political life, as he felt that his promotion of industry, labor, and thrift would help with the uplift of his people. He denied this temptation, however, because he felt that a political career would simply be "selfish."

This is one of Washington's first invitations to serve as a public representative, and his future opportunities will follow a similar pattern. He will accept the position with gratitude, fulfill his duty, and then return to his life work. Washington is adamant that he is not pursuing fame or fortune. He simply accepts such invitations to try to accomplish what he feels is the greatest good.

During this time, many young black men had aspirations to be lawyers and congressman, but Washington felt that there needed to be something done to prepare their way. Washington tells the parable of a slave who wanted to learn the guitar, and his master agreed only if the slave paid him three dollars for the first lesson, two dollars for the second, one dollar for the third, and a quarter for the last. The slave agreed, but said he wanted the last lesson first.

Once again, Washington advocates gradual racial progress through labor, not through the attainment of "high" societal positions—or through white Americans actually giving up their power and prejudices.

After Washington worked to move the capital in West Virginia, he was asked by General Armstrong to deliver the "post-graduate" address at Hampton's commencement ceremonies. Washington readily agreed, and on the way to Hampton he reflected on his original journey to the school as a student, and the hardships that he overcame to get there. On this second trip, he was able to ride the train the entire way directly to Hampton.

Washington will often return to places or positions that he originally had to struggle through in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of his theory of uplift. He wants the reader to know that his hard work is what has enabled him to return to Hampton unencumbered by the financial burdens that he encountered as a poor student.

Upon arriving at Hampton, Washington received a warm welcome. He was very impressed that the school had further developed its industrial curriculum, and he felt that the institute was even closer to fulfilling the needs of black Americans than it had been five years before when he had been in school. Washington was also impressed that the students were not required to fit an abstract educational mold, but rather they were focused on meeting the needs of their communities through the development of industries.

Washington adopts much of his personal educational philosophy from Hampton, so many of these ideas will recur later in the narrative when he discusses the educational philosophy of Tuskegee.

Washington's address was well received, and once he returned to Malden, he was surprised by a letter addressed to him from General Armstrong asking him to return to Hampton as a teacher. Washington believes that a large factor in this invitation was that his students from Malden that attended Hampton were always well prepared, and often enrolled in advanced classes immediately.

Washington tries to highlight that his new position was granted to him because of his merit as a teacher, not because of his relationship with General Armstrong or any other factors.

Around the time that Washington was invited to teach at Hampton, General Armstrong was trying a new "experiment" of educating Native Americans at Hampton. While most people felt that Native Americans could not benefit from an education, Armstrong was eager to include them in his educational project. He found some of the most "wild" Native Americans from the Western territories and put them under Washington's charge. While Washington felt torn because of his love for his work in West Virginia, he felt that he could not deny any request of Armstrong, so he immediately accepted the offer.

These following passages demonstrate the complexity of American race relations at the end of the 19th century. Although Native Americans were systematically murdered and forced to move out to the Western territories, most white Americans felt that Native Americans were still racially superior to black Americans. Native Americans were seen as sort of an "in between" race in comparison to black and white people. They were still often subject to harmful racial stereotypes, but they were held as a better or more valuable race than blacks.

Washington's residence at Hampton was with 75 Native American youths, and he was in charge as the "house father." At first he was doubtful because he felt racially alienated from them. Washington thought that Native Americans felt superior to the white man and to the black man especially, because the black man's submission to slavery was a cultural taboo for Native Americans. However, Washington was soon completely trusted by the Native Americans because he treated them like human beings. The only things that they resented were giving up cultural traditions like long hair and smoking, but Washington suggests that these sacrifices are a necessity, since white Americans will not respect anyone until they act, dress, and speak like them.

Washington espouses a very conservative political ideology in this passage. He suggests that assimilation to white norms, not amalgamation or the blending of cultures, was the proper way to achieve racial uplift. Washington believed that it was necessary to adopt and perform the ideals of white society in order to achieve true racial harmony—essentially, minorities need to change to fit white society's views, rather than white society changing to accept other cultures as they are. This belief seems rooted in Washington's assumption that what white society calls "civilized" and "respectable" is the objective ideal of these qualities, not something relative to culture and time.

After the language barrier was surmounted, Washington found that the Native Americans had similar interests to black Americans, especially in trade education. Black students widely accepted the Native Americans at the school despite a small minority that protested their admission. Washington wishes that white students would engage in the same type of acceptance, because the increase of true social value is found in the lifting up of others and the relative uplift of all civilization. To Washington, white students are doing themselves an educational and personal disservice by excluding those of other races.

It is not wholly surprising that Native Americans and black Americans had similar interests. After all, they were both politically, economically, and socially oppressed by the white majority. Once again Washington emphasizes the value of trade education.

This problem of racial segregation reminds Washington of an instance in which former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass was forced to ride in a luggage car despite the fact that he paid an equal amount to his white peers who were allowed to sit in the passenger car. When these peers came back to comfort Douglass, they found him sitting tall and proud, and claiming that the true degradation was upon those enforcing such horrible segregation.

Washington interprets this story of Douglass to mean that black people should not feel degraded by immoral racist practices, because dignity and poise is found internally. Washington also repeatedly insists that racism hurts white people more than black people because it degrades their moral character. He generally excludes the economic, political, and psychological harms of racism in such discussions.

Washington tells another story of a man who was so light skinned that the train conductor could not tell if he was black or white, although the man was sitting in the blacks only section of the train. The conductor examined him for a long time, looking at his hair, eyes, and other features, but once he saw the passenger's feet, the conductor promptly decided that he was black, and allowed him to continue sitting in his seat. Washington is greatly amused by this story.

White society used all sorts of absurd measures to determine someone's race. Many states adopted the "one-drop rule," which said that anyone with black ancestry anywhere in their family tree should be considered legally black. These types of racial qualifications were founded in a view that race is determined by biological makeup, a view that is debunked by scientists today.

Washington continues, saying that the measure of a true gentleman is in his treatment of members of a less fortunate race. To demonstrate this, he tells a story of a black man tipping his hat to George Washington, and George Washington returning the gesture. When his friends were appalled at his action, Washington replied that he would not let some "poor, ignorant" black man be more polite than he.

This appeal to authority is a questionable logical move for Washington, as he appeals to the founding fathers for authority on racial equality. Washington does not mention that General Washington, along with many other founding fathers, was a slave owner.

During Washington's time with the Native American boys at Hampton, he experienced the importance of racial caste in American society. For example, one Native American boy became ill and needed to return home to his reservation, and Washington escorted the boy to the nation's capital. On the steamboat, Washington and the boy went up to the dining room after most of the patrons had dined. Despite their similar complexions, the Native American boy was allowed in the dining room and Washington was not.

This passage demonstrates the arbitrariness of American racial ideology in the 19th century. Although Washington and this Native American boy looked very similar, Washington was denied access on account of his blackness.

Likewise, even black foreign nationals received different treatment than black Americans. Washington tells the story of a Moroccan black man who attempted to stay at a local hotel and was denied a room because he was black. Upon finding out that he was Moroccan, however, the hotel gladly accepted him.

Once again, American racial ideology in the 19th century was largely arbitrary and had blurred lines of application. Unfortunately, the absurdity of situations like this was usually lost on the people actually perpetuating racist ideas and systems.

After Washington's work with Native Americans for a year, another position opened up at Hampton as a night-school teacher. General Armstrong wanted to provide an educational opportunity for those too poor to attend Hampton, so he developed a system in which pupils would work for ten hours out of the day and attend school for two hours each night. Their compensation would be just above their room and board. After one or two years in the night school, they would be allowed to enroll in the day school and pay for it with the extra money from their night-school labor.

This night school provides Washington with a model by which to form his night school at Tuskegee. In fact, Washington adopts some of the exact same specifications from Hampton for the Tuskegee night school.

Washington was placed in charge of the night-school, and he loved the job. According to him, his students would labor happily and hard during the day and would only stop studying at night when the lights out bell rang. He admired their work ethic and even nicknamed their class "The Plucky Class." Almost all of the students found success upon completion of the program, and at the time of Washington's writing, Hampton's night school had multiplied from its initial twelve students to three or four hundred.

Like his work at the night school in Malden, Washington appreciates that the school values labor above all else. Students are forced to demonstrate their worth through hard work, and Washington feels that this is an excellent way to test student merit.

CHAPTER 7: EARLY DAYS AT TUSKEGEE

In May of 1881, a transformational opportunity was presented to Washington. One night after Hampton's chapel, General Armstrong approached Washington about a letter that he had received from Alabama asking for recommendations for a principal to lead a new "colored" school in the town of Tuskegee. Although the men expected Armstrong to recommend a white man, he approached Washington about the position. Washington gladly accepted and waited to see if the men would accept a black man for the job.

Washington explicitly mentions that the people in Tuskegee were looking for a white man, thus highlighting his belief that his merit erased whatever racial prejudices the search committee had in their qualifications for a new teacher.

After waiting several days, Armstrong received a telegram accepting Washington as the new principal. Washington and the faculty, students, and staff of Hampton were elated, and he immediately began to prepare to move to Tuskegee. He spent a small amount of time in his home town of Malden, and then made the journey down to Alabama.

Another recurring event in Washington's narrative is the community celebration of individual success. Washington always includes the celebration of his accomplishments by his community, to show that the community valued his hard work and recognized the uplifting power of his merit.

Washington found Tuskegee to be a small town of about 2,000 people, of which about one half were black. In the county around Tuskegee, black people outnumbered white people by three to one. Washington mentions that Tuskegee is in the "Black Belt," which he defines as the geographical region distinguished by both the color of the soil and the large black population brought there by slavery.

"Black Belt" is a relatively contested term in geographical and sociological circles. Some people argue that the term only refers to the color of the fertile soil of the area. However, because of the region's agricultural fertility, many slaves were sold to this area of the country to work the land. Thus others feel that "Black Belt" is a racially charged term to describe this region. As a result, the term has adopted a sort of a double meaning.

Washington felt that Tuskegee was an ideal place for the school. It had a large black population that was "ignorant," but had not fallen to the vices of people in the lower classes of large cities. The white people of the town were also more cultured than most Southern whites, because the town was once a center for white education. Because of this, Washington found race relations to be relatively peaceful in the town. Tuskegee's largest business, the hardware store, was even jointly owned by a black man and a white man.

Washington deeply admires the white Southerners in and around Tuskegee, and he highlights their "cultured" nature to show that not all Southern white people are racist and vicious. Of course, he also sets a rather low moral bar for white Southerners in this case, but that's because racism in the South at the time is so prevalent that it's usually assumed.

Washington learned that the people of Tuskegee had asked the state legislature for some money to educate themselves, and the legislature had granted $2,000 as a yearly educational supplement. However, the money could only be used to pay teacher salaries, so it could not be applied to school materials, land, or buildings. Although Washington felt that the task of actually starting a school seemed impossible, the black people in the town were very encouraging and supportive.

Monetary issues re-enter Washington's narrative here, and they will continue to plague Tuskegee until after Washington's Atlanta Exposition Address many years later. Washington is also highlighting that black Americans deeply value education and are supportive of his endeavor.

Washington's first priority was to find land on which to open the school. He found a small shack near the black Methodist church in town, and he immediately began teaching there. The building was in such poor shape that if it rained during the school day, an older student would have to put down his lessons in order to hold an umbrella over Washington so that he could continue teaching.

Washington includes the details about the dilapidated nature of the building in order to highlight how exponential Tuskegee's growth was. Washington wants to show that labor can create an entire institution from a broken down shanty.


The people of the town of Tuskegee were deeply interested in political matters, and they wanted to ensure that Washington was one of them politically. One man who was put in charge of this task asked Washington to vote how they voted, which was always the opposite of the white men in the town. However, Washington felt that this type of practice was misguided, and he is happy to report that the practice is diminishing in the area as he is writing. He believes that voting from "principle" is the only way to vote.

As already discussed, Washington was rather conservative in his political ideology. He believed that it was foolish for black Americans to vote based on their racial interests, and rather black Americans should simply vote based on the merit of the candidates.


The first month that Washington spent at Tuskegee, in June of 1881, was spent traveling through Alabama to observe the actual life of black Americans in the state as well as to advertise his school. Washington relished this opportunity to engage with the real and everyday life of the people.

Wherever Washington travels, he attempts to see the "actual" life of the people. Since his educational philosophy highlights meeting needs as they occur in the community, he feels that it is very important to engage with that community before developing a curriculum.

In the plantation districts, Washington found that most families slept in one room, and that there was no place to bathe in most of the houses. Most families also survived off of fat pork and corn bread, and despite the rich soil around them that could have supported many crops, Washington observed that they only planted cotton, sometimes so much cotton that it went right up to the door steps. The cabins also usually had one expensive item, often a sewing machine or a clock, that the inhabitants would buy on credit and pay back in monthly installments despite the family's meager income. One family even had purchased an organ, but only had one fork, which the entire family had to pass around and share.

Like in his discussion of the homespun cap that his mother made him in his childhood, Washington feels that material items are of no use if people lack morals and merit. Washington was shocked by what he saw as the backward priorities of some of these families. He thought that many of their practices were wasteful and thriftless, which in his eyes contributed to their poverty. This is a very limited view (as it ignores the fact that labor doesn't make everyone happy, and sometimes these "extravagances" do), but it fits with Washington's general ideology.

Although Washington was regularly treated with the hospitality of a sit down dinner, this was not regular protocol for the families in the plantation district. Often at the homes he visited the wife would get up and cook breakfast in a skillet, and the husband would pick up his breakfast and walk to the fields while the children would eat directly out of the skillet or eat while running around in the yard. After this, the whole family would proceed to the cotton field, and the later meals were taken in the same way.

Washington felt very strongly that black families should emulate the practices of upper class white families. He wanted black families to sit down to dinner together at the same time each day with a properly set table, to foster organization in the household.

This type of schedule was repeated daily, except for on Saturday and Sunday. Saturday the family would go to town to "shop," and although they had little to no money, they would spend the entire day in town, sitting around or talking with the other families. Sunday was spent in church.

Like other family practices that Washington observed, he felt that these weekend practices were wasteful and contributed to poverty.

As for the rural schools, Washington found that they were all in disrepair. The black communities were largely in debt and the state provided no money for education, so the schoolhouses were in shambles. Most did not even have means by which to heat the school in the winter. Many of the teachers were also ill prepared. Because of these abysmal conditions, the schools were only open for 3-5 months per year. Washington also states that the churches and ministers were in a much similar condition to the schools and teachers.

The lack of state subsidized education in the South was a big issue for many black Americans in the South after the Civil War. Without access to free public schools, black Americans had little chance to educate themselves and achieve economic independence. Washington recognized this and knew that education needed funding to succeed.

While Washington feels that the conditions of rural Alabama were abysmal, he both recognizes the cause of these conditions and states that some people in this region provided "encouraging exceptions." He tells the story of one man who was sold to Alabama from Virginia during slavery. When asked how many were sold with him, the man replied "myself and brother and three mules." Washington claims that his purpose in describing the struggling families of rural Alabama is to show the depths from which the region rose with the help of the Tuskegee Institute.

This story by Washington demonstrates the mental effects that slavery had on many newly freed black Americans. Since they were considered chattel, or property, during slavery, many people internalized such views and struggled to uplift themselves socially or economically.

CHAPTER 8: TEACHING SCHOOL IN A STABLE AND A HEN-HOUSE

After traveling the countryside and seeing the awful conditions of the people, Washington felt deeply discouraged. To Washington, his travels confirmed the idea that a traditional New England education that is focused on book learning would not be appropriate or sufficient for the people of the region.

Washington's conclusion that black Americans need industrial education and not book learning was practical, but short sighted. While black Americans were empowered to make a living economically, Washington's industrial education did not prepare them to fight the rhetorical and legal battles against political and judicial subjugation that prevented black Americans from participating fully in American society for decades after this narrative was written. More generally, it also ignored the individual human pleasures and value to be derived from "book learning."

After conferencing with the citizens of Tuskegee, Washington set the opening day of the Institute for July 4, 1881. White and black citizens alike were quite interested in the school, but white citizens were skeptical of the education of the black citizens because they thought it might foster disunity between the races. They felt that the more that black citizens are educated, the more that they lose their economic value. These people had an image of an educated black citizen as a fancily dressed man in a high hat who "was determined to live by his wits" rather than his labor. It was difficult for the white citizens to imagine anything else.

The idea that the education of black Americans was a waste of time has its roots in slavery. Many slave masters felt that education and literacy were not only wasteful but dangerous, as they gave slaves ideas of freedom and equality that the slave owners believed were not applicable to slaves, since they were not seen as fully human. This idea transferred over to the post-Civil War era, in which many white Americans still felt that black Americans were meant to be a laboring class that did not need education.

Washington says that he relied on two men in particular at the beginning of the school. These two men, Mr. George W. Campbell and Mr. Lewis Adams, were the citizens who originally wrote General Armstrong requesting a teacher in Tuskegee. Mr. Campbell was a former slave owner and Mr. Adams was a former slave, but Washington claims that they were two noble men who worked hard for peaceful racial relations in Tuskegee. He often solicited their advice and support.

Washington is usually quick to point out that some of the men who helped him achieve success were former slave owners. He believes that their prejudice was largely abolished by the time that he interacted with them, and he sees them as great men of high society.

Washington particularly admired Mr. Adams, who was an unschooled mechanic that also knew the trades of harness-making, tin smithing, and shoemaking from his bondage in slavery. Washington believes that Adams' mental prowess was developed by his ability to learn multiple trades, and that more generally the most reliable black Americans were those who learned a trade during the time of slavery.

Washington's idea that slavery served as an empowering tool for learning trades is extremely problematic, in that slaves were forced *to learn such trades, often at the threat of violence or death. Such an institution is not as fortuitous as Washington makes it out to be.*

On the first morning of operation for the school, about 30 students showed up, and Washington was the only teacher. Many more students were interested in the school, but Washington decided to only take those who were above the age of 15. Many of the students were actually public school teachers, some even nearing the age of 40. However, many of the younger pupils surpassed the ability of the older teachers. Washington criticizes these teachers, saying that they placed more value in high-sounding subjects like Greek and Latin than practical education. He says that they felt self-important if they could name the long title of a book that they had read. The longer the title, the more important they felt.

This passage reaffirms Washington's implication that many black teachers simply were in the profession to avoid labor. He clearly finds little pleasure or value in Classical education or any kind of "book learning," and so assumes that these endeavours are inherently inferior to vocational education in which Washington himself finds pleasure and value.

To demonstrate the backwardness of some of these teachers, Washington tells the story of a young man who was covered in filth and grease, with weeds all around his cabin, sitting in the middle of his cabin reading a French grammar book.

To Washington, such a picture is tragic, as it represents a disconnection with material reality and a backwardness of priorities. But in another view, one that values whatever the man is getting out of his study of French, this story could even be inspiring.

While most of the students were interested in subjects like grammar, banking, and mathematics, few of the pupils actually applied such principles to their lives. Most students did not even have a bank account or a bank in their hometowns. Some students did not even have a middle name, and they just adopted an initial that did not stand for anything, because they thought it made them look distinguished. Washington believes that most of these types of students were just getting an education to make more money as public school teachers.

Once again, Washington is questioning the purity of these students' motives and he thinks that they were simply trying to avoid labor. While Washington believes that the accumulation of wealth was an indicator of merit, he also believes in the sincere moral value of labor and overcoming as many obstacles as possible—thus making money quickly and easily is not seen as a positive thing for him.

In spite of the difficulties with these types of students, Washington claims that most of the students were hard working and quite willing to learn. Washington set out to correct them, so he accompanied lessons like African geography with practical lessons like where to place silverware at the dinner table. Washington even had a student who had been studying the cube root and banking but did not know his multiplication tables. Washington had to encourage him to learn the fundamentals first.

Washington is reaffirming that all education should have some connection to real community needs. To Washington, education must have practical application or it is useless.

Each week at the Institute brought more and more pupils, and after one month Washington had 50 pupils total. However, most of them could only stay for 2-3 months and wanted to accelerate their education to get a diploma during that time.

Many students were unable to take 9 months off of work in order to get an education. Washington respected some of their ambitions, but he felt that many students were trying to get a diploma for superficial reasons, not for personal betterment and community uplift.

After a month and a half, a new face appeared at the school. Miss Olivia A. Davidson, Washington's future wife, showed up looking for work as an instructor. Davidson was born and raised in Ohio, but she worked as a teacher in Mississippi and Memphis. Washington tells the story of a time when one of Davidson's pupils came down with the small pox, and no one would go near the student in fear of infection. Davidson, however, sat by the boy's side and nursed him back to health. When the city of Memphis had an outbreak of yellow fever, Davidson was one of the first to volunteer her services as nurse. Her experiences as a teacher and nurse in the South showed her that black Americans needed more than just book learning. They needed a more practical education.

Washington tends to romanticize those in his life who he respects. He thus portrays Miss Davidson as a selfless and devoted laborer for the cause of gradual racial uplift. Even when he suggests that her labor practices are unhealthy and physically harmful, he still lauds her work ethic. He engages in the same type of romanticization of other figures like General Armstrong and President Cleveland.

Davidson was educated at Hampton, and upon graduating Hampton she pursued further studies at a black school in Massachusetts with the help of a donor from New England. While in the North, someone remarked to her that she was so light skinned that she could pass as white in order to have an easier life. She replied that she would never deceive anyone on account of her color. Washington deeply admired her honesty, grit, and determination. He credits her with laying the foundations of the Tuskegee Institute.

The practice of racial passing was relatively common in the 19th and early 20th century. Since many black Americans were light-skinned due to a traumatic history of sexual assault in and after slavery, they were able to pass as white or as another race in order to avoid racially oppressive treatment. Washington seems to dislike such a practice, however, and he implies that it is dishonest.

Washington and Davidson both agreed that hygiene, cleanliness, and industrial education should all be key aspects of the curriculum at Tuskegee. Since many of the pupils came from farming districts, they wanted to teach these pupils not only how to provide education to others but also how to farm more effectively and efficiently. Washington and Davidson wanted their pupils to be moral, spiritual, educational, and practical leaders.

Once again, Washington emphasizes what he sees as the importance of practicality in education.

The scope of such an education was overwhelming to Washington and Davidson. They only had a small shanty, fifty students, and two instructors, but they were growing quickly. However, they saw, as they traveled through the countryside, that their efforts for uplift were finding a relative degree of success in the rural communities. Despite this, many students still came to Tuskegee to get an education that would supply them with a life of ease, free from labor. To illustrate this, Washington tells a parable of a man who was working in the cotton fields of Alabama during the summer, and he was so hot and tired that he decided that he was "called to preach."

Washington's ultimate goal in his educational project was to see the rural communities of Alabama transform into uplifted and "civilized" communities. Throughout the narrative, he will continually return to this idea, and he will measure the success of the Institute by the degree of transformation in surrounding rural communities.

In the midst of Washington and Davidson's anxiety, and about three months after the opening of the school, an old plantation went up for sale just outside of Tuskegee. They felt that this plantation would be the perfect site for a permanent establishment of the Institute, but they had no money. They were able to strike up a deal with the owner in which they paid $250 down and paid the remaining balance in installments. To get the initial payment, Washington appealed to the treasurer of Hampton, General J. F. B. Marshall, who lent him the money personally. Washington felt a great burden from the loan, for he had never had more than $100 in his hand at one time. He was determined to pay it off as soon as he had the means.

Washington often leans on the help and generosity of his contacts and community for his success. Although he frequently claims that Tuskegee's success was only a result of the hard work of himself and his students, he often gets quite a lot of help from those around him, including his rich white contacts from Hampton. To a certain degree, Washington's accomplishments are inaccessible to other poor black citizens because his accomplishments are largely contingent upon the support of others.

Washington moved the school onto the plantation as quickly as possible. The farm was already equipped with a cabin, a stable, a kitchen, and a hen house. The school eventually had so many pupils that Washington had to clean out the hen house to make more room. Most of the work done to prepare the plantation for school use was completed by the students in the afternoon. Many of the students resisted this requirement of labor, and in order to inspire their help, he would lead the way clearing land. They worked until they cleared 20 acres and planted a crop.

Some students were resistant to the idea of working on a plantation for their education, which was understandable since it was an image directly reminiscent of the degradation of slavery. However, Washington was determined that students' perceptions of labor would be transformed by his example.

While Washington was leading the students in the clearing of the land, Miss Davidson was planning on ways to repay the loan. She would hold festivals in which she would sell cakes or chickens donated by the townspeople of Tuskegee. Washington claims that the white families donated just as much as the black families. These festivals, however, did not raise a large sum of money. Some of the older black citizens could not donate much at all, and their donations were as small as five cents. Washington notes one donation in particular, from an old black woman, that was only six eggs. Washington says that this is the most touching gift that he ever received for the school.

Washington once again highlights the support white families offered to his educational project in order to show that white Southerners are progressive in their racial views—a controversial claim in light of social and political practices in the South at the turn of the century. The story of the old woman donating her six eggs also reflects a parable in the Bible, in which Jesus says that a woman who gives all her money—two small coins—has given a greater gift to God than all the rich men giving large amounts, but only a fraction of their actual wealth.

CHAPTER 9: ANXIOUS DAYS AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

As Christmas approached, Washington was able to get a clearer view of the private lives of the people of Alabama. Dating back to the times of slavery, Christmas was a special time for black Americans. They would get time off from working and engage in a week of festivities, including heavy drinking, shooting, and no work. Washington laments that the sacredness of the season seemed to be forgotten.

Washington, a firm believer in respectability politics, vehemently condemned such holiday behavior. Respectability as a political term is the idea that in order to find success or equality, black Americans or minorities must conform to the norms and behaviors of polite white society. Washington believed that respectability was a key aspect of racial progress.

Washington traveled to the plantation district during the holiday, and he was dismayed that some of the poorer families would spend whatever meager savings that they had in order to participate in the festivities. Sometimes families would split a whole pack of firecrackers, or they would be able to buy one small ginger cake for the entire family. Even ministers would partake in such festivities. Washington tells the story of a preacher who claimed that working was a sin, so this week of Christmas festivities was at least one week free from sin. Washington deeply disagrees with such sentiment, and he feels that these festivities were not only a waste but that they were immoral.

Washington uses this story to illustrate that often even the church is backward in its ideology and beliefs, which holds black people back politically and socially according to his labor-centric worldview.

Washington made a special effort to teach his students what he felt was the true meaning of Christmas and its religious significance. Washington would have his students serve the community and help minister to the happiness of others. He feels that he helped to transform the entire region's celebration of Christmas.

Washington was a devout Christian, and he was deeply disturbed that in many black communities, Christmas had lost its religious significance. He set out to correct what he saw was errant practice in these communities.

Washington claims that white citizens in Tuskegee expressed an explicit interest in the school because they were asked to contribute to the purchase of the land. Because of this, Washington says, the white citizens of Tuskegee are some of the Institute's strongest supporters. Washington believes that the white and black citizens of Tuskegee have a neighborly relationship

Once again, Washington is trying to demonstrate the virtue of white Southerners, especially those at Tuskegee. As in many other places, here he seems to be appealing to white readers, emphasizing their virtuous practices to eclipse the stereotype of the racist white Southerner.

After three months of fundraising, the school was able to secure enough money to repay General Marshall, and two months later it was able to pay the full five hundred dollars. Washington was greatly satisfied both by the speed and means of fundraising, since most of their money was raised by holding festivals and concerts.

Washington believed that credit and loans were only to be used if the person asking for money had the means to repay the lender. Therefore, whenever a loan is taken out for Tuskegee or for Washington himself, his narrative is focused on repaying it back as soon as possible to demonstrate his general honesty and thriftiness.

Washington's next aim was to grow enough crops to make a profit from their sale and to train more students in agriculture. They originally began growing just to have food, but Washington wished to perhaps make some money off of their agricultural products. This also benefited students who were too poor to stay in school for more than two or three weeks at a time, because it gave them means by which to make money while they were in school. Washington's goal was that all students would be able to pay their way through nine months of school each year.

Although Washington wanted all students to be able to attend school for an entire school year, he also wanted students to earn that privilege on their own. Thus he required students to work in the fields to demonstrate their work ethic and their merit while also earning money to pay for their education.

The first animal that the school got was an old blind horse that was donated. However, at the time of Washington's narrative, the school owns hundreds of different types of livestock, including, cow, pigs, and chickens.

Washington will often include brief asides such as this one to illustrate the scope of the Institute's rise from relative obscurity to one of the nation's best schools for black Americans.

Since the school was constantly growing, Washington felt that there was need to expand by building a large central building. However, the estimate for construction was about $6,000. Washington was overwhelmed by this sum, but he was determined to move the school forward. The community, upon hearing about the new project, helped out. One white man who owned a sawmill promised to provide all of the lumber to the school without taking any money up front. Although Washington did not have any money in hand, the sawmill owner still insisted on providing the lumber up front. Washington was elated.

Again, Washington's improvement of the school is largely dependent upon the generosity of others.

With this new project Miss Davidson resumed her fundraising activities. The black citizens contributed all that they could, with one man even donating two hogs. After they felt that the town was unable to give any more, Miss Davidson traveled North to solicit funds. She would visit Sunday schools and other organizations to try to piece together money. Sometimes she would even fundraise during her journeys, and her first gift was given by a woman that she met on a steam boat.

Washington sees fund raising as a key aspect of the work of the leadership at Tuskegee. They were largely dependent on rich white donors from the North who wished to donate toward institutions promoting black progress.

Washington deeply admired Davidson's work ethic. She would fundraise for months and then return to the school as an instructor and a principal. She also worked with the older people in Tuskegee and ran a Sunday School. Davidson would work so hard that she would fall asleep immediately upon sitting down. Davidson was so skilled at fundraising that when the school was required to pay $400 on short notice to a creditor, she was able to secure that exact amount in the same day from two donors in Boston.

Washington continues to romanticize Davidson here. He admires her work ethic, but ignores the problems that her work is causing to her health and well-being.

When the plans were drawn for the new building, the students began digging the foundation as soon as classes ended. Some students still were resistant to the work, but the ideals of dignity in labor were taking root in the students' minds. After a few weeks, the ground was prepared and ready for the laying of a cornerstone. Washington feels that this laying of a cornerstone was a significant occurrence because just a short time before, it would have been illegal to educate any black Americans. This is a tangible sign of progress, he says. The address for the cornerstone laying was delivered by the county Superintendent for Education, and the event was widely attended by both white and black citizens.

The laying of the cornerstone is a symbolic part of the construction process that is usually accompanied by some sort of ceremony or festivity. Washington's cornerstone ceremony symbolically represents the racially unified support of the school and its construction.

Washington felt a significant amount of pressure in the process of constructing the new building. Creditors were constantly sending him bills to pay, and many people doubted that his project was worthwhile. There were many people who doubted that educating black Americans was a worthy enterprise, and Washington felt that people were constantly waiting for him to fail. This burden caused many sleepless and anxious nights.

Here there is another "problem-struggle-solution."Washington has a twofold problem, that of raising the funds and motivating his students to work. His struggle is then the constant deadlines and the pressure of the racial expectations of his project.

However, despite his anxiety, the town of Tuskegee was extremely supportive of Washington. When he needed something, both white and black citizens would lend him immediate aid. One of Washington's mentors, Mr. George W. Campbell, also suggested that Washington should work to build strong credit for the institution. As a result, Washington worked hard to always pay his debts on time. He is proud that the Institute has kept high credit throughout the years, even up to the time of his writing. He also received aid from General Armstrong, who personally donated to the school.

This passage serves as the solution of the problem-struggle-solution paradigm described above. Once again General Armstrong acts as a personal "savior" and supporter of Washington's endeavours.

During the summer of 1882, Washington married Miss Fannie M. Smith from Malden, who was also a graduate of Hampton. In 1884, their one child, Portia M. Washington, was born. Washington says that his wife worked very hard for the school, but she passed away before she could see what it would become.

This is the only mention of Fannie in the narrative, and she figures as a minor character in Washington's account of his life. Washington focuses primarily on the development of his Institute and his own personal uplift, and his family plays little role in his selective narrative. His goal is to promote his ideology, not necessarily give a full account of his life.

CHAPTER 10: A HARDER TASK THAN MAKING BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

Washington wanted his students not just to learn agricultural and domestic work but also to learn how to erect their own buildings. He wanted them to find dignity and beauty in their labor as well as innovate new ways to engage in industry more effectively. Some people were opposed to having students build the school buildings because of their lack of expertise, but Washington insisted. He believed that students would learn self-reliance through the process, which in his perspective is the most valuable lesson that one can learn. Washington also felt that by requiring students to build their own buildings, they would feel a degree of ownership that they could not experience in poverty. Tuskegee ended up erecting four buildings with student labor, which, according to Washington, created a skilled labor force that spread throughout the South.

The ideas of self-help and self-reliance through labor are largely drawn from mid-19th century American Transcendentalist writers such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Washington is echoing these writers' ideals that the ultimate path to freedom and self-worth is finding self-reliance through labor. Washington is aligning himself and his educational ideology within this New England-based philosophy.

One of the most difficult experiences of building the school was the process of **brickmaking**. There was no brickyard in town, so the school was forced to try to make its own bricks. The work was difficult and dirty, and it often ended in failure if the kiln was too hot or improperly constructed. Some students even left the school because the process was too dirty and difficult. Washington tried three separate times to make bricks, and each time he failed. He was ready to give up because he was exhausted and had no money. However, he decided to try one more time and pawned a watch to get enough money to build another kiln. On the fourth try he found success in brickmaking. Washington credits his perseverance and hard labor in the process, and at the time of his writing, brick making has become a prominent industry at Tuskegee.

This is another example of the "problem-struggle-solution."The school's problem was that it did not have enough money to purchase bricks for the construction of the new building. Washington struggled to create the bricks himself, failing three times and almost giving up. However, Washington persevered and found a solution, which resulted in Tuskegee becoming one of the largest brick providers in the region. Washington is trying to illustrate that hard work can overcome any obstacle. Thus bricks and brickmaking come to encapsulate Washington's general ideology of labor and merit. Washington is also alluding to the biblical story of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt who were forced by the Pharaoh to make bricks without straw as a punishment for the prophet Moses's rebellion. Since straw is a key component of brickmaking—it helps to hold the shape of the bricks—this task was difficult and oppressive. Washington, by alluding to this biblical passage, suggests that the task of brickmaking at Tuskegee was even more difficult than the oppressive and almost impossible task of making bricks without straw.

Washington says that this process of **brickmaking** taught him an important lesson about race relations. Many white people who did not know about the school traveled to Tuskegee to buy their bricks. This economic contribution caused many white Tuskegee residents to feel that the education of black Americans was useful for society, which was the opposite of their original expectation. Furthermore, students who learned brickmaking at Tuskegee almost always were able to contribute to their communities at home. Washington believes that the merit of the brickmaking at Tuskegee erased some racial prejudice and animosity, and that regardless of race, a man's merit defines his true value to society.

Washington believes that the quality of Tuskegee's brickmaking demonstrates the industrial merit of the school, and thus helps to improve race relations in the area by demonstrating black excellence. Washington does not seem to consider that those purchasing Tuskegee's bricks may simply be using the Institute for its resources without changing their racist ideas or support of racist systems.

Washington continues, saying that Tuskegee's wagon-making industry has had a similar effect to **brickmaking**. These types of industries proved invaluable to white citizens, which ultimately proved the worth of black citizens, in Washington's eyes. Washington claims that any man, regardless of race, will find success if he makes himself useful to his community. Book learning, like Greek and Latin, are not useful to Washington; rather, brickmaking and wagon-making are industries that are practical and useful, and thus valuable to the uplift of black Americans.

Once again, Washington believes that the quality of Tuskegee's products helps to overcome racial inequality, which may or may not be actually true. Washington also takes another opportunity to disparage "book learning" as not "useful" to society or individuals—because he finds no use in it himself.

Around the time that they were finding success in **brickmaking**, Tuskegee was facing more opposition from students and parents regarding the requirement of students to labor. Parents would protest in person or through letters, requesting that Washington instead require Greek and Latin teaching. Washington pokes fun at these parents, claiming that they just wanted their students to read books with long titles. Washington always resisted such opposition from parents, and at every opportunity he would travel to try to demonstrate the value of industrial education. Despite the opposition, Tuskegee continued to grow in numbers.

Washington repeats some of his same criticisms of black parents and students who were wary of an education that heavily depended upon labor. He again seems to ignore the racial history of labor practices in the United States, and denies the value of "book learning."

In the summer of 1882, Washington and Davidson traveled North on a fundraising trip. Washington initially encountered resistance from an officer from a missionary organization who denied Washington any funds and told him to turn around and go home. Washington continued on his journey, and despite his initial setback, was able to raise enough money so that on Thanksgiving Day of that year, they were able to hold a service in a new chapel in Tuskegee.

Here is yet another "Problem-Struggle-Solution":Washington encountered a problem with the resistance of the officer of the missionary organization, but he continued to struggle in the North to fundraise. This problem was solved as Washington's perseverance secured enough funds to build a new chapel in Tuskegee.

Washington asked a white minister from Montgomery to deliver the Thanksgiving service, and most of the students and black citizens crowded the new chapel in amazement and pride. This convinced the white minister, Mr. Robert C. Bedford, to become a trustee of the school. Washington deeply admired Bedford in his willingness to serve at all times, regardless of personal comfort and pride. During this time, Mr. Warren Logan, a black man and the school's future treasurer, came from Hampton to Tuskegee. Washington credits much of the school's financial success to Mr. Logan.

By pointing out that the minister was white and that the treasurer was black, Washington is attempting to show that the merit of Tuskegee attracts donors and trustees of all races. He once again wants to show that proven merit erases all racial prejudice.

As soon as the part of the new building was completed, Washington decided to open up a boarding department. The school did not have many resources, and it did not even have a kitchen. They were able to build a kitchen by digging out the basement of the building to create a space to cook, prepare, and eat food. Although the space was small and uncomfortable, Washington says that it was functional.

The following passages concerning the construction of the new school building are an extended version of the problem-struggle-solution paradigm. The problem is twofold, both a lack of resources and a lack of specialized skills in the students.

The largest problem that the boarding department had, however, was the lack of furniture. The school did not have any money with which to purchase furniture and food. Some merchants allowed them to take food on credit, and they used carpenter's benches as tables. Also, the staff of the boarding department did not think that meals needed to be served at regular hours, so everything seemed off schedule and disjointed. There were also problems at every meal since the cooks were very inexperienced. The students were furious, and Washington was ashamed that he could not provide basic necessities for his students.

Regardless of the lack of resources and skills, the students still struggled to create a proper and comfortable environment. However, the students failed often and had to go without the comforts and necessities of furniture and regular meals.

However, through "patience and hard work," they were able to solve the problems of the boarding department at the school. Washington reflects upon this time at the school, and he feels glad that they went through such a struggle, as they are better off because of it. He says that if they would have started off with a fine dining room, the school may have become "stuck up." Washington claims that though students now see meals that are delivered in an orderly fashion in a nice dining room, they are also glad that they started where they did. Washington deeply values the growth evident in this transformation.

The "solution," as is typical in the narrative, is hard work and perseverance. Washington, despite his earlier shame in his inability to provide basic necessities for his students, thinks that students were better off for going through the struggle of having nothing. This type of struggle and solution reflects Washington's racial ideology as well, for he feels that black Americans need to struggle and deal with hardship before they are able to find success and ownership in society.

CHAPTER 11: MAKING THEIR BEDS BEFORE THEY COULD

A little bit after the early struggles of the Institute, some of Washington's mentors, including General Marshall, Miss Mackie, and even General Armstrong himself visited the Institute. By this time the school had become more established and organized, and there were many more students and instructors. All of the visitors were impressed and pleased at the quick progress of the school.

A large part of the education at Tuskegee was designed to serve as a model for visitors and the surrounding areas. Washington paid special attention to appearance and manner so that the school would always look presentable to whoever was visiting or inspecting it.

Washington describes how General Armstrong interacted with the Southern white men with deep compassion and care, which Washington did not expect, since the General fought against the South in the war. According to Washington, Armstrong reacted to all men with love, regardless of color or region. In fact, Washington suggests that Armstrong was as compassionate towards Southern white men as he was to black Americans.

Washington is romanticizing Armstrong here, much in the same way that he romanticized Miss Davidson. While he idealizes Miss Davidson's work ethic, with Armstrong he idealizes love, compassion, and strength of character.

Washington takes General Armstrong's behavior as a lesson that all great men are men who primarily express love toward their fellow man. To Washington, hate is a sign of inner weakness, and he says that because of Armstrong's example, he would let no man degrade him by making him hate that man. As a result, Washington is as willing and ready to help white Southern men as is he ready to serve black men. He pities anyone who holds hatred in his or her heart, especially race prejudice.

This passage connects to Washington's story about Frederick Douglass refusing to be degraded by sitting in the luggage car of a train. Washington reiterates his belief that racism and racial prejudice hurt white people more than black people.

Washington believes that any white man who engages in race prejudice, such blocking black men from voting, is doing a greater disservice to himself than to the black men, because he is practicing dishonesty and hatred that will affect other parts of his life. To Washington, hatred is a disease that will spread if it is not eradicated. Washington also claims that General Armstrong's idea of the importance of an industrial education was spreading across the South, and many white educational institutions were adopting his ideals after seeing their success.

Washington continues to espouse the idea that racism is more hurtful to white people than black people. As usual, he perceives everything through the lens of individual responsibility and growth, along with the Christian worldview of embracing hardship in this life to ensure greater rewards in the next.

Students were still pouring into Tuskegee in hope of an education during this time, and the school had a difficult time accommodating them without any money or resources. The boarding department was able to rent a few cabins nearby, but the cabins were in such poor shape that students suffered greatly from the cold in the winter. Despite charging for board and tuition, the school could not make a profit off of the small earnings from students and thus could not provide them with basic comforts like a bed, bed sheets, or proper clothes. Washington was deeply disturbed by this, and often he would lose sleep thinking of the students' discomfort. However, despite the dismal conditions, very few of the students complained. In fact, Washington says that the students were more concerned about alleviating the teachers' discomforts and burdens than their own.

This passage can be a bit confusing in comparison to other of Washington's commentaries about his students. He seems to divide his students into only two types. The first type is lazy, backward, and simply wants to get an education to avoid labor. The second type of student is hard-working, thrifty, selfless, and deeply compassionate. The latter is represented in this passage.

According to Washington, some people in the South believe that black Americans will not obey or respect one another if another black American is in charge of them. Washington believes that this is a fiction, as he has never been disrespected by any student or faculty member. In fact, the only discomfort he felt was that of embarrassment when students would serve him with random acts of kindness, such as students coming to his side with an umbrella when it was raining or carrying his books for him.

Washington continues to describe students of the generous and compassionate type, as discussed above.

Washington likewise never felt disrespected by any Southern white man. He describes a trip to Dallas in which at every stop on the train, white people would come onto the train just to introduce themselves and thank Washington for the work that he was doing for the South. Washington tells another story of when he was asked to sit with two Northern white women on a train full of Southern white men. Washington felt conflicted, as this was a cultural taboo in the South, but he felt that he must sit with the women. Rather than being greeted with rudeness, insult, or violence, he was greeted with good tidings and thankfulness from the men aware of his work in the South.

As already seen in the narrative so far, Washington is very hesitant to criticize any white Americans. He believes that criticism of white Americans usually only inflames racial tension, so he is slow to point out racial problems with white Southerners in particular and very quick to praise positive behavior. While this ensured that Washington was rarely in the midst of racial tension, it also ignored clearly present issues of racial subjugation in the South, and put the responsibility for overcoming racism on black *people, not the white people actually perpetuating and benefiting from a racist society.*

Washington goes on to claim that Tuskegee is not his institution, but rather it is an institution run for and by the students. He only wishes to be seen as a friend and adviser. He would regularly ask students for complaints and suggestions so that he could change the school to fit their needs, and he often would meet with students one-on-one to check in about their wellbeing. Washington feels that this is the true way to engage in leadership, and that many employer-employee troubles such as labor strikes or disputes could be solved if the employer interacted with his employees in the same way that Washington interacts with his students.

Washington again focuses on the type of student who is hard working and earnest in academic and industrial pursuits. He feels that his leadership style with these students is not only applicable to education, but it is also applicable to the public and economic spheres.

The issue with the lack of beds and bed frames was one that, despite the students' patience, needed to be solved. Students would have to make their own bed frames, and since they did not have great carpentry skills, the frames would often fall apart in the middle of the night. The mattresses were made of sacks stuffed with pine needles, because the school did not have the funds to purchase proper mattresses. However, at the time of Washington's writing, Tuskegee has developed a robust mattress-making industry that provides all of the Institute's mattresses.

This is another "Problem-Struggle-Solution":Washington continues to describe the problems he had furnishing the Institute. The students struggled together to make suitable bed frames and mattresses, but they often failed. However, after hard work and perseverance, the school was able to perfect its mattress making industry and provide proper accommodations for the students.

Similarly, the Institute began with students making chairs and tables for the classrooms, but they had little ability to craft strong furniture. By the time of the narrative, the students have strengthened their skills, and each room is fully furnished with well-made pieces.

This problem-struggle-solution paradigm carries the same construction as the example of the mattresses.

Although the school rarely had the resources it needed, Washington was adamant that the students value cleanliness. He particularly valued the toothbrush, which he felt was one of the most important tools for success. After hearing about how much Washington valued the toothbrush, many students would show up at the school with nothing but a toothbrush. Washington sees the toothbrush as a "civilizing" instrument because it demonstrates a daily concern for bodily hygiene. Students were likewise required to bathe regularly and sleep between two sheets. Washington also believed that appearance was extremely important, and students were required to keep their clothes in good condition with all of the buttons, no rips, and no grease spots.

Washington applied his promotion of the toothbrush during his time in Malden and Hampton to Tuskegee. Washington felt that the toothbrush was extremely important to "civilize" students and impress upon them the importance of hygiene. This type of policy fits into Washington's emphasis on appearance and promotion of "respectability" politics.

CHAPTER 12: RAISING MONEY

While the boarding department at Tuskegee was able to accommodate some of the students, the large number of incoming students proved to be too much to handle for the small number of facilities on campus. While Washington would send some of the boys to board in off-campus cabins, he did not feel comfortable exposing the girls to the dangers of living in such cabins. As a result, he resolved to build an even bigger building than the one before, one that could accommodate all of the living quarters for the incoming girls.

Whenever Washington accomplishes one goal, he usually starts another, larger project. His narrative is one that is not temporally linear, and he constructs his narrative so that his progress is foregrounded. There is a common construction throughout the narrative moving from uncivilized to civilized, or from squalor to success.

They decided to name the new building "Alabama Hall" in honor of the state that they were serving, and they estimated that its construction would cost ten thousand dollars. Miss Davidson immediately resumed fundraising in the Tuskegee area with both the white and black citizens. The students also immediately began digging the foundation, as they had for the first large building, Porter Hall.

Washington describes this project to highlight the fact that it's of a larger scope and more expensive than his former projects, and as a result he has larger obstacles to overcome in order for it to succeed.

But as was the case in with the fundraising for Porter Hall, the Institute soon ran out of local resources. Washington felt very anxious about where he was going to come up with the money, but he received a telegram from General Armstrong asking Washington to tour the North with him for a month as a speaker. Washington readily accepted and was greatly surprised when Armstrong informed him that all proceeds earned in that month of fundraising would be given directly to Tuskegee for the construction of Alabama Hall, with all of the traveling expenses covered. Washington felt that Armstrong was completely selfless in this sacrifice, and his actions served as a testament to his humble and kind character.

Here is another "Problem-Struggle-Solution." The problem of this passage is that Washington ran out of money once again. In fact, it seems that this passage follows a very similar construction to the problem-struggle-solution paradigm associated with the construction of Porter Hall.

Washington spoke in cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, and he and General Armstrong pleaded together for funding for Tuskegee. This served as an introduction of Washington to many Northern donors, and after their brief speaking tour ended, Washington went North alone to try to secure more funds.

The "struggle" of the three-part paradigm occurs as Washington tours the North, speaking to raise money for the school even after Armstrong returns to Hampton. The solution is that Washington is able to secure the proper funds from New England donors.

When people ask Washington about his secrets for fundraising, he says that he only gives two general principles. The first principle is to make sure that his work is properly known to all organizations and individuals, and the second is to not worry about the outcome. Although this second rule is perhaps the hardest, Washington has learned that keeping a calm demeanor and poise in fundraising is quite important, despite the stakes involved. In conjunction with these two principles, Washington says that his greatest principle is to forget personal interests in the interest of the work itself, which will ensure both that dutiful attention is given to the work itself and happiness is found in service.

Washington believes that selfless labor is the height of virtue, and he applies these same principles to his public speaking. He believes that speaking for the sake of speaking alone is wrong and a waste of time, but speaking to further one's work is both necessary and fruitful.

Washington claims that he has no time for those who condemn the rich for being rich or for not giving enough to charity. Washington argues that if wealthy people gave away all of their money, poorer people would be much worse off, because that would cripple business enterprises. Also, in Washington's opinion, rich people often give privately and humbly, so no one can properly condemn the rich for being greedy. Washington holds up two ladies in Boston who donated a great deal to the construction of Porter Hall, but whose names rarely if ever are recognized in print for their contributions.

As discussed above, Washington had very conservative political and economic views. He felt that the rich were rich because their virtue helped to get them money, and he felt that poverty was a sign of internal sin or character weakness. Washington's idea that the economy would collapse if the rich lost their money is called "trickle down economics," which is an economic perspective that suggests that if the rich get richer, the poor will benefit from the "trickle down" effects of that wealth. The efficacy of such a view is highly disputable, but Washington believed in it.

Washington, however, detests that some people call his fundraising "begging." He claims to never have begged for anything, and on the contrary, he simply states the facts of his case for the development of Tuskegee, which inspires donors to give generously. He believes that begging is undignified, but his way of fundraising is both dignified and effective.

Dignity is a key character trait for Washington, and he is deeply resistant to calling servitude or fundraising undignified because he felt that one can always find dignity in the humility of labor and hard work.

According to Washington, fundraising can also be taxing on one's physical and mental health, but it is worth it to come in regular contact with "the best people in the world." Washington believes that there are more and more men in the world who see the value in his work and who perceive him not as a beggar, but as an agent of change requesting assistance. Washington claims that in Boston, he is almost always thanked for *requesting* funds from an individual before he can even thank the donor for the monetary contribution. He believes that the rich of Boston, and of the North more generally, demonstrate the essence of Christian spirit in their generosity and kindness.

Again, Washington suggests that rich donors are some of the best people in society and the most virtuous, and he cherishes his time spent calling on them. He thinks that rich Americans are often more grateful for his contributions to society than he is for their monetary contributions.

Washington's fundraising journeys were not always easy, however. In the early days of the Institute, Washington would spend days meeting with potential donors without receiving a single dollar. In one case he traveled to a donor in Connecticut who potentially was interested in supporting the school, but after Washington presented his case, the man was interested but did not donate any money. However, two years later Washington received a message from the same man pledging ten thousand dollars to Tuskegee. Washington believes that this gift was a testament to his fulfillment of his duty and his steadfastness.

This is yet another Problem-Struggle-Solution. Washington's problem in this passage is that he was unable to secure funds during some of his fundraising trips. Nevertheless, he struggled and continued to meet with donors. According to his narrative, his hard work and patience paid off in the end in the form of robust monetary contributions.

Washington also felt a double burden as the leader of Tuskegee. He knew that if the school failed, it would not only be a failure for the students trying to attain an education, but it would also be a failure for racial relations. Many white Americans would look at the failure and assume that black education was a waste of time. So as Washington traveled to fundraise, these thoughts weighed heavily on his mind. Despite his anxiety and mental burdens, he felt that if he kept the school as a "clean" and "wholesome" institution, it would find success somehow.

Respectability politics reappear in this passage. In order to combat racist beliefs that the education of black people was a waste of time, Washington did not decry such beliefs as racist or illogical, but rather promoted a clean and wholesome institution. Washington believed that he could prove the merit of black education if he ensured that his institution was above reproach.

Washington, however, denies any presence of luck in the success of the school. He attributes all of its fundraising success as a result of hard work, perseverance, and grit. To illustrate this, he tells the story of a time in which he invited a distinguished pastor from New England to preach at the commencement ceremonies in Tuskegee, and just as the pastor began to speak, it began to rain. One of the students held an umbrella over the pastor, and the pastor was so impressed by the students at Tuskegee that he immediately acquired funds from his congregation for a new chapel at Tuskegee.

This passage highlights Washington's dependence upon the ideals of grit and perseverance. He downplays, however, the role that generosity and personal connections played in the building of Tuskegee. He wishes for his readers to believe in the doctrine of merit and hard work, so he highlights these principles in this passage.

Washington also solicited the famous philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, who initially was unimpressed with Washington's vision for Tuskegee. However, Washington was persistent and convinced Carnegie to provide a $20,000 donation for the school's library construction and costs. Washington believes that it was a combination of his business acumen and discipline that encouraged donors like Carnegie to give money.

Once again Washington suggests that hard work and perseverance ultimately bring success, even if that success is not immediate.

Although Washington spends time describing the large donations to the school, he also wishes to communicate that much of the school's success has come about through small donations. Such small gifts, many of which come from congregations and Christian societies, provide both monetary and spiritual support. Tuskegee graduates also almost always provide small contributions yearly after they graduate.

This passage highlights the importance of the community in the success of Tuskegee. Washington believes that the black and white communities both want to see the success of black Americans, so by highlighting small contributions to Tuskegee's success, Washington attempts to illustrate that progress is also brought about by widespread community support.

After Tuskegee's third year, Washington was surprised to receive money from three special donors. One donor was the Alabama State Legislature, which increased its yearly contribution from two to three thousand dollars, and later to even four thousand five hundred dollars. Second, they received money from the John F. Slater fund, which provided up to eleven thousand dollars annually. Last was the Peabody Fund, which increased its yearly donation to one thousand, five hundred dollars. Washington was able to secure these funds through the help of a wide variety of people, including an ex-Confederate soldier and a distinguished black doctor. Washington was particularly grateful for the help from the treasurer of the Slater Fund, who he says is devoted to the uplift of black Americans through industrial education both in the donations from his wallet and from his time and personal energy.

Washington is careful to point out that he has a diverse group of donors. The supporters of the school range from a conservative legislature to black doctors, to ex-slave holders. Washington tries to construe merit as a universal value that regardless of race, political ideology, or social position is appreciated and applauded.

CHAPTER 13: TWO THOUSAND MILES FOR A FIVE-MINUTE SPEECH

Soon after the opening of the boarding department of Tuskegee, there were a great number of applicants who were "worthy" in Washington's eyes but could not pay tuition. To solve this problem, Washington opened a night school much like the one that he helped to run in Hampton. The only students of the night school were those too poor to pay for the day school, and they were required to work ten hours a day and study for two hours at night. They were paid slightly above the costs of room and board, with the expectation that the extra money would go toward paying tuition for the day school after they graduated from the night school. At the time of Washington's writing, the night school has grown to have over four hundred pupils.

Washington felt that night school was an excellent way to test the grit and merit of poorer students, so it is no surprise that he continued the institution at Tuskegee. Washington enjoyed watching the night school students' progress, and he felt that they had a superior work ethic to some students in the day school.

Washington believes that the night school model is an excellent test of character for students pursuing education. The hard labor and long days were exhausting, so students who were able to survive the night school proved to Washington their true desire for an education and their willingness to labor. After students graduated the night school, they enrolled in the day school. The day school required four days of academic study and two days of trade study per week, with three months of industrial study during the summer. No students of either the day or night school were able to graduate without engaging in manual labor.

The institution of the night school also plays into Washington's class ideology, that the rich were rich because of their virtue and the poor were poor because of their vice. While this ideology is certainly not explicitly stated, Washington implies it through his constant praise for the rich and his rather constant criticism of the moral fortitude of the poor. Washington believed that the poor students had more to prove and thus had to pass through the test of the grueling trade of the night school.

Tuskegee also valued religious development in its curriculum. The school was non-denominational but actively Christian in its practice, training, and ideology.

In keeping with his Christian beliefs and ideals, Washington felt that spiritual training was an important part of a well-rounded education.

In 1885, Washington married Olivia Davidson, whose hard work in fundraising and teaching was foundational in establishing the Institute. During their marriage, Davidson continued her efforts at the school and divided her time between the home and the Institute. She even continued her fundraising trips to the North. She birthed two sons, Baker Taliaferro and Ernest Davidson, before she died in 1889. Washington attributes her death to exhaustion from her hard work and continuous labor for the school.

As discussed before, Washington idealized Davidson and her work ethic, and he uncritically suggests that she even worked herself to death. This passage is perhaps one of the most explicit passages concerning Washington's romanticization of those whom he admires, and of the ideal of constant labor.

Washington says that he is often asked how he began public speaking, and he claims that he never sought out a career as a speaker but that he was called by his duty to speak in front of people regularly. His first notable public speaking engagement was with General Armstrong for the National Education Association (NEA), which he claims is the beginning of his official career as a public speaker. Although his address to the NEA took place in the North, in Wisconsin, Washington refused to abuse the South in his speech about the status of black education in the South. Because of the "fairness" of his "general position" on race relations, Southerners and Northerners alike were delighted by his speech, and he became known for his perceived fairness in discussing American race relations.

Washington's caution to not criticize the South to Northern audiences earned him great respect among Southern whites. Many Southern whites at the time felt victimized by the North because of the Federal military occupation during Reconstruction and the largely Northern controlled Federal government. Washington's allegiance to the South, despite the South's abysmal record on race relations, helped him to become popular among most Southern whites and some Southern blacks.

Washington explains that his views on race relations come from his desire to call Tuskegee his home. He felt that if he were truly to become a Southerner, he needed to take pride in the same things that a white man would take pride in, and discourage actions that a white man would discourage. Washington decided that he would not say anything in the North that he would not say in the South. He believes that it is hard to convert people to his educational philosophy by being harsh towards them, and it is much more effective to praise their positive beliefs and behaviors.

Washington highly valued locality and community. He believed that everything in life, including education, social relationships, and economics depended upon healthy local relationships. Therefore Washington foregrounded concerns of the local over concerns of the racial. He felt that if he was going to find true equality, it was going to be through the establishment of strong community relationships.

Washington is quick to point out that this policy does not prevent him from calling out racial injustice in the South when he sees it. Rather, he feels that the North is not a proper context to criticize the South, and that he should only engage in such criticism when he is speaking in the South.

Again, Washington appeals to his allegiance to the South to defend its lack of criticism in his speeches.

Washington's address to the NEA in Madison consisted of appeals to black Americans to seek to improve and better their immediate communities, not to seek approval from those thousands of miles away in the North. He used Tuskegee as an example of such practice, citing an instance in which the Institute was able to figure out a way to multiply a sweet potato crop by five times per acre and teach that method to the surrounding community. White men in the surrounding areas were extremely grateful for this contribution. Washington doesn't think that black Americans should only be engaged in farming practices, however, but believes that the labor in being economically useful in the present will allow generations in the future to progress to greater things. Washington says that since this initial address, he has had no reason to change his perspective on race relations.

Washington is once again reiterating the importance of the local and of small communities. He is denying the presence of any national concerns of race, and he feels that most racial strife can be solved if it is treated in its individual and local contexts.

Washington says that in his early life, he used to feel bitterness to those who tried to suppress the political and economic progress of black Americans. Now, however, he says that he simply feels pity for those trying to stop the progress of others, because these people are on the wrong side of history and are acting out of their own lack of opportunity.

Here Washington repeats his belief that white people are more harmed by racism than black people are.

Washington's speech to the NEA gained him some degree of fame in the North, but Washington was eager to speak in front of a white Southern audience. He was given the opportunity to give an address to an international meeting of Christian Workers in Atlanta, and since the time allotted for his speech was only five minutes, Washington was unsure of whether to accept the invitation. But because the audience would consist of a rare mix of many influential white Southerners as well as a large portion of Northerners, Washington decided to accept the offer. Washington's speech was received well, and he felt that he had accomplished his goal of speaking in front of an influential white Southern audience.

Washington was eager to speak in front of a mixed crowd of Southerners and Northerners, because he deeply believed that his ideas of uplift through meritocracy would have universal appeal regardless of region, class, or race. Thus even though Washington would have to travel a great deal just to speak for five minutes, he felt that this opportunity was invaluable for testing out his social and educational ideology.

Because of his speech in Atlanta, requests for speaking engagements began to pour in. Washington took as many of these engagements that he could with his duties at Tuskegee. Washington's aim in taking these engagements was to promote his belief in industrial education for black Americans and to raise money for Tuskegee.

Washington wants to make it clear that he had no selfish ambition in beginning a speaking career. He claims that all of his engagements were directed toward the betterment of Tuskegee or of black people more generally.

One of these speaking engagements, delivered to the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, garnered Washington national fame and attention. In 1895 Washington received a telegram requesting that he accompany a delegation to meet with Congress in order to get support for the Exposition. Washington agreed, and delivered a speech to Congress claiming that the Atlanta Exposition could be used to encourage the intellectual and material growth of both races, and as a result ameliorate some racial tensions in the South. Washington told Congress that no political agitation could accomplish equality for black Americans, and that the virtues of property ownership, economy, and industrial skill promoted in the Exposition would be the true means of uplift. Washington's speech was well received, and Congress passed a bill to support the Exposition.

In his speech to Congress, Washington essentially summarized the ideals that he would present later in the Exposition address. Washington thought that the mixed-race and mixed-regional company of the Exposition would provide a chance for his racial and educational ideology to spread.

After the trip to Congress, the leaders of the Atlanta Exposition decided that there should be a building designed and built by black architects and builders to house a black exhibit that would highlight the progress of the race at the Exposition. Both the building and the exhibit were of high quality, and Washington says that those who enjoyed the exhibit at the Exposition the most were Southern whites.

Once again Washington tries to show the value and good character of Southern whites, and to demonstrate that they are truly interested in the rights and well being of black Americans. While some white Southerners, and Northerners as well, may have fit this characterization, Southern and Northern societies continued to legally, politically, and socially oppress black Americans openly for decades.

The leaders of the Exposition also suggested that a black leader should be selected to give one of the opening addresses of the Exposition as a sign of good faith, and they selected Washington. Washington felt a great deal of responsibility, since a few decades before he could have been a slave of many of the attendees to the convention. He felt that he needed to showcase the progress of the race, especially since this was the first time that a black leader was invited to speak on the same platform as prominent white Southern leaders to a crowd of largely affluent white Southerners. Washington knew that the content of his speech had to be very carefully selected, since he needed to be true to his beliefs but also not upset fragile racial relations and ruin the chance of another black man receiving the same invitation to speak in the future.

Washington certainly felt the tension of Southern racial relations at the turn of the century. If Washington would have engaged in "inflammatory" rhetoric calling for the immediate political and social equality of black Americans, he would have been removed from the stage, and violence would have been likely. If he had called for the outright submission of black Americans to white Americans, he would be labeled a traitor to his race. Washington had to balance an extremely precarious situation of opposing ideologies as he formed his speech, thus winning many supporters but also accumulating many detractors.

The newspapers before the speech intensified the atmosphere of tension, highlighting the high stakes of Washington's speech. Some Southern newspapers were even hostile to the idea of a black man speaking at the Exposition. Because of this tension, Washington was very nervous before the speech, and he prepared vigorously. His third wife, Margaret, helped him to edit his speech, and he even delivered it to Tuskegee teachers and students in order to get feedback and comments. This practice helped ease some of the tension, as the speech was well received by the students and staff.

This is the only time in which Margaret Washington is called by her first name in the narrative. Throughout the rest of the book, she is only called "Mrs. Washington," and appears as an aide and companion to Washington himself. The social and political rights of women do not seem to have been very important to Washington's ideology, as he once again takes a traditional, conservative viewpoint on the issue.

After much practice and revision, Washington, Mrs. Washington, and Washington's three children set out on September 17th, 1895 to Atlanta for the Exposition. Washington was very nervous, and along the journey, many people recognized Washington and discussed the high stakes of his speech. Upon arrival in Atlanta, he was greeted by a committee for the Exposition. The city was teeming with people for the Exposition, and the atmosphere was highly charged because of the gossip circulating about his speech as well as the inflammatory newspaper coverage. These pressures heightened Washington's nerves, and he did not sleep at all the night before his speech.

Washington is once more emphasizing the high stakes of his speech, building up to the speech itself. Washington's description of his nervousness serves to humanize him more, though, in contrast to his usual narrative of constant labor and subsequent success.

On the day before his speech, Washington continued to prepare and prayed to God to bless the content and delivery of his speech. Washington explains that his preparation for a speech is only focused on the needs of the audience. He does not care about how his words will be construed in the newspapers or their political consequences, for he is only concerned about his audience and its reception of his speeches.

This type of speech preparation fits with Washington's dependence upon community. Washington is relatively uninterested in political or social repercussions, for he is primarily interested in the reaction and reception of those immediately in front of him. His ideology of the importance of the local even transfers into his speech preparation.

On the morning of his speech, Washington was escorted to the Exposition grounds, and he was overwhelmed by the amount of people both inside and outside of the Exposition. There were so many people that thousands were waiting outside of the gates, unable to get in. Washington felt like he was going to collapse due to nerves and the heat.

Washington continues to build suspense, emphasizing the high stakes of the event before he actually describes the speech itself.

When Washington entered the room on the stage, he was met by loud cheers from black audience members and faint ones from white audience members. He was told that some white audience members were in attendance simply out of curiosity, and many thought that he would make a fool of himself. One of the trustees from Tuskegee that Washington brought along with him was so nervous that he refused to go into the venue, and he remained outside, pacing back and forth nervously until the opening ceremonies were over.

The racial stakes of Washington's speech are embodied in the audience's immediate reaction to his presence. He highlights the pressure from white society by mentioning that some white audience members were only there to see him fail. He was determined that his ideas and his merit would prove these types of audience members wrong. This perspective, however, is problematic if applied more generally (which seems to be Washington's goal): if black Americans are supposed to be especially excellent to prove racist white people wrong, that puts all the responsibility on the victims of prejudice, not on those acting upon prejudice. It is assumed that all black Americans will be judged as representatives of their entire race, for good or for ill, and Washington makes no attempt to actually address the white *Americans who make such judgments.*

CHAPTER 14: THE ATLANTA EXPOSITION ADDRESS

The Atlanta Exposition commenced with a short address from the Governor of Georgia. There were some other opening events, including an invocation, a dedicatory ode, and addresses by the president of the Exposition. After these events, the Governor introduced Washington by saying, "We have with us today a representative of Negro enterprise and Negro civilization."

By recounting the other types of addresses given—an introductory address by the Governor, a dedicatory ode, and a presidential address by the Exposition president—Washington is illustrating the magnitude and nature of his speech. It must be dignified enough to seem natural on such a lofty occasion.

As Washington rose to speak, he was met by many cheers by black audience members. He felt that he needed to open with a statement that fostered unity and friendship between the races as a sign of good faith. Washington then gives a transcription of the contents of his speech.

Washington is continuing to build suspense to highlight the high racial and cultural stakes of the event.

Washington opens his address by thanking the members of the Exposition board and saying that their invitation for Washington to speak is a great stride forward in finding peace in race relations. Washington also suggests that the United States can never find success if it denies the welfare of the black race, which consists of one third of its population. Washington also is hopeful that his opportunity to speak will open up an era of new industrial progress for both black and white Americans.

This statement is carefully crafted to appeal to both black and white audience members. Black members would be appeased by the call to account for the welfare of the black race, and white members would be appeased by the suggestion that such an event is inherently a step forward for race relations.

Washington then begins telling a parable of a ship lost at sea for an extended period of time. The sailors, dying of thirst, were desperate for a fresh drink of water. They spotted another friendly ship and began desperately calling out for the ship to bring them fresh water. The ship called back, "Cast down your bucket where you are." Confused, the sailors lowered a bucket into the waters below them and were shocked that the water below them was fresh and drinkable. The sailors unknowingly had sailed right into the mouth of the Amazon River! According to Washington, this parable represents the status of race relations in the United States. Rather than striving toward progress in legal, medical, and political professions, black Americans should excel "where they are," in professions like agriculture, mechanics, and commerce, to prove their worth. Washington claims that as much dignity can be found in these professions as can be found in the "higher" callings, and that black Americans can only find progress once they engage in industrial labor.

This now infamous parable is used as an emblem of Washington's educational and social ideology. It encapsulates his belief that community and the local are the most important institutions, and that race relations and economic concerns can be found if people find satisfaction where they are. This promotion of black people to "stay where they are" is deeply problematic, however, because it is reminiscent of the racist belief that calls for black people to "stay in their place." This ideology suggested that black Americans should only hold subservient roles in economics, politics, and society. Because of this connection, Washington was widely criticized by black leaders who thought such an ideology was too conservative and harmful for the true progress of black people.

Washington then pivots, directing this same advice to the white audience members, exhorting them to "cast down their bucket" with black Americans by expressing fidelity and love as their neighbors. Washington urges his white audience to accept their black neighbors and to work alongside them toward racial harmony and industrial progress. While Washington accepts that black and white Americans could live separate social lives, he believes that they must intermingle in the public and economic spheres.

While the invocation for black people to "cast down their bucket" was problematic, this pivot helped Washington to win over some of his more skeptical black audience members. Washington here tries to show that his ideology calls for a valuation of community for whites as well as blacks, and whites need to treat blacks as neighbors.

Washington continues, suggesting that society only progresses when its members work together for the betterment of all its citizens. According to Washington, those who work to help black Americans will be blessed in return, and those who aim to inhibit black Americans will suffer from a lack of social progress.

Washington yet again reiterates his belief that white Americans suffer more from racism than black Americans—because individual morality and dignity is more important than social or economic progress.

Washington argues that black Americans will constitute one-third of the South's population regardless of their white neighbors' acceptance of them. These black Americans can thus either constitute one-third of the South's ignorance and crime or one-third of the South's intelligence and progress. Therefore Southern white citizens should do whatever they can to ensure the progress and security of the race.

Washington argues that black people are going to be in the South whether white people like it or not, so white people should go ahead and accept black people into society. He believes that this acceptance will lead to great strides in societal and economic progress. Such a message was very attractive to Southern whites in the audience, for they were still in a state of economic and political depression following the Civil War. Any prospect of the restoration of the South's perceived greatness was both attractive and desired by white Southerners.

Washington then credits both Southern states and Northern philanthropists in conjunction with the effort of black Americans for the progress showcased in the black culture exhibit at the institution.

Washington tries to demonstrate that his call for unity is for Northerners and Southerners as well as blacks and whites.

Washington continues, saying that the "wise" members of the black race know that political agitation is "folly" and will accomplish no progress for the black American. To Washington, such action is largely alienating and will only secure guaranteed exclusion and racial strife.

This is another deeply problematic statement, as "political agitation" is what freed black people from slavery in the first place. Asking black Americans to "stay in their place" promotes racist ideologies of black inferiority. This is also another promotion of respectability politics.

Washington concludes by saying that the Exposition is one of the greatest opportunities for racial progress, and that his invitation to speak draws black Americans much closer to racial reconciliation with white Americans. Washington pledges that as long as white Southerners continue to put effort forth to heal the racial divide, black Americans will prove their worth through labor in the industries. Such action will rejuvenate the South and establish a new and harmonious society. With this the speech ends.

While this speech was indeed a milestone in race relations in the United States, it did not quite have the intended effect that Washington wished for. Southern and Northern whites were more than happy to see blacks laboring for the economy, but as soon as black people began to try to move up the social ladder, both the South and North passed racist laws to try to suppress black political and social uplift. White Americans were not so eager to see the merit of black people outside of the institution of labor, which refuted Washington's philosophy that merit is recognized by all humanity as a universal virtue. It seems that white Americans were willing to see the merit of laboring African Americans, but not the merit of a powerful and prominent black middle or upper class.

Washington says that the first thing that he remembers after the speech is the Governor and other Exposition speakers on stage rushing over to shake his hand. Washington was elated and honored, but he did not realize the full effect that his speech had on his audience until his return trip to Tuskegee, in which people crowded the train at each stop, wishing to congratulate and shake hands with him.

As is the case throughout the other portions of the narrative, Washington presented a problem with the racial stakes of his speech and the struggle in his preparation of the material. His solution, or at least resolution, comes in the form of his universal congratulations by the audience members, the Exposition members, and the citizens of surrounding areas.

Papers all over the United States published the full address, and Washington was overwhelmed by the positive reception of critics. Washington immediately began receiving propositions to lecture permanently or to write editorials for magazines, but he believed that his life work was at Tuskegee. His only speaking engagements would be in the interest of the Institute.

Washington tries to reiterate that he has not accepted his speaking engagements for the fame, but that he his doing so for the betterment of Tuskegee and black people in general.

After his speech, Washington sent a copy to the President of the United States, Grover Cleveland. President Cleveland deeply appreciated Washington's speech, and eventually the two met when the President visited the Atlanta Exposition and the "Negro" exhibit. Washington deeply admired the President's interest in black Americans' lives, and Cleveland repeatedly demonstrated his friendship through personal and financial interest in the Tuskegee Institute. Washington claims that Cleveland was a man of rare and excellent character, who cared deeply for those around him and particularly his constituents.

Like his descriptions of Olivia Davidson and General Armstrong, Washington romanticizes his interaction with President Cleveland, claiming that he is a man of impeccable and selfless character who is only interested in equality for all.

Washington philosophizes that any person whose vision is colored by race cannot truly experience the greatest things in the world. He believes that those who do the most for others are the happiest and that racism is the greatest impediment for social progress. Washington claims that the highest joy in the world is making someone else's life easier or happier.

Washington reiterates his idea that merit and labor can erase racial differences because they are universal human values.

Immediately after Washington's address, black newspapers and black people in general were widely supportive of his speech, but after the initial excitement, black critics became skeptical of some of Washington's ideas. Some critics, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, felt that Washington had been too kind to white Southerners and had not been strong enough in his stance against the poor treatment of blacks in the South. Washington calls these critics "reactionary," and he claims that he won them over after they saw the wisdom in his approach.

Washington misrepresents reality in this passage. While many black institutions cast their support for Washington, he also encountered a great deal of strong resistance. Other major educational thinkers, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, claimed that Washington's ideology would only further racial inequality and cause the continued oppression of black people. These critics did not change their mind, as Washington claims they did.

These critics remind Washington of another event in which his comments garnered criticism. About ten years before the Exposition address, Washington was asked by a newspaper editor about his opinions of the status of black clergy in the South. Washington responded that the clergy was in a quite poor condition and that black Americans had not had sufficient time to develop a "competent" clergy. Black ministers were outraged, and many religious organizations condemned Washington, his ideology, and his Institute. Washington, however, did not respond to clarify or explain his remarks because he felt that he was right. Washington claims that this belief was confirmed when one of the oldest bishops in the Methodist Church agreed with him. According to Washington, public sentiment turned and his remarks catalyzed a widespread purge of incompetent clergy. Because of this, Washington decided that if he feels he has done the right thing, he will stick by his actions regardless of the social or political consequences.

Washington tries to show that in his opinion, truth and goodness are always exposed if one sticks with one's beliefs. Washington believes that his detractors are simply misinformed, and they will see their error after time exposes the fault in their logic. Washington believes that personal conviction is more important than larger political consequences.

As a result of the Exposition address, Washington also received an invitation from the President of Johns Hopkins University, requesting that he serve as a Judge of Award for the Department of Education in Atlanta. Washington was shocked because as a juror, he would be asked to judge not only black schools but also white schools. Washington spent a month serving his duty as a judge for this organization, and he felt that he was treated with respect and dignity in both white and black schools.

Washington sees this appointment as evidence that his speech had positive effects on race relations, since he was treated with dignity in both white and black schools.

Reflecting upon the nature of race relations in the South, Washington proposes that in due time, all black Americans will be awarded the political rights that their ability, character, and material possessions will allow. These rights will not be accorded because of political agitation or government action but by Southern white people themselves, because of the merit demonstrated by black Southern citizens in their own individual communities. Washington suggests that if his position as speaker at the Atlanta Exposition came about because of the demands by Northerners or black Southerners, it would not have had the same positive effect for race relations as it did. According to Washington, he was given the opportunity to speak based on his merit, not on any artificial racial reconciliatory project.

Again, Washington's worldview did not prove to work, as race relations worsened in the 20th century until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. Contrary to Washington's theory, the only effort that made effective strides toward equality was political and legal agitation and intervention.

Washington proposes that it is the duty of black citizens to not pursue political power or high positions in society until they demonstrate their worth and merit through labor in industry. He believes that true political equality will not occur immediately, It will be slow, not an "overnight, a gourd-vine affair." However, black Americans should continue to vote, but they should do so only based on their discernment and intelligence, not based on their race. Washington thinks that it is unwise for black Americans to ignore the political and economic opinions of white Southerners, since white Southerners are very similar to them in their political and economic concerns.

The phrase "overnight, gourd-vine affair" refers to the Biblical story of the prophet Jonah, who ministered to the sinful city of Nineveh. Jonah was very hesitant to minister to the city because of its reputation, so to teach Jonah a lesson in obedience, God suddenly wilted all of the plants outside of Nineveh so that Jonah would have nowhere to find shade, and would have to enter the city and follow God's commands. Once Jonah began following God's command to prophesy to the city about its wickedness, God provided shade overnight in the form of a quick-growing gourd vine. Washington feels that race relations will not be fixed in this swift manner, and rather racial reconciliation will come from slow and deliberate progress through labor and merit.

Although Washington rejects the idea that a poor and ignorant white man should be allowed to vote while a poor and ignorant black man is prohibited from the ballot, he does suggest that an educational or property test for the ballot may be a good solution to protect the integrity of the institution. However, such a test ought to be applied evenly to black and white Americans, and the white American should not be allowed to cheat the black American out of a vote. According to Washington, such practice promotes thievery and dishonesty and lowers the general moral stature of society.

The ballot test is an infamously racist tool used to prevent newly enfranchised black voters from going to the polls. Some polls had a land-owning requirement for voting, some had an educational test, and others had a tax associated with them. Since black Americans were largely poor and uneducated, these rules as a whole prevented many black voters from going to the polls. While Washington thinks that singling out black people with this practice is immoral and harmful, his proposition that the ballot test could ensure the integrity of the ballot is problematic in its exclusionary purpose.

CHAPTER 15: THE SECRET OF SUCCESS IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

As evidence of his audience's reception of his Atlanta Exposition address, Washington includes a full newspaper article written by a reporter for the New York *World*. The article names Washington as a "Negro Moses" whose address marks a new period of race relations in the South. It describes Washington's address as "electrifying" in the midst of the anticipation and tension of the mixed audience composed of blacks, Southern whites, and Northern whites. It depicted Washington as a stoic and powerful speaker who captured both his white and his black audience's attention, and whose noble presence on stage was a large part of his success in the address. Because of such success, Washington decided to take on some public speaking engagements, as long as the purpose of the engagements was to support Tuskegee or his race more generally, and not for personal gain.

Washington tries to prove to readers that his motives are pure in taking more public speaking engagements, and that his success with his Exposition address is simply an opportunity to achieve a greater good for Tuskegee and black Americans in general.

Washington claims that he does not understand why people repeatedly come to see him speak. He is humbled by people's widespread support of his ideology and educational philosophy. Although Washington spoke somewhat regularly, he says that he still suffers great nervousness that causes him to feel unworthy, and often after a speech he will feel like he forgot to include some key concept or example that would have made the speech much better. However, Washington is able to overcome this nervousness if he can simply connect with his audience. To him, audience connection is an extremely important part of public speaking, and sometimes he even tries to pick out one cynic in the crown simply for the exercise of trying to win him over. There is also a sense in which he approaches making speeches as a craft, a vocation.

Washington's focus on the importance of community is again highlighted in this passage. To Washington, speaking engagements are less about politics and rhetoric and more about the establishment and fostering of community. For all his modest rhetoric, it's clear that Washington has a passion and great talent for persuasive public speaking.

Because of the importance of connection with one's audience, Washington thinks that speaking for the sake of public speaking alone does an injustice to one's argument. For Washington, the purpose of public speaking is to speak from the heart, and speaking earnestly with investment in a topic is more important than the rules of rhetoric or grammar. Washington believes that fostering a connection with the audience is more meaningful than rhetorical strategies or devices. Washington could be disturbed on the podium, however, when someone would leave the room. To solve this problem, he resolved to make his speech so interesting that no one would want to leave.

Once again, Washington thinks that community—the general community of the location, as well as the immediate community of the speaker and direct audience—is very important in public speaking. Even when Washington is trying to be aesthetically pleasing or interesting with his speeches, this is still in the service of utilitarian purposes.

Washington's favorite audiences consist of businessmen from major cities like New York or Chicago, because he feels that they are responsive and quick to understand his points. However, he does not enjoy the long dinners that usually are held before these speeches, for he feels that these accentuate his nervousness. Washington also thinks that such meals, often containing as many as fourteen courses, are decadent. He recounts that as a slave boy, he would get a weekly treat of molasses on his plate from his mother that was much more enjoyable and valuable to him than these extravagant meals.

That Washington's favorite audiences are important businessmen should come as no surprise. Washington felt that those in high positions in society were necessarily virtuous, and so he deeply enjoyed being in their presence.

Washington's second favorite type of audience consists of Southern people of either race. Washington particularly likes speaking in front of black people, because he feels that their active response to his speech during delivery is encouraging. His third favorite audience is a college audience, and he has spoken at large universities including institutions like Harvard and Yale.

Washington's preference of Southern and collegiate audiences should also come as no surprise, because of his deep appreciation for local communities.

When Washington spoke in the interest of Tuskegee, he would schedule speeches in as many local organizations and churches as he could, often delivering up to four speeches in one day. After the Atlanta Exposition address, Washington and his wife were paid by the Slater fund to speak to large groups of black people in the cities of ex-slaveholding states. Washington would talk to professional men, ministers, and teachers in the morning, Mrs. Washington would speak to the women in the afternoon, and then Washington would deliver an address to a large audience at night. Washington claims that most of his speeches were largely attended by white citizens as well as black, which Washington sees as a valuable occurrence.

Washington tries to reiterate that his purpose in pursuing public speaking engagements was only to better the Tuskegee Institute. Likewise, he is careful to point out that many of his audiences consisted of ex-slaveholders and Southern whites—thus again demonstrating (what he sees as) their wide acceptance of him.

According to Washington, such speeches in the Southern cities gave him an excellent indication of the status of the race in terms of racial uplift. He would visit churches, homes, and even prisons to get firsthand accounts of race relations in the cities. Washington was hopeful after speaking to these cities, for he felt that there was a lasting sense of good will between the races that would promote unity and progress. Such access to firsthand information also helped him to debunk the racist notion that black women were not virtuous, and he felt confident that such assumptions about black women and black people more generally were absolutely false.

One popular racist idea circulating in the US at the turn of the century was that black women were more inclined to sin and vice than white women. This harmful stereotype partly came from the institution of slavery, in which black women were sexually abused in order to create more slaves or to appease their white masters' sexual desires. As a result, black women were seen as sinful, hyper-sexualized beings. Washington denies this stereotype and argues for the virtue of black women.

In 1897 Washington received an invitation to speak at the Robert Gould Shaw monument in Boston. Washington was honored, as Shaw was a Civil War legend among black Americans at the time. Washington again recounts the address and memorial through a report in a newspaper, the Boston *Transcript*. The report claims that Washington's position as speaker at the memorial was a testament to Massachusetts' spirit of abolition and good will toward black people, and many people showed up at the memorial to show their support of Shaw's legendary sacrifice and Washington's speech. Delivered after speeches by the Governor and some military officers, the report claims that Washington's oration had a sensational effect on the crowd, often bringing the audience to its feet and inducing the Governor to cry out "Three cheers for Booker T. Washington!"

Robert Gould Shaw was the commander of the first all-black regiment in the Union Army in the Civil War. In the Battle at Fort Wagner, Shaw died valiantly leading his men into battle, and was enshrined in popular memory as a freedom fighter for American ideals and racial equality. Thus Washington was honored to speak at such an event because it represented both racial progress and American patriotism.

Washington also delivered speeches to celebrate the end of the Spanish American War. His most notable address of this kind was in Chicago, upon the invitation of the President of the University of Chicago to speak in the post-war festivities. Washington claims that this was the largest crowd he ever spoke in front of, consisting of 16,000 participants, including President William McKinley. Washington's speech recounted the military participation of his race, from the sacrifice of Crispus Attucks in the Revolutionary War to the black regiments in Cuba that liberated the island from the Spanish. The speech was well received by the audience in general, as well as by President McKinley.

Washington includes an account of this address both to demonstrate the increasing size of his speaking engagements and to introduce President McKinley into his narrative—a major historical presence who will figure rather heavily later on. Crispus Attucks, a black man who, in the popular American imagination, was the first casualty of the Revolutionary War, was killed in a riot in Boston called "The Boston Massacre." While casualties were few in this so-called massacre, anti-British propaganda was able to use the killings as an example of British tyranny. By mentioning Attucks and the "liberation" of Cuba, Washington is attempting to connect black Americans with important political and military contributions in American history.

According to Washington, although his speech was a great success among those in the North, the Southern press misinterpreted one portion of the speech. After a great deal of criticism by Southern papers, Washington clarified his comments by appealing to his principle that he would never say anything in the North that he would not say in the South, and that his work for 17 years in the South should be testament to his love and care for the region.

Washington uses this passage to reaffirm that if one's beliefs are correct, time will expose their truth to even one's greatest detractors. However, this has not always been the case with his own firmly held convictions. Washington most likely omits the content of his supposedly controversial speech in order to downplay whatever racial content his white Southern audience felt was problematic. Once again, even in his handling of conflict with white Southerners, he is privileging his relationship with white Americans in spite of racial tensions in the country at the time.

In his public speaking career, Washington dreaded one specific type of audience member—one that Washington calls "the crank." Washington describes this type of character as being dirty and having a long beard, often covered in grease and wearing baggy clothes. Washington claims that these cranks would come to him with unrealistic schemes that were designed to make them rich but had little to no benefit for the greater good of the race. For example, when Washington was speaking on the methods of how to grow corn for a year to support black communities, a crank in the audience claimed that he knew a patent process of how to preserve corn for three to four years. Washington believed that this type of person was foolish because they wasted valuable time in his speaking engagements and rarely had contributions of note.

To Washington, the "crank" violates all the principles of respectability that Washington believes are the true exemplars of merit. The "crank" is dirty, poorly dressed, and self-absorbed. The "crank" indeed serves as a foil to Washington himself, for while Washington portrays himself as respectable and intelligent, he portrays the "crank" as slovenly and unintelligent.

Washington claims that he is only able to balance his speaking with his commitments at Tuskegee through help from those close to him, in conjunction with Tuskegee's excellent and organized infrastructure. Washington claims that Tuskegee is so well organized that it does not require much direct supervision, which allowed him to spend time fundraising and speaking. Washington largely was able to keep up with the events of the school through a system of reports made for him by his secretary. Through these, Washington was able to know particularities of the school's operations such as the attendance records of students, the production measurement of Tuskegee's industries, and what food was being served in the dining room.

The reader gets particular insight into Washington's leadership style in this passage. Washington was evidently a very hands-on leader who would pay attention to minute details such as individual student attendance and what kind of meals were being served. Washington implies that this attention to detail helps him to run a tightly organized system at Tuskegee, which in turn boosts institutional efficiency.


On the subject of rest or recreation, Washington claims that he does not engage in these activities generally, but finds joy and relaxation in his work. Often he finds purpose in new work, so he will try to close each day by wrapping up whichever business matters that he was working on by the end of the day in order that he may start the next day with a new set of tasks and concerns. Aside from this, Washington occasionally engages in physical activity to keep his body healthy, but he does not engage in sport or other recreational activities. Washington also prepares himself at the beginning of each day for the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of his work, and he readies himself for any bad news so that he does not become too stressed or frustrated with the setbacks or problems of the day.

Washington's ideology of the dignity of labor is expressed to the extreme in his personal life. Washington rarely engaged in any recreational activities or took vacations, and he found joy and rest in his work. Washington is trying to demonstrate that a life of labor can be both joyous and fulfilling, even if it requires lifelong toil and might be detrimental to one's health.

Washington has only taken one vacation, which he took when his friends paid for him and Mrs. Washington to spend three months touring Europe. Washington claims that his good health is a result of proper upkeep, regular doctor's visits, and a good evening of rest.

This vacation is discussed in detail in the next chapter. As usual, Washington emphasizes his own strict adherence to a life of order and labor.

Washington also claims that the only time that he has to read is on trains. He prefers newspapers, and he finds "delight and recreation" in their reading, but he also enjoys reading biographies and other non-fiction works. The only type of literature that he does not like to read is fiction, because he sees it as a waste of time. He prefers to read about events that really happened. His favorite subject for study is Abraham Lincoln, and he claims to have read almost every work concerning Lincoln.

It should not be surprising that Washington dislikes fiction. We already know that he deeply distrusts politicians and professional public speakers, because he feels that these professions are distanced from reality—and what could be more distanced from reality (as Washington sees it) than fiction? This also explains his disdain for "book learning" and those who might emphasize the value of purely artistic or intellectual pursuits, rather than those involving physical labor and economic benefits.

By 1897, Washington was spending as much as six months of every year away from Tuskegee. Although he regretted his absence, Washington claims that his constant traveling for fundraising and speaking events helped him to focus on the important aspects of the work and gave him some time for rest and relaxation that he would not have had were he to stay in Tuskegee year round. However, the times that he felt most rested were when he was with his family in Tuskegee. Washington deeply enjoyed simply spending time with his family after an evening meal.

Aside from his narration about his early life, this is the only part of Washington's narrative that discusses his family outside of the scope of his work. Before this point, all of his wives and children have been contextualized only by their relation to Tuskegee or Washington's personal work.

Washington also found some enjoyment and peace in his garden in Tuskegee, and he feels that time spent in nature is both spiritually and physically rejuvenating. Along with gardening, Washington personally cares for some livestock, and he particularly enjoys working with pigs. While he does enjoy these simply pleasures at home, Washington does not enjoy games like football or cards because he never played games in his youth. He sees them simply as frivolity.

Washington also suggests that the only respite or rest that he gets outside of time with his family is in nature. This is in accord with his earlier espousal of the American Transcendentalist belief in the important of self-reliance, because the Transcendentalists also advocated for regular time in nature to gain wisdom and rest. Washington seems to deeply value this strain of philosophical thought.

CHAPTER 16: EUROPE

In 1893, Washington was married to Miss Margaret James Murray, who had come years before to serve as a teacher at the school, and at the time of their marriage was serving as a principal. Along with her duties helping Washington, Mrs. Washington also ran a mothers' meeting in Tuskegee, helped with field work at one of Tuskegee's nearby properties, and ran a women's club at the school.

Like his other wives, Washington describes his marriage to Margaret only in relation to his work at the Institute. This reiterates his narrative that hard work and labor are the most important means of uplift, and that his family life is secondary to his work life.

Portia, Washington's oldest daughter, engages in dressmaking as well as music studies. At the time of Washington's writing, she is serving as a teacher at Tuskegee in conjunction to her studies. Baker Taliaferro, Washington's second oldest child, mastered **brickmaking** at a young age and deeply enjoyed working in trades. He enjoyed his trade work so much that when Washington required him to work a half of a day at a trade every summer, Baker requested that he have permission to spend the whole day on his trade. Washington's youngest child, Ernest Davidson, aspires to be a doctor and spends a good portion of his time at the local doctor's office.

Washington's description of his children here is significant because it highlights their industrial accomplishments rather than any personal information about them. His interaction with them, and his valuation of their skill, seems to be rooted only in their industrial abilities. It seems that Washington's political ideology even colors his perceptions of home life and intimate familial relationships.

Washington's greatest regret in his work was that it often kept him away from his family. His family provided him pleasure and respite from the large crowds and public appearances. He likewise gained great pleasure from talking to students and teachers and seeing the immense progression of the Tuskegee Institute.

Again Washington explains, as he did in the previous chapter, that his family is one of the only things that provides him with rest and relaxation from his constant work.

In 1899, Washington claims that he received one of the greatest surprises of his life when he attended a meeting in Boston. Attendees of the meeting noticed that Washington seemed quite tired, and they surprised him and his wife with an all expenses paid trip to Europe for three months to provide him vacation and rest. Washington was hesitant to leave, for he had been working without vacation at Tuskegee for 18 years. He assumed that he would simply continue to work until he died. To combat his hesitancy, donors raised enough money to keep Tuskegee financially stable while Washington would be away, and they even planned out his trip down to the specific steamboat that he and Mrs. Washington would take. Washington had no choice but to agree.

Washington so grounded his life in the ideology of the dignity of labor and the proof of merit through hard work that he never considered that he would actually desire to take a vacation. It is important to note that Washington did not choose to go on this vacation, but that he had to be persuaded. He was so psychologically married to the idea of the importance of labor that he could not seriously even consider the possibility of vacation, rest, or relaxation.

Washington was deeply honored by this opportunity. He was born and raised in slavery, and according to him, he rose from the depths of poverty and ignorance. Luxury seemed something out of reach his entire life, and in his mind Europe was the quintessence of luxury. He could not believe that an ex-slave would be afforded the opportunity to see the sights of Europe. However, Washington was worried that people would think that he had become "stuck up," and he felt guilty that he would be leaving his work for such a prolonged period of time.

This passage fits Washington's narrative of progress, as the highest point of uplift from slavery in his eyes is vacation and luxury. Washington's repetition of his concerns about the trip reiterates his dedication to labor and hard work.

Mrs. Washington had many similar concerns, and the two of them were torn as to whether or not they should go. But because Washington needed the rest, they decided to agree to the trip, and set their departure date for May 10. Their friends in Boston took care of all of the accommodations and reservations. As they left, they received word that two donors had pledged enough money to build a new girls dormitory at Tuskegee, and this news assuaged some of their fears as they embarked on their vacation to Europe.

Washington's agreement to go on vacation did not come about because he felt that he had earned it (which, if he worked as hard as he describes, he certainly did!), but rather because rich donors gave enough money to keep the school in operation during his absence. This highlights two major repetitive ideas in the book. First, rich people repeatedly demonstrate their merit through their generosity in their donations, and second, work and labor are primary in all things, and vacation is only secondary.

Washington was worried about their treatment on the trip over to Europe, for many black Americans suffered great indignities at the hands of sailors and passengers when crossing the Atlantic. However, he claims that they were treated with the utmost respect, and that even the white Southerners were kind and cordial. This kind treatment, along with the prospect of vacation, lifted much of the tension and stress that had burdened Washington for his eighteen years at Tuskegee. For the first time in his life, he felt "free from care."

Once again, Washington tries to demonstrate the virtue of white Southerners by highlighting their kindness. Washington's self-description as "free from care" is also significant, in that it shows that he has come quite far in his life. When he was younger he could not even imagine a minute of his life that was not dedicated to hard labor. Now, he is able to spend three months in relative leisure.

Washington slept for up to 15 hours a day during the sea voyage. For the first time in his life, he awoke without any speaking engagements or meetings, and he was able to relax and catch up on the sleep that he had deprived himself of for over a decade. For the duration of the trip, the weather was good and the passengers kind, and Washington was in good spirits when they landed in Antwerp, Belgium.

Washington reiterates the positive effect that rest and relaxation had on his disposition during this vacation.

Washington was in awe of the sights, the beautiful flowers, and the people, and he felt that all of this was very new to him. After some time in Antwerp, Washington and Mrs. Washington were invited to go on a trip through Holland, and they were able to study the country life of the people. Washington was most impressed by the agriculture of the region and the famous Holstein cattle. He was amazed at how much the Belgian farmers could get out of a small plot of land, and he was inspired by how little they wasted.

Like on his trips through the countryside in Alabama, Washington watches and observes the people of Holland. His interest in their agricultural skill demonstrates that even on vacation, he cannot deny his belief in the importance of physical labor.

After their tour in Holland and a brief time in Brussels, Washington and Mrs. Washington proceeded to Paris. In Paris they were invited to a banquet attended by foreign dignitaries, including former U.S. President Benjamin Harrison. Washington was pressured to speak, but he attempted to minimize the amount of speeches that he would deliver so as to not defeat the relaxing purposes of this vacation.

Washington insists that he is trying to enjoy his vacation and not work, despite his constant invitations to speak and attend meetings. He then runs into the same issues in London.

Washington was particularly impressed with the life and work of the black American painter **Henry O. Tanner**. Washington felt that the painter's excellence garnered him great success in Europe, and that looking at his paintings, one would not be able to tell that they were painted by a black American man. To Washington, this was the greatest sign of excellence, as Tanner's merit as a painter eclipsed the racial prejudice of his audiences. Washington takes Tanner's work as evidence that merit will always be valued more than race, and true racial uplift will only be found when black Americans prove themselves to be objectively valuable and excellent. Washington believes that such a meritocracy is not just something pertaining to race relations, but rather it is a "great human law."

It's interesting that Washington applies the concept of meritocracy to an artist, considering that he is largely opposed to education and training in the arts for black Americans. Despite his respect of Tanner's work, Washington still does not see the value in arts education for most black Americans. He is able to adopt the artist into his meritocracy, but not into his overall educational ideology.

The French people in general encouraged Washington, because he felt that black Americans were not very far behind the average Frenchman in terms of social and moral progress. While the Frenchmen had some degree of superiority in terms of economic efficiency, Washington believed that black Americans were ahead of the French in terms of agricultural development. Such a perception was encouraging to Washington because he felt that there was great hope if his people could rival the French in excellence of economy and society.

Washington's comparison of French culture to black culture once again demonstrates his desire for black culture to emulate white culture. Such a desire is problematic, of course, as it places white cultural progress as the standard that black culture must adhere to. In other words, Washington's analysis here is entirely Euro-centric, despite its intended compliment to black culture.

After Paris, Washington and Mrs. Washington proceeded to London. Washington was flooded with social invitations upon his arrival, along with many invitations to speak, which Washington largely declined in order to rest. The Washingtons did attend some social functions, though, including a reception thrown by the American Ambassador and some social events organized by British statesmen. Washington also accepted a few speaking engagements, including a speech at the Women's Liberal Club and the commencement ceremony for the Royal College of the Blind. His time in London was marked by the company of many famous figures, including the author Mark Twain, the women's voting rights activist Susan B. Anthony, and even Queen Victoria.

Once again, Washington insists that he is trying to enjoy his vacation and not work, despite his constant invitations to speak and to attend meetings. However, he does greatly enjoy being able to spend time with people of great celebrity and notoriety.

Washington felt that English culture was best experienced in the country houses of Englishmen, and he came to the conclusion that the English get more out of life than Americans do. According to Washington, the English have superior servants who excel at servitude, and he deeply admired their social organization. Likewise, Washington felt that all classes in England had great respect for law and order, and this allowed English people to be more orderly and relaxed than Americans, who, in Washington's perspective, are too nervous and rushing. Washington also was amazed at how the masses loved the nobility, and he had a great respect for the upper classes.

Washington's favor for English country life is perhaps most indicative of his problematic views of class. He feels that the strict structure of English society and its servant labor system is well developed. It is evident that Washington believes in the moral superiority of the upper classes, as evidenced through their organization and relaxed country life.

The only trouble that Washington had in England was that of speaking to an English audience. He claims that the average English audience is much more serious and earnest than the average American audience, so it was very difficult to gauge the reaction and reception of his speeches. However, he felt that once he won Englishmen over, they demonstrated the greatest capabilities of loyalty and friendship.

Washington initially struggled to find a sense of the community in audience interaction that he found in speeches given to an American audience. However, once he achieved the difficult task of winning an English audience over, he was able to find that community quite quickly.

After leaving London, Washington and his wife set off back to America. Their ship was stocked with a full library, so Washington spent a great deal of time reading. One of his readings was Frederick Douglass's autobiography, and he was deeply affected by a passage in which Douglass described the discrimination he faced on his journey to and from England. Washington felt that his own treatment on a similar trip was much different than Douglass's, and that this was evidence that race relations were improving rapidly both in the United States and in England.

This passage fits Washington's trajectory of racial progress, and his comparison of his own situation to Douglass's shows that he feels great hope that the country (and world) is moving forward in terms of race relations.

While he was in Paris, Washington received a message from the citizens of West Virginia requesting that he visit upon his return from Europe, so that they could celebrate him and his accomplishments. Washington was deeply honored by this, and accepted the invitation. Washington was treated like a dignitary upon his arrival in Charleston, the capital of West Virginia, and he was greeted by important men of both races. His reception was held in an opera house, and it was attended by politicians and state leaders, including the current and ex-state Governors. Washington also received similar receptions in Atlanta and New Orleans, and he was deeply honored by the desires of the citizens and politicians of these cities to honor him and his work.

Washington's reception in West Virginia again fits his narrative of racial uplift. Washington especially cherishes events in which he can return to the locations of struggle or strife in his past and reflect upon the significance of his social rise. For Washington, the West Virginia reception demonstrated that through merit and hard work, anyone, even a former slave, can be celebrated by American society.

CHAPTER 17: LAST WORDS

Washington opens his final chapter by reflecting upon the unique and unexpected accomplishments of his life. He claims that his greatest joys and his most notable accomplishments have come when he was trying to make someone else's life better. To Washington, laboring for someone else's well being is the most satisfying activity in life.

Washington once again reaffirms that service and labor are the defining factors of merit in his ideology, regardless of one's race.

Six months before he died, General Armstrong wished to return to Tuskegee to visit. Armstrong had lost most functions in his limbs and was no longer able to speak or get around on his own, so the white men who owned the railroad agreed to have a special train take him down to Tuskegee. He was received in a spectacular fashion by thousands of students holding torches in his honor. Armstrong was overcome with happiness and gratitude.

Washington continues his tendency to romanticize Armstrong by highlighting his virtue and fidelity to Tuskegee and the South in general.

Armstrong stayed at Washington's house in Tuskegee, and despite his debilitating disabilities, Armstrong spent most of his time devising ways to help the South find more social and economic progress. Armstrong felt strongly about uplifting both black Americans and poor Southern white Americans. This last visit by Armstrong provided Washington with inspiration and a renewed devotion to the importance of his work.

Once again Washington idealizes Armstrong and his contributions to both black and white Americans in the South.

Washington claims that his biggest surprise in life came when he received a letter from Harvard University requesting his presence at the commencement ceremonies, in order to confer upon him an honorary degree. Washington was overwhelmed, since Harvard was America's most prestigious university. Washington reflected on his rise, and how he never could have considered that universities like Harvard would even know his name. He says that he was both grateful and humbled.

Washington spends a significant amount of time in this last chapter reflecting upon his rise in social status from the squalor of slavery. His honorary degree from Harvard is quantitative evidence of such a rise, and many passages in this last chapter will be similar to this one.

Despite his great success and recognition for his life work, Washington claims to never have pursued fame in his career. If others use his name to accomplish a greater good, he is satisfied, but his work is never done for vain purposes. Washington believes that most wealthy people also have a similar worldview to him, and they only use their money or recognition to achieve the greater good.

Washington repeats his claim that success and wealth is evidence of moral strength, and that whatever success he has found is entirely the result of his selfless dedication to his work. Of course, not all or even most wealthy people use their wealth to benefit the greater good. Many people pursue wealth and fame for their personal benefits, not so that they can better serve their communities. The problematic nature of this claim is not that some wealthy people work for the good of their community, as many certainly do, but rather the generalization of all wealthy people as belonging to a class of superior personal merit.

Washington attended the Harvard ceremony on June 24, 1896, and he was awed by the enthusiasm of the students for those receiving the honorary degrees. Washington was conferred an honorary degree of Master of the Arts, and after the ceremony the honorees were marched across campus, received the "Harvard yell," and attended the alumni dinner at Memorial Hall.

This is the first honorary degree conferred upon an African American by a prestigious university, and Washington spends a significant amount of time in his last chapter describing the event as a testament to his personal progress and success.

Washington was asked to speak at the dinner, and his remarks explained that true societal uplift comes about when the upper classes come in regular contact with the lower classes and "bring the masses up." Washington claimed that Harvard was engaging in such uplift regularly, and he lauded the school for its efforts. Washington continued, saying that each race in America is required to live up to the American standard, which is merit, and that black Americans must continue to try to better themselves and their race by passing through "the American crucible." He proposed that black Americans will be measured by their thrift, patience, moral fortitude, and industriousness, and that they should be both "great and small" and work as the "servant of all."

Washington's problematic class ideology is again apparent in his idea that the upper class will bring the lower classes to a higher level of society if they are in constant contact. He also places the burden of uplift on black Americans, claiming that it is their responsibility to demonstrate their worth to society—not society's responsibility to recognize their worth. However, with a group of people that had been socially subjugated for hundreds of years, uplift is not so simple as Washington makes it out to be.

Since the Harvard commencement was the first time that the university had conferred an honorary degree to a black American, the event received relatively widespread news coverage. Washington cites newspapers that suggested Washington's degree was notable because of its racial implications, but its true notability was in the merit of Washington's work and service to the country.

Washington notably downplays the racial coverage of his degree, and in doing so he tries to claim that merit and nothing else earned him the degree.

Such national attention to his work inspired Washington to set the goal raising the reputation of his Institute to such greatness that the President of the United States would visit Tuskegee. This goal was so ambitious in Washington's eyes that he largely kept it a secret. In 1897, Washington made his first stride toward this goal, and he had the Secretary of Agriculture visit and deliver the remarks for the opening of the Institute's new agriculture building.

To Washington, the President represented the highest level of society. A visit from the President would be an honor because it would show that Tuskegee is worth the attention of the most elite members of white society.

To further pursue his goal of a presidential visit to Tuskegee, Washington decided to directly appeal to the President in 1898. He heard that then-President McKinley was interested in attending a peace celebration for the end of the Spanish-American war in Atlanta, and Washington felt that this was his chance to secure a visit from the President.

Washington reintroduces the problem-struggle-solution paradigm in this passage. The problem is that Washington wants to get the attention of President McKinley so that he will visit Tuskegee.

Washington traveled to Washington, D.C. and was able to get a brief meeting with McKinley. McKinley was interested, but his travel plans were not yet concrete. He asked Washington to come back after his plans were secure, and ask again. Washington returned a few weeks later with a white citizen of Tuskegee to vouch for the invitation to the President from the white citizens as well as the black citizens. There were many race riots occurring at the time of Washington's second visit, and he argued to McKinley that a visit to Tuskegee would show good faith to both races that reconciliation was possible. McKinley was convinced, and he agreed to visit Tuskegee in December of that year.

Washington then struggles to solidify a visit from the president, meeting with McKinley multiple times and even bringing a white Tuskegee citizen to vouch for the town's interest. The solution, which according to Washington was accomplished by his dedication to hard work and his perseverance with the President, was McKinley's agreement to visit Tuskegee later that year.

The town of Tuskegee prepared thoroughly for President McKinley's visit. White and black citizens worked together to decorate the town and organize a proper reception, and Washington was deeply impressed by the effort and kindness of Tuskegee's white citizens.

Washington once again highlights the contributions of white Southerners to his work to convince his audience of their virtue.

President McKinley's visit brought the biggest crowd to Tuskegee that the small Southern agricultural town had ever seen. There was a large procession consisting of state politicians, military officers, and members of the President's cabinet. Reporters flooded the streets to document the visit. To showcase the school's progress, the town also held a procession of all of the students on different floats that highlighted the agricultural and industrial work of the Institute.

Fitting with his narrative of racial uplift, this passage serves as evidence of Tuskegee's progress as an institution. At its inception Washington would have never believed that he would be able to secure a visit from the President of the United States. This passage serves as Washington's testament to his hard work with the Institute and the progress that can be found in perseverance and labor.

In his address to the school, President McKinley praised the good work and progress of the school's industrial-based education, and particularly honored the effort and leadership of Washington. McKinley was deeply impressed by the school's national reputation and its accomplishments. The Secretary of the Navy and the Postmaster General also delivered remarks praising the school for its racial progress and Washington's work. The Secretary of the Navy even equated Washington's leadership with that of Presidents Lincoln and Washington. President McKinley and his entire administration seemed strongly impressed by the Institute.

Washington includes this passage to connect his ideology with that of other American figures who accomplished much for the ideals of American freedom. George Washington led America to political and economic freedom from Britain, and Lincoln aided in the freedom of black Americans from slavery. Washington is thus trying to show that his ideology likewise will contribute greatly to the advancement and freedom of black Americans. However, such advancement and freedom seems to only be possible with the approval of elite white Americans, such as McKinley and his administration.

After his narration of President McKinley's visit, Washington details the progress of the Tuskegee Institute from its founding twenty years before the time that he was writing. While the original school met in a small shanty, the Institute now owns over 2,300 acres of land, with 40 buildings and 70 acres of farmland. The school has 28 departments, each of which specializes in an industry. Despite its exponential growth, the Institute still has to turn down approximately one half of its applicants because it does not have enough room or resources to accommodate the entire South.

Washington includes this passage to numerically represent the Institute's progress over the years, while also implying that the work is not yet done, because of the many applicants that have to be turned away each year.

Washington explains that Tuskegee's industrial education is founded on three principles. First, all students need to learn how to accommodate the needs of their current communities. Second, all students will have the skills to be able to make enough money to support themselves or their families. Third, all students will be taught that there is dignity in labor. At the time of this narrative, Tuskegee had recently developed a non-denominational school for training in the ministry. The students of this program, however, are not exempt from labor, and are taught the same principles as the industrial students.

Washington again reiterates the importance of community, labor, and industrial education to Tuskegee and the black community in general.

The value of the school property is up to $300,000 at the time of Washington's writing, and all of the mortgages have been paid off. The student population has increased from the original 30 to 1,100, and the population of instructors increased from 1 to 86. With such a large group of people, Washington explains that many people question how he keeps things orderly. He claims that students stay out of trouble because most students come to Tuskegee earnestly searching for an education, and because everyone is kept on a strict and busy schedule. Students have required activities from 5 AM to 9:30 PM. Thus students have no opportunity for mischief.

Washington again tries to numerically represent the Institute's progress over the years. He also claims that his promotion of long days of labor and hard work help to keep students out of trouble. At the time of his narrative, black people were perceived as being more susceptible to crime than other races. Washington's claim of order and peace at the Institute then serves as a direct refutation of this racist perception (though his idea of purposefully keeping students "out of mischief" also arguably reinforces it).

Washington's primary aim in his educational program is to develop graduates that raise the reputation of the Institute by establishing their merit and excellence in industry. He hopes all graduates will continue to follow his ideology of race relations, and practice patience and kindness to those of other races. Washington believes that this project is rather successful, and he claims that wherever his graduates go, the communities experience an improvement in economic, social, and moral life.

As discussed before, community is immensely important to Washington. He wants his graduates not only to find personal and individual success, but also to go into the rural communities from which they came and apply their educational skills to enact positive social and economic change.

In the early 1890s Washington began hosting a conference called the "Negro Conference," which was designed as a forum to discuss and discover the mental, physical, spiritual, and moral needs of the black community. According to Washington, this conference was so useful that it inspired similar conferences in other states, as well as conferences for educators and workers. Likewise, Washington established the "Negro Business League" in Boston, which inspired other cities to adopt similar conferences and organizations.

Washington is once again highlighting the progress made by the Institute and his own hard work.

During the time of all of these conferences, Washington was also traveling to deliver addresses in the interest of promoting his racial ideology in both the North and the South. Washington would address concerns of racial tension, especially in opposition to the practice of lynching, which he abhorred as a practice in its violence and ignorance of the law.

As discussed earlier, lynching was practiced widely in the South from times of slavery up until the late 20th century. Although Washington rarely made strong racial political speeches, he felt that the injustice of lynching was so severe that he could not stay silent.

Washington begins to conclude his narrative by painting a hopeful picture for the future of race relations. He earnestly believes that Southern white people are working hard to eliminate race prejudice, and that such race prejudice should be combated with patience and service from black Americans. If white Americans can see black Americans demonstrating their merit through industry, Washington believes that American society can find great racial progress.

In spite of Washington's best efforts, his ideology widely failed as a method of racial reconciliation. The hope that Washington discusses here dissolved in the early 20th century, as lynchings and Ku Klux Klan activity increased. Oppressive Jim Crow laws remained in place until the middle of the century, which disenfranchised black citizens from exercising basic civil rights. Progress was eventually found, but it was found in political agitation, not in Washington's theory of meritocracy and gradual racial uplift.

Writing from the city of Richmond, near to the area that he once slept under the city sidewalk, Washington concludes his narrative by reflecting upon his rise from his birth in slavery to the position of educator, speaker, and leader, and he expresses gratitude at the opportunity afforded to him on account of his hard work.

It is fitting that Washington concludes his narrative with a reflection of his time being homeless in Richmond. Since his narrative is largely focused on his social rise from a slave to a prominent educational thinker and public speaker, this passage is particularly powerful in its illustration of the extreme progress that Washington made in his life. Washington credits this rise to the principles that he has been advocating throughout the narrative: hard work, perseverance, and proof of one's merit.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Bunzey, Tyler. "*Up From Slavery*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 7 Sep 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Bunzey, Tyler. "*Up From Slavery*." LitCharts LLC, September 7, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/up-from-slavery.

To cite any of the quotes from *Up From Slavery* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Washington, Booker T.. Up From Slavery. Penguin. 1986.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Washington, Booker T.. Up From Slavery. New York: Penguin. 1986.