

# The Principal and the President: Dining at the White House

By Charles Everett Pace

In a recent conversation, Shelly C. Lowe, Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), spoke by Zoom to those attending the Healing Through Language Conference on May 22, 2022. After welcoming all in her native Navajo language, our NEH leader, Lowe, began her formal presentation: “In the words of recent Poet Laureate Joy Harmon of the Muscogee Creek Nation, in her poem “Perhaps the World Ends Here”:

The world begins at a kitchen table. It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

On the night of October 16, 1901, Booker Taliaferro Washington, founding principal (1881) and first teacher at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, sat down to dinner at the White House. He was the guest of his friend Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States. Washington enjoyed a fine meal with the new Commander-in-Chief, Edith, his wife, two of their children, and a hunting buddy from Colorado. After which, the three men retired to the Red Room while enjoying each other’s company over coffee, and discussing politics, particularly Southern politics.

The storm of protest their meal provoked surprised the world. No dining experience, before or since, has ignited such a national public dialogue, drama, or dilemma. A twenty-first-century audience might ask, “What’s the big deal? They shared a meal, convened a private meeting, and knocked down a cup of joe. So what?”

Let me explain: Since it is 1901, let us journey back six years, and consider three events that happened in 1895: At age 77, Frederick Douglass dies, Booker T. Washington, age 39, ascends, and Charles Hamilton Houston is born. I will contextualize the dinner by first discussing the significance of the first two events, then fast forward through the life and work of Houston, and conclude with a discussion about what this all means for creatively leading change in the world of today. On this journey, with

Washington, Roosevelt, and me, you will discover how symbols, rites of familiarity, and even the most mundane of ‘things’ can signal the dawn of change.

### **Journey I: To the Freedom Land**

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) was the most famous Black man in the world: one of the nation’s leading abolitionists, a journalist, U. S. government official, and, beginning with President Abraham Lincoln, an advisor to several U. S. Presidents. Also, Douglass was the remaining radical Republican that kept Lincoln’s emancipation vision alive. As a member of the Board of Trustees of Howard University from 1871 to his death, Douglass was often on that campus. Once, when asked by a student what could be done to preserve and enhance the rights of black people, Douglass replied: “Agitate! Agitate! Agitate”!

From his July 19, 1848, speech in Seneca Falls, New York, to the day of his death on February 20, 1895, he agitated as a co-founding leader of the American Woman’s Rights Movement. The masthead of *The Liberator*, the first of three newspapers that he published and edited from 1847-1874, proclaimed: “All Rights for All”: “Right is of no Sex - Truth is of no Color - God is the Father of us All, and All we are Brethren”. Douglass was the leading human rights man in America, and his death left a huge void in the American “protest tradition.”

The tradition he dominated followed the publication of his first of four books, *The Narrative of a Slave Life*, in 1845. After which he immediately set off on the first of five trips abroad. He journeyed across the United Kingdom, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe. This mission was the first of two international anti-slavery speaking tours.

Over 21 months, from 1845 to 1848, Douglass educated, charmed, and raised funds for abolitionist movements throughout England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. His voice was the voice of bondswomen, like the enslaved Betsy Bailey, the mother of his enslaved mother, Harriet, on the Lloyd Plantation in Talbot County on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. And the enslaved bondswoman Jane, the mother of Booker Talliafero, on the farm of James Burroughs, near the village of Hale’s Ford, in the hills of Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains. Yes, Douglass was the liberation voice of the paternal grandparents of Charlie Houston before they liberated themselves as he had done.

Thus, for a full half century, Douglass was the dominant voice for human rights in the national and international arena. No other leader in the antebellum, Reconstruction, or post-Reconstruction era matched his voice. His constructive work in “protesting”—the idea and ideology of White supremacy, its

practices, policies, and power—had no peer. Therefore, when Frederick Douglass died, the Black “protest tradition” in America lost its leader for the next generation, a full twenty years.

### **1895: Journey II: to “paradise” Booker T. Washington Ascends**

The historian Rayford W. Logan dubbed the 1890s “The Nadir,” the lowest point in American race relations. Tyranny is supreme then, and terror rules the Southland. In this place the leading elected officials, educators, churchmen, and their congregations believe, and unabashedly proclaim: “This a white man’s country!” to those who listen and to those who do not. Blacks who overtly resist literally take their life in their hands.

Those few whites (and there were some; there had always been some) who not only believed in, but stood up for Black rights made the decision to wear the brand of “nigga lovers.” Elijah Lovejoy (Nov. 7, 1837) and Mrs. Viola Liuzzo (March 25, 1964), to name just two, who though problematically Christian, yet definitely Christ-like, made the ultimate sacrifice. They wore the same mark, which in other times and other parts of the country, was laid on those called “Indian lovers.” Therefore, their “termination with extreme prejudice “ was deemed justifiable “casualties of war” by those who exerted “kinetic” pressure on the puppet populace. Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), a true son and lover of the Southland, lived in this environment.

His life’s labors required that he assume responsibility for the health and well being of his three wives, two sons, two daughters, along with the lives of the Tuskegee faculty and staff, as well as the lives of the thousands of students whose neighbors, cousins, aunts, uncles, fathers, and mothers had entrusted their daughters and sons to his care.

In *Up From Slavery*, Washington informs us: “I had no schooling whatever when I was a slave, though I remember on several occasions I went as far as the schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses to carry her books. The picture of several boys and girls in a school room engaged in study made a deep impression upon me, and I had the feeling that to get into a school and study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise, “until, “by and by” Booker became one member caught up in “This experience of a whole race beginning to go to school...for the first time.”

Thus, in 1895, when “Professor Booker T. Washington” was invited to deliver a major speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, history was made. This event, by design, began a new age in American labor and race relations. It was the first time a Black man

addressed an audience of prominent Southern whites, Blacks, and whites from the North. As a cultural event, it was the iconic example of what Yale sociologist Elijah Anderson calls “A Black Man in White Space.” And what happened in Atlanta (the premier city of the “new South”) had real and symbolic implications for how the American experiment in democracy would position itself internationally, in the marketplace of both ideas and commerce. In Atlanta, in 1895, Booker T. Washington came into his own as the new leader of the Negro people.

### **Frederick Douglass, the leader is dead: Long live the leader!**

When Washington told the crowd of thousands that “The wisest among my race understand that agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than artificial forcing...the opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera house,” a new age had dawned. Washington, in word and deed, separated himself from the protest tradition of Frederick Douglass. The major point about “race-matters” was made clear and, for the most part, deemed acceptable by the majority of Americans, Southern and Northern, Blacks and whites.

His proclamation that “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers—yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress,” was the coup de grace. So, when he finished the oration, his audience stood, shouted, and stomped its thunderous applause of approval.

Long live the leader. The United States had indeed entered a new era with one man’s vision for “a more perfect union.” Even Dr. W. E. B. Dubois (considering the reality of Southern race relations) initially supported Washington’s position...initially. Eight years later, in 1903, with his publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, his position had changed...considerably:

### **Instructing Children: Dining at Home**

Wednesday, October 16, 1901

“My dear Mr. President,

I shall be very glad to accept your invitation for dinner this evening.”

After dinner the gentlemen stepped into The Red Room for further conversation, coffee, and to strategize about politics, particularly Southern politics. Two days later, when word got out about the dinner, a fire storm erupted. For weeks it raged and burned. One example, expressing the Southern take on the matter, was *The Mobile Weekly Press*. In December 1901 the *Press* announced:

But alas for good intentions,  
And such democratic ways!  
For there came a cry from Dixie  
And a fire was set ablaze.  
You insult us, you outrage us!  
You commit an awful sin!  
When you welcome to your table  
That - er—man with a dark skin.

In Lincoln, Nebraska, Williams Jennings Bryan, in a move designed to curry Southern favor, devoted a page and a half to the dinner. In *The Commoner* he wrote, “It is to be hoped that both of them will upon reflection realize the wisdom of abandoning their purpose to wipe out race lines, if they entertain such a purpose”

William H. Council, Washington's rival Black educator in Alabama, attempted to use the “accident,” as he called the dinner, to undercut Washinton’s influence among his white supporters in the South.

*The New York Times* opined: “The South should be rejoiced,” reporting that Washington and Roosevelt are “two of the truest Americans born on our soil and two of the best and most intelligent and influential friends of the south now living.” For the most part, the Black populace was proud and pleased.

As news of the uproar reached Europe, the dinner was “the most universally discussed topic that has found its way across the Atlantic in many years” reported the Paris correspondent for the *London Express*.

And, in France, *Le Journal des Debas* termed the affair “a black incident in a White House” and asked, “Is the South going to secede anew to maintain the social slavery of the black race?”

In his book *My Larger Education*, Washington wrote: “The public interest aroused by the dinner seemed all the more extraordinary and uncalled for because, on previous occasions [on his three trips to

Europe], I had taken tea with Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle; I had dined in the same room with President McKinley in Chicago at the Peace-Jubilee dinner; and I had dined with ex-President Harrison in Paris, and with many other prominent public men.”

Certainly, when such public men as Andrew Carnegie host you as a guest at his summer retreat, Skibo Castle, in Scotland, or John D. Rockefeller invites you into his regular bible class in New York City, the day after the White House dinner, Washington has reason to be a bit perplexed at the press and personal interest that the dinner received.

In *My Larger Education*, Washington also relates another encounter:

Some weeks after the incident I was making a trip through Florida. In some way it became pretty generally known along the railroad that I was on the train, and the result was that at nearly every station a group of people would get aboard and shake hands with me. At a little station near Gainesville, Fla., a white man got aboard the train whose dress and manner indicated that he was from the class of small farmers in that part of the country. He shook hands with me very cordially, and said:” ‘I am mighty glad to see you. I have heard about you and I have been wanting to meet you for a long while.’ I was naturally pleased at this cordial reception, but I was surprised when, after looking me over, he remarked: ‘Say, you are a great man. You are the greatest man in this country!’ I protested mildly, but he insisted, shaking his head and repeating. “Yes, sir, the greatest man in the country.’ “Finally I asked him what he had against President Roosevelt, telling him at the same time, in my opinion, the President of the United States was the greatest man in the country. ‘Huh! Roosevelt?’ he replied with considerable emphasis in his voice. ‘I used to think that Roosevelt was a great man until he ate dinner with you. That settled him for me.’”

Now, the crux of the issue was two-fold: One, that the invitation had been offered and, two, that Washington had accepted. Roosevelt, on occasion, had stated that, because his mother was a native of Georgia, the South should consider him as one of their own. And because Washington had proclaimed in Atlanta that in all things “social” Negroes would remain as “separate as the fingers,” it was a bit difficult to square that circle. So the South had concluded that Washington and Roosevelt were in cahoots in promoting “social intermingling of the races.” And, yes, a snack in the office together might be acceptable, but for Washington to sit down and enjoy a meal with the President, in his home, with his wife and children

at the same table, he had crossed the line completely. Yet, on the other hand, he was the only Booker T. Washington they had, so after several months the storm subsided.

How did the news get out about the meal? As Harlan explains, the White House Social Calendar, a regular column in the newspapers of the national capital, reported, in small print, that on October 16, 1901, Booker T. Washington had been President Theodore Roosevelt's guest at dinner

In the aftermath of the affair, Washington addressed this letter to Roosevelt:

My Dear Mr. President:

I have refrained from writing you regarding the now famous dinner which both of [us ] ate so innocently, until I could get to the South and study the situation at first hand. Since coming here and getting in real contact with the white people, I am convinced of three things: In the first place, I believe that a great deal is being made of the incident because of the elections which are now pending in several of the Southern states; and, in the second place, I do not believe the matter is felt as seriously as the newspapers try to make it appear; and in the third place, I am more than ever convinced that the wise course to pursue is exactly the policy which you mapped out in the beginning; not many moons will pass before you will find the South in the same attitude toward you, that it was a few years ago. . . I cannot help to feel. . . that good is going to come of it.

Throughout November, Roosevelt continued to contemplate the situation that the dinner had produced.

He recorded:

I have not been able to think out any solution, of the terrible problem offered by the presence of the Negro on this continent, but of one thing I am sure, and that is, that in as much as he is and can neither be killed or be driven away, the only wise and honorable and Christian thing to do is to treat each black man and each white man strictly on his merits as a man. . .Of course I know that we see through a glass dimly, and, after all, it may be that I am wrong; and my whole way of looking at life is wrong. At any rate, while I am in office, however short time it may be, I am honor bound to act up to my beliefs and convictions.

For ten years Washington refused to offer any public statement about the incident. Then in 1911 he published *My Larger Education* and in chapter VII, "Colonel Roosevelt and What I Have Learned From

Him,” he went into detail about the close and long relationship that he had enjoyed with Roosevelt, as a private citizen, as Governor of New York, as Vice-President and as President of the United States.

Historians have revealed additional details that Washington did not. The fact is that, on September 14, 1901, the very day Roosevelt was sworn in as President, following the assassination of President McKinley, he requested Washington to come north and meet with him immediately.

Now let's cut to the chase. After the White House dinner, the men retired to The Red Room and over coffee discussed what? In the big picture:: how to deepen the policy and action agenda that had been percolating in their gray matter for over a decade. Since both Washington and Roosevelt shared the same beau ideal of an elected political leader, Abraham Lincoln, it's no surprise that their rise would connect one to the other. The quest for power and influence profits from a great model. And, in the approaching 1904 Presidential election, the Party of Lincoln needed to further unite its house. In order to ensure a Roosevelt victory, as the ticket's incumbent at the top, the time had arrived for a serious sit-down concerning the South.

Both men agreed that the influence of the Democratic majority in the South could best be neutralized by increasing the influence of Republicans in the North. When President Rutherford B. Hayes agreed to the Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877, which awarded the Presidency to Hayes rather than to Democrat Samuel Tilden, American political and military leaders learned something about Reconstruction: that new nation-building attempts, within a post-war context, will seldom succeed without a strong and sustained military presence. (Or, perhaps they already knew this?)

In 1877, Commander-in-Chief Hayes withdrew all federal military troops from the South. He then allowed the defeated rebellious Southern leaders to regain control over the formerly enslaved people. He also promised that there would be no interference from the federal government. Do with the Negroes what you will, in spite of the Constitutional guarantees of the 14th and 15th Amendments for “due process of the law” and the right to vote. Thus, in the United States of America, democracy was gone because the Democrats had regained control in the South.

Even rewarding Frederick Douglass with the highest “appointed” federal position ever achieved by a Black man did not compensate for the loss. Thus, America's first Black U. S. Marshal, from his D. C. office, braced for the fall. The success of Lincoln's emancipationist vision hobbled on just one leg and, by 1901, it was all but dead. And, since Southern nullification of the 15th Amendment to The Constitution of

the United States, guaranteeing Black men the vote, was all but gone, Roosevelt was determined to minimize the loss by cutting the cost. Therefore, Washington would provide the operational intelligence that consolidated national power in the Roosevelt docket.

Naturally, Washington saw the wisdom in Roosevelt's plan to replace some of McKinley's appointments with Roosevelt men, particularly McKinley men who were close to Mark Hanna, McKinley's political manager. If Hanna (as expected) chose to seek the Republican Party nomination, in opposition to Roosevelt for the 1904 Presidential race, these men could be a problem. Thus, it was high time to start circling the wagons.

Of course, Roosevelt wanted to know if Washington understood what these circumstances would mean for Black appointees. Since the vote is the voice, those with few votes had little power, and Southern Democrats had skillfully neutered Black power. Yet, Roosevelt saw the logic in Washington's comeback. Unless Blacks received some rewards for their over a quarter century of party loyalty, no good would result. In a close city, state, or national election, the swing-vote potential of the enfranchised Northern Black Republican votes could be severely jeopardized, especially when white Northern Democrats, sensing the split, would most likely raise their effort to lure the Black vote. And, as Lincoln protégés the Principal and the President well understood the perils of "a house divided."

Roosevelt explained that though fewer Southern Blacks would receive federal appointments, he would appoint Blacks in the North and the West, something that previous administrations had failed to do. And both Washington and Roosevelt agreed that regardless of region or race, all appointments should go only to persons with a solid record, a record that illustrated their support for the common good.

Also, both men acknowledged that Republican relationships with Southern Democrats would be tricky and must be handled with finesse. What Democrats were trustworthy supporters of the common good? Just who these so-called "Gold Democrats" were, Washington was best positioned to know. And what about the opposition Southern Republicans, the so-called "Lily Whites" who were hell bent on excluding all Blacks as well as progressive whites? They had to be dealt with as well.

Thus, on those occasions when there arose an internal struggle within the "Lily White" faction, Washington's insight could be decisive in the President's decisions. Roosevelt's decision may curtail the lesser of two evils, but Washington's selection would be a pointer among the available alternatives. For the pros relationships are everything.

Now what about Washington's standing among key white power brokers in the South, especially among those in his home state of Alabama? What had he done for them that convinced them that they were better off with him than working to oppose him? What had Washington done to make Alabama look good in the eyes of the nation? For that matter, what had he done to raise Alabamans' conception of themselves to themselves? And what does this all mean for his relationship with Theodore Roosevelt?

Let's begin with Alabama. While I've never heard another scholar say it quite this way, here is my take on this question. On the national political playing field, I'd argue that Washington was not only "a great player, with a genius instinct for the subtleties of the game, but he was a coach-general manager, whose won/lost record merits the hall of fame. Booker Washington was the "Bear Bryant" of Alabama politics. (And they both loved to sport stylist hats.) Indeed, Roosevelt, who was no shrinking violet, understood that Washington was a master of public relations. Whether playing his usual, high-profile, quarterback position or observing (he was always observing) the ground game runs of congressmen, governors, or presidents, Washington set the standard. All Alabama public figures profited from his political ploys. Principal Washington drew national attention, spotlights and cameras, to Alabama by his seduction of U. S. Presidential recognition.

For instance, in 1898, President William McKinley catapulted Washington from cub to bear status in Alabama political circles and positive national attention to Alabama when he conceded to Washington's invitation to make a Presidential visit to Tuskegee Institute. For this occasion, state politics in Birmingham called "time out"! Congress was adjourned. The Governor, members of his cabinet, as well as Justices of the Alabama Supreme Court gathered on the Tuskegee campus and played witness to it all. And, though he was not in attendance, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt took note of it all, too.

All of Alabama took note as well.. Alabamans further noticed when on October 24, 1905, Roosevelt, now President, made his visit to the Tuskegee campus. Alabamans noted also when, on March 19, 1906, Theodore Roosevelt stopped in on an attention-getting visit. Cameras certainly snapped, and newsmen wrote, about the 1906 Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Tuskegee. The whole of Alabama academic and business communities (those institutions that grow politicians and industrialists) read about the speakers who shared the stage with Washington.

Here at this little school and industrial enterprise sat Charles W. Elliot, the President of Harvard University, Andrew Carnegie, the capitalist, and William Howard Taft, Secretary of War [secretary of defense], and heir apparent of the presidency. And, whether on stage or pacing the sidelines, Alabamans

knew there was Washington, Head Coach, General Manager, and owner of it all. And, yes, the stadium was located at Tuskegee, though residual benefits would yield a profit for Alabamans one and all. Of course, it did not hurt when, in 1910, Theodore Roosevelt became a member of the Tuskegee Board of Trustees.

But what about the wider world, North and South, but especially in the South, Black and white, and especially white? How did he ensure that they got the message in a transparent, quid pro quo, mutually beneficial way? Well, let's see. Washington publically teaming up with Roosevelt in 1901 was certainly a master stroke for both men. Plus, he published *Up From Slavery*, a classic, in this year. Here I do see one similarity between Washington and Douglass in the main.

Just as 1877 marked a tragic downturn for Black people as a whole, it represented a personal elevation for Marshal Douglass, the man. Comparatively speaking, though 1901 remained at a low point for Blacks as a whole, the year ushered in positive change for Washington, the man, while the semiotics signaled something of a rise for all.

As such, even the downtrodden Black rural masses felt uplifted by the sign of his success. Relationships have a rubbing quality about them, even distant ones. Whatever is on me may transfer to you, and that which you represent may rub off on me, even in the more mundane of places, like dining room tables.

Theodore Roosevelt judged a person by his individual worth, his non-economic virtues such as intelligence, unselfishness, courage, and decency. He felt these qualities indicated character, and Roosevelt believed that what is true of the individual is also true of the nation.

Correspondingly, Washington made it clear that he did not seek, expect, nor would he accept any political position for himself. However, Roosevelt was aware that while the Principal desired no official position, he was not averse to the power his influence with the President transferred. And the more power that Washington acquired, the more influence his principalship would bring to that one great love of his life: Tuskegee–Tuskegee, as an institution, an ideal, and Tuskegee as an idea.

Because Roosevelt felt what Washington knew—that, in matters of significance, race trumped all—they agreed on one more key point: that a white face be seen as coordinator of Negro affairs. Just as most Black colleges had white presidents, it would be the same for most other Negro patronage. And it HAD to be the same for any and all positions of power the President granted to white men. Therefore, they agreed on two trusted white allies for this position in the South. Of course, each white man

understood that all recommendations to the President about Southern patronage for either Black or white men would first be secretly filtered through Washington. Washington, himself, stressed that a powerful Southern white man would rather not get the position than to get it because Washington, a Black man, had an influential hand in its acquisition.

Thus, what we have here might be considered a willful failure to communicate in the public domain. Yet communicate it does. Southern white republicans, as well as Northern Black members of the party, did understand these changes in the rules, yet never lost sight of how the game was played. They understood Washington's role in the whole affair. So as well as a bear, he was "the elephant in the room," which explains why friends and foes often referred to him as "the Wizard," though, as one historian informs us, "never to his face." Washington was complex. Indeed, Roosevelt and Washington initiated the overt in their actions. It's just that their maneuvers were translucent, opaque, in a semi-transparent sort of way.

Washington had this Janus-like ability to project a different face to different audiences, yet, not in a hypocritical way. He was complex and disarmingly clear because power is without influence if people don't know you have it. The Wizard, unlike most . . . no, unlike all other presidents of educational institutions had built Tuskegee brick by brick...literally brick by brick. He and his students had, after building the kiln, made enough bricks not only to construct the buildings, but to sell the surplus for profit. Thus, the Tuskegee Institute was an idea, an ideal, and an industry with a lot of investors whom Washington invited in.

One such invitee was President Grover Cleveland. In *Up from Slavery* Washington informs his readers that he "met Grover Cleveland for the first time when he visited the Atlanta Exposition as President." Though he never made a high profile Presidential visit to the Tuskegee campus, Washington reveals that "Mr. Cleveland has not only showed his friendship for me in many personal ways, but has also consented to do anything I have asked of him for our school. This he has done, whether it was to make a personal donation or to use his influence in securing donations of others."

Now, of course, Blacks knew by the grapevine how the Wizard consolidated and expanded his influence. And, for those Negroes nationally who may not have been plugged in, Washington had "the Tuskegee Machine." Keeping track of its business locally, nationally, and internationally was the job of the Texan Emmet Jay Scott, his loyal, efficient, industrious and, highly effective Tuskegee lieutenant.

## Booker T. And T. R. : Personalities in a Personal Relationship

Washington's long standing personal relationship with Roosevelt had given him the chance to know the President in ways that even scholars may not have appreciated. For instance, in *My Larger Education*, the Principal not only refutes an often-cited trait of Roosevelt but advances an alternative interpretation on Roosevelt's behavior.

One of the most striking things about Mr. Roosevelt, both in private and public life, is his frankness. I have been often amazed at the absolute directness and candor of his speech. He does not seem to know how to hide anything. In fact, he seems to think aloud. Many people have referred to him as being impulsive and acting without due consideration. From what I have seen of Mr. Roosevelt in this regard, I have reached the conclusion that what people describe as impulsiveness in him is nothing less than quickness of thought. While other people think around a question, he thinks through it. He reaches his conclusions while other people are considering preliminaries. He cuts across the field, as it were, in his methods of thinking...I remember that, on one occasion, when it seemed to me that he had risked a great deal in pursuing a certain line of action, I suggested to him that it seemed to me that he had taken a great chance. He replied: "One never wins a battle, unless he takes some risks."

These words from the former U. S. Army Colonel who bravely led Black fighting men-in -arms in Cuba, yet, as President, ignored Washington's advice, and the advice of other Black leaders, against unjustly dismissing from the Army other "Black Brothers in Arms" in Brownsville, Texas.

Washington further made the point, about issues of impulse, control, planning, and success, what he had observed about Roosevelt:

He not only thinks quickly, but he plans and thinks a long distance ahead. If he had an important state paper to write, or an important magazine article or speech to prepare, I have known him to prepare six or eight months ahead. The result is that he is at all times master of himself and of his surroundings. He does not let his work push him; he pushes his work.

But, if the popular view was that Roosevelt had impulse-control issues, no one thought this about Washington. His *modus operandi* was all about control, primarily of himself. In spite of these popular perceptions about them, they won both in professional and personal terms. These two had no need for

separation. Theodore Roosevelt won the 1904 Presidential election against New York Judge Alton B. Parke in a landslide. In fact, Roosevelt carried every state outside the South, including Missouri. Meanwhile, Washington rode a tidal wave of success with his work at and for Tuskegee. Life, you see, had revealed much about whys, hows, and what fors, and he passed his knowledge on to his students. He was deliberate, systematic, and dogmatic in his pedagogy. I think that Washington was an administrator by necessity, but at heart he was a teacher. His primary message to his students was that they were being trained to do useful labor, to get a job, yes, but, more importantly, they were being educated and trained to create jobs.

Tuskegee Institute was an industrial and normal school. This meant that following graduation they were to disperse themselves throughout the South and, like him, create new schools, little Tuskegees. One way to think about Washington's educational philosophy is that all productive labor can be put on a scale of from good to great; it depends on what you make. The emphasis is on "make," so go forward and create!

Thus, their life's work guided by this philosophy would materialize what he had promised in 1895, to those white industrialists in Atlanta: "Cast down your buckets where you are": if they built their businesses in the South, they would find a trained Black labor force to fill the jobs. And, because these workers had been educated and socialized, with a mindset toward solving problems, as problems arose, they would do what all free workers do. They would intelligently adapt to the change for the betterment of all. It would be a win-win-win situation with a minimum degree of loss. In fact, if they all—owners, managers, and laborers—did a cost/benefit analysis, they'd see no need to import workers from elsewhere because Blacks would experience the benefit of staying home. In this "New South," native lab Tuskegees" would, as Captain Jean-Luc Picard would say, "make it so."

Speaking about the pudding, Washington also had a message for all those who believed that he spouted maladaptive ideas, ideas that were holding Black people back, those who believed that the liberal arts curriculum was the path to success and that he was, in fact against liberal arts education. He simply informed them that he hired more Black graduates from liberal arts universities than anyone else in the nation.

### **Pudding Talk: Making it Plain**

In fact, Washington explained that the head of Tuskegee's industrial education department, Robert R. Taylor, had graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the head of the

academic department, Roscoe Conkling Bruce, whom he hired in 1903, graduated from Harvard University.

Washington's actions displayed his belief that for Tuskegee students to learn how to lead, they must be taught and surrounded by leaders. Books were necessary to be sure, but for his students, as well as the population of the surrounding, it was a whole new culture that Washington was teaching. I don't know if he was reading the works of Frank Boas, the father of American anthropology, of the Smithsonian Institution and later Columbia University. But one of his primary assistants, and sometimes traveling companion, was Dr. Robert Park, who would go on to establish and lead one of the most successful Social Science Departments in the world, at the University of Chicago. The "whole person" theory and practice method that he had learned from general Samuel Armstrong at his alma mater, Hampton Institute in Virginia, was his guide, only Washington had upped the ante on Reconstruction education.

Once hired, Bruce immediately made plans to bring aboard new faculty from Harvard, Oberlin, Fisk, Atlanta, to join the existing Tuskegee faculty from Harvard, Oberlin, Cornell, and the University of Michigan. And, the resident genius, George Washington Carver, had undergraduate and graduate degrees from Iowa State University, where he had also taught, before joining the faculty at Tuskegee. Thus, Washington used Tuskegee Institute itself as his prime pedagogical tool for his famous "object lessons in a life of learning."

Roscoe C. Bruce was the son of Reconstruction-era United States Senator Blanch K. Bruce, from Mississippi. Josephine Beal Wilson Bruce, his mother and women's rights leader, had worked at Tuskegee as the Lady Principal or Dean of Women. And Washington had lured W. E. B. Du Bois there for a spell. However, Washington was not successful in convincing him to become a member of the Tuskegee faculty. Over the years, Du Bois had remained close to Mrs. Washington (Margaret Murray Washington), his Fisk University classmate. They had both graduated in the class of 1888. Washington's first two wives, the mothers of his children, and Tuskegee teachers, were leaders in their own right, but died all too soon.

Washington also proved successful in using his personal influence to help other Black academic institutions. For instance, as a member of the Board of Trustees of both Howard University and Fisk University (the two top Black liberal arts schools in the nation), he persuaded his friend Andrew Carnegie to finance their libraries. Upon accepting his Trustee position at Howard Carnegie said, in part, that his intent was to help "build up a great Negro University...[one] abreast with the best institutions of the kind in the country."

And, when Fisk was unable to raise the matching \$20,000 that Carnegie required, he encouraged its President to keep the faith. In his letter to President Merrill, Washington wrote :

Mr. Carnegie is very fond of Mrs. Washington and I am quite sure if she were to make a personal appeal to him, on the grounds that she is a graduate, to leave off the condition and to give you \$25,000 straight for erection of the library that he would accede to her request.

She did, Washington endorsed, and Carnegie did bestow the gift of \$25,000 to Fisk University.

Washington also leveraged his position as a member of the Southern Education Board (SEB) to help other Black schools. The SEB was a philanthropic organization that made grants to Southern educational institutions, white and Black. Washington was a force in the world of philanthropy. The larger General Education Board (GEB) was also receptive to his ideas, though he had no official position with the GEB.

Thus, since Washington was successful in the arenas of education, the press, business, and philanthropy, only one major question remains: Why would a man as smart, ambitious, successful, and driven as Theodore Roosevelt not want to connect with Washington for mutually beneficial reasons? Why the invitation to dinner? The President was very aware that Washington did not come empty handed; the Principal brought something to the table. In fact, Louis Harlan, like many historians of the South, refer to the time period 1901 to 1915, as “The Age of Booker T. Washington.”

Finally, as we start our sprint to the goal line, and wrap up our journey with Washington and Roosevelt, let’s catch a glimpse into his greatest coup, which happened one year prior to Roosevelt’s second-term landslide. Washington and William H. Baldwin, chair of the Tuskegee Board of Trustees, scored big time. Washington had over many years quietly courted Andrew Carnegie, who was supportive but not overtly so. Baldwin, president of the Long Island Rail Road, accompanied Washington when he snagged a “Hail Mary” pass, one that ensured the economic future of Tuskegee, his school, and The Oaks, his home.

In 1903 Andrew Carnegie gave \$600,000 to the Tuskegee endowment. And, according to a note that Carnegie wrote to Washington personally, “\$150,000 is to be used by him for his want and those of his family during his life or the life of his widow.” However, after he finished reading the note, Washington thanked Mr. Carnegie and then politely refused the offer. Washington feared that once word got out about the gift, people would mistakenly think that he was working for himself rather than for Tuskegee.

Thus, when he and two of his Tuskegee Board members met with Carnegie in his New York mansion, “Mr. Carnegie listened politely” and then said to Washington: “You go back there into my library, re-write my pledge to suit yourselves, bring it back to me and I’ll sign it.” They did and he did. Carnegie also consented to Washington’s request that he be allowed to keep the letter. He wanted to pass it on to his children, to mark his place in history. Washington was, indeed, a record-keeper. Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, the editors of *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, published them in an edited set of books amounting to fourteen volumes.

The Tuskegee Trustees did establish an endowment of \$150,000.00 to Washington, which allowed him to relinquish his salary. This amount would be worth a little over \$2,000,000.00 in today’s dollars. Of course, this was before federal income tax. Washington labored for Tuskegee, literally, until the day he died, November 15, 1915 at age 59. Most of those who knew and worked with him said he had worked himself to death.

W.E. B. Du Bois, historian, first Black to earn his Ph.D. from Harvard University, and his rival in waiting, published his eulogy in *The Crisis* (the official magazine of the NAACP). The NAACP leader, historian, and the magazine’s founding publisher and editor wrote: “The death of Mr. Washington marks an epoch in the history of America. He was the greatest Negro leader since Frederick Douglass, and the most distinguish man, white or black, to come out of the South since the Civil War.”

### **The Leader is dead: Long live the Leader**

1915: Third Journey Story

The 1896 “Plessy vs. Ferguson” U. S. Supreme Court separate-but-equal-decision gave Constitutional sanction to the daily practice of racial segregation. It also ensured that Black social inequality was now *de jure*, as well as *de facto*. The legal change to this law happened 58 years later in the 1954 Supreme Court “Brown vs the Board of Education” decision. The lead attorney was Thurgood Marshall. But the brain behind the winning legal strategy was Charles Hamilton Houston. Marshall was trained and mentored by Houston.

Houston, the Dean of the Howard University law school was a legal genius. He created the field of Civil Rights law, argued and won cases from small town Southern courtrooms to the nation’s highest court. At Howard University he trained and mentored a whole generation of civil rights lawyers, professors, and federal judges

After earning his Phi Beta Kappa key, as class valedictorian at Amherst University in Massachusetts, Houston served as a U.S. Army artillery officer in World War I. After returning from the front in France, he entered Harvard University law school. He became the first Black student to serve on the editorial board of the prestigious *Harvard Law Review*. After earning his Juris Doctorate under the close mentorship of future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, Houston earned his Doctor of Juridical Science, in civil law at the University of Madrid in Spain. The J.S.D. is the legal equivalent of the Ph. D.

Houston then went on a European tour and returned to the United States. Back home in Washington, D.C., he became a partner in his father's, William Houston's, law firm. At last Houston had satisfied Mordecai Johnson's, Howard University's first Black president's, directive. Johnson (Harvard, class of 1922) required all professional department heads to obtain at least two doctorate degrees in their field. Thus, what Charles Drew, M.D., Sc.D. did for Howard's medical school, Houston, J.D., J.S.D., did for its law school. And the "Capstone of Negro education" was well on its way to becoming that.

When Thurgood Marshall, first Black and U. S. Solicitor General and future Supreme Court Justice, NAACP lawyer, and his platoon of "legal engineers" won the 1954 Brown decision, Houston had been dead for four years. Close friends and associates said that he had worked himself to death, too.

### **The King is dead: long live the King**

When the first Black editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, President Barack Hussein Obama, nominated Elena Kagan for her current position as an Associate Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court, this Harvard Law School Dean had amassed a distinguished record. She was the first woman U. S. Solicitor General. Prior to this position she had formerly worked at the U. S. Supreme Court, as a clerk for Justice Thurgood Marshall. At the time of her nomination, she held dual positions at Harvard Law. This was because the Dean, an administration position, also granted her a choice of several options among named professorships, as a member of the teaching faculty. And Dean Elena Kagan chose to be selected as "The Charles Hamilton Houston Professor of Law."

My work as a Chautauqua performance scholar/artist, who does public history as my special area, is quite revelatory. In working with professors of literature, as well as, novelists, I've noticed that they may know as much about the past as historians do. Faulkner certainly knew as much. And perhaps Booker T. Washington, through the process of writing his biography on Frederick Douglass, understood the value of the long game as well as coaches do. Each game played under the Friday night lights may yield Saturday

morning insights into the hows and whys of leading change creatively and come to realize that compromise and seemingly random hook-ups, and hits in the ring, sometimes result in wondrous things. In 1940, following their first meeting at Tuskegee, Nettie Washington, Washington's granddaughter, married Frederick Douglass III, his namesake's great grandson. After becoming friends with Portia Washington Pitman, Alice Roosevelt (T. R.'s daughter) invites her into her home without so much as a shuffle from the stands. "She's my contemporary, Booker T. Washington's daughter. She brings her grandchildren here", Alice told an interviewer in 1968

Finally, Booker T. Washington and Theodore Roosevelt did jointly share one common experience with several of the leaders that have briefly appeared on the Chautauqua stage. This was the acquisition of a Harvard degree. In *Up From Slavery*, Washington fondly walks us across the Harvard stage, he recalls the roar of the crowd when his name is called, he receives the diploma, and he walks, sheep skin in hand, to the waiting dining room table. Thus, it was that Harvard University, on June 24, 1896, awarded Booker T. Washington an honorary Master of Arts Degree. This was the first time that a New England institution had so honored a Black man. Washington shares the names of others so honored: "General Nelson A. Miles, Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, Bishop Vincent, and Rev. Minot Savage."

Washington was one of the alumni dinner speakers in Memorial Hall that afternoon. The other after-dinner speakers were "Harvard President, Charles W. Eliot, Governor Roger Walcott, General Miles, Dr. Minot J. Savage and the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge." Reminiscing further, he says "To see over a thousand strong men, representing all that is best in state, Church, business and college pride—which has, I think, a peculiar Harvard flavor—is a sight that does not easily fade from memory." In Anderson's other concept about those special spaces, gathering places, this location was a mutually beneficial "cosmopolitan canopy." It points to an ideal where race and civility can become the norm in everyday life. Spaces like these remind me of Chautauqua..

You may have noted the name of one of Washington's Harvard "classmates in the class of 1896. "Reverend Vincent" is the Reverend Dr. John Heyl Vincent, a future Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1874 Vincent, along with Lewis Miller, co-founded the Chautauqua Movement in the United States. Both Washington and Roosevelt spoke on the Chautauqua circuit.

Roosevelt said that "Chautauqua is the most American thing about America". British Ambassador James Brice, on August 4, 1874, while at the "Mother Chautauqua," along Lake Chautauqua in Northeast New York State said: "I do not think any country in the world but America could produce such a gathering."

Roosevelt reminds us that Chautauqua is the experiential place where one “can be educated and entertained at the same time, and not tell the difference”

“Chautauqua,” an Iroquois-Seneca word that means “a coming together” of the American peoples. It is uniquely “us,” as conceptualized and institutionalized by Vincent and Miller and innovatively modernized by Everett C. Albers, the founding Executive Director of two organizations: The North Dakota Humanities Council (now Humanities North Dakota) and The Great Plains Chautauqua. As a Public Humanities Scholar-in-Residence Project, it is now a nationwide movement.

Frederick Douglass was paid quite well as a Lyceum speaker. The agency that handled some of his speaking tours was The Redpath Agency, which became one of the largest Traveling Tent Chautauqua circuits in the nation. The Great Plains Chautauqua Society, Inc. resurrected the modern traveling tent Chautauqua as a Public Humanities project. I became a member of the tribe in the summer of 1981. After my seven-year initiation by Chief Chautauquan, mentor, and friend, George Frein, I remained with the organization for eight more years. The Great Plains Chautauqua closed down forever in 2007. Thus, when I performed that final Tuesday night show, and the Grand Forks community stood and applauded us all, our journey had come to its end.

During those last sixteen years, I had, once again, been a part of something that was creatively greater than myself. In the Spring of 1972, at the University of Texas at Austin, Professor Geneva Gay had provided such an experience for us. Her multicultural education class, in the Afro-American Studies Department, had given birth to The Afro-America. For 16 years with the Great Plains Chautauqua, I had roamed the Great Plains, from Oklahoma to North Dakota, with our two-week residencies, two towns in each of the five states. And, like Willie Nelson, my Texas homeboy, from June to August, we did relish being “on the road again”.

On Tuesday, November 4, 2008, in his concession speech conceding victory to Barack Hussein Obama, Senator John McCain said in part: “My friends, we have come to the end of a long journey. The American people have spoken clearly. . .A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt’s invitation of Booker T. Washington to visit—to dine—at the White House was taken as an outrage in many quarters. America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of time. There is no greater evidence of this than the election of an African American to the presidency of the United States.” For eight years a Black family dined, with others, at the White House, and as host rather than guest.

Nuff said.

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