

Then Darkness Fled (The Liberating Wisdom of Booker T. Washington) by Stephen Mansfield, Cumberland House Publishing, 2002.
(22 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Booker T. Washington – a torch in Alabama

So from an old cabin in Virginia’s hills, Booker T. Washington rose up to be one of the nation’s great leaders. He lit a torch in Alabama; then darkness fled. —Martin Luther King Jr.

2. Obstacles Overcome.

I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.
(Page 12)

3. Tuskegee Founded.

The state of Alabama contacted the Virginia school about the possibility of establishing a similar college there. Washington was recommended for the job. Thus, on July 4, 1881, at the age of twenty-five, Washington founded Tuskegee.

The obstacles were enormous. There was no money, no faculty, no campus, no land, and no student body. Indeed, there was nothing except the resolution of the state to launch the school and the determination of Booker T. Washington to raise up a new generation of leaders from the rabble of the South and out of the legacy of slavery.

Nevertheless, before his death in 1915, Tuskegee had grown to encompass a 2,000-acre campus of 107 buildings with more than 1,500 students and nearly 200 faculty members. More important, though, Washington had installed his philosophy of hard work, competence, and community-mindedness in thousands of students all across the country who were at last making a substantive difference in the welfare of African families, churches, neighborhoods and business. Page 13

4. Prominent Black Leaders Follow Example.

Prominent black leaders like Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, Clarence Thomas, J. C. Watt, and Alan Keyes have revived the example of Booker T. Washington in the hope that his vision might finally and fully be implemented. (Page 15)

5. Black Indentured Servants in 1619.

They came (to America) in 1619 . . . one year before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, a century and a half before Jefferson proclaimed, “All men are created equal,” and more than two centuries before Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg.

They were only “twenty and odd Negroes” who sailed into Jamestown Harbor on a Dutch man-of-war captured by a man named Jope and piloted by an Englishman named Marmaduke. Their story is as murky as the James River must have been the day they dropped anchor. Somewhere on the high seas, Captain Jope had apparently decided to attack and rob a Spanish vessel making for the West Indies with a cargo of Africans. Little more is known, except that to the Jamestown of John Smith, and Pocahontas weary blacks came with names like Pedro, Isabella, and Antoney. It was the beginning of black America.

In a broader sense, though, it was but one small event in the agonizing four-hundred-year drama called the Black Holocaust. In these years as many as forty million Africans were callously uprooted from their homes and violently harnessed to dream of arrogant power. It was the continuation of what began with the Moslem Arabs in the 700s and exploded with the Portuguese in 1442. Although it is true that “slavery was old when Moses was young,” the more modern version was different from anything known to the ancients: It was based on race, not on military conquest or even religion, as it had been in Greece and Rome and dozens of other civilizations. It was based on supposed inferiority of black skin and African culture, and to justify this fallacy and its enormous economic benefits men distorted their faults and perverted their souls.

Thus, Pedro, Isabella, and Antoney, along with the rest of the Jamestown blacks, were the first of a million or so Africans to be planted in what was later to become the United States of America. What distinguishes their story, though, is that they were not slaves. While in time almost all blacks in the America colonies were classified as slaves, this was not so in the first forty years of their history. Instead, they became part of English society just as most of the white settlers did—as indentured servants. (Page 33-34)

6. Slaves Converted to Christianity Proved to be a Problem.

Then the years of equality came to a tragic end. By the 1660s, word demand for sugar and tobacco became too much temptation for the white rulers of the American

colonies. Hungry for huge profits to be made and needing cheap labor at any normal price, colonial growers and merchants seized upon their black servants and made them slaves in perpetuity. Maryland and Virginia led the way both in outlawing intermarriage and making blacks slaves for life. Changing the law was easy; changing religious principle was another matter. Needing some theological justification for their deeds, slavers rationalized that since blacks were “heathen” their chains were tools of conversion. But heathens can change and when slaves converted, owners were confronted with their own hypocrisy. This reached its apex in 1667 when a Virginia law stated, “The conferring of baptism doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom.” (Page 35)

7. In 1787, Blacks Only $\frac{3}{5}$ a Human.

The social compact of the nation was not to include blacks. At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the Framers concluded that a black man counted as only three-fifth of a human being in determining representation. In 1793 Congress passed the first Fugitive Slave Law, which made helping a runaway slave a crime and capturing him a business. The hope of the Revolution was fading. Even good laws were ignored. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 forbade slavery in the territories that were becoming states, but Tennessee welcomed slavery anyway and the floodgates were opened. Then in 1808 Congress passed a law prohibiting the importation of African slaves, but it, too, was ignored everywhere. Before long, with the advent of the plantation system, the enthronement of cotton, and the protection of the courts, the cruel subjugation of some four million Africans became an established fact of American society. (Page 38)

8. Slavery, An Evil System.

This entrenched system of evil bore no resemblance to the tempting illustrations of *Gone With the Wind*. Human beings were bred like cattle. Advertisements for slaves often spoke of how pleasing a slave girl was and how much delight she might bring her master. The children of slave women were routinely taken from their arms, never to be seen again. Whipping and beating, even to the point of death, were not unknown. Even religion among the slaves, irrationally feared by some plantation owners, was opposed and sometimes outlawed. It was illegal to teach a slave to read and illegal in some quarters even to read to him from the Bible.

Perhaps worst of all, there was serious debates about whether black people had souls and many slave owners, having concluded the matter for themselves, simply impressed upon their human property the dehumanizing, dispiriting lie that they were but animals, made for the very abuse they were enduring. (Page 38-39)

9. Why Can't Slavery Be Eradicated in America, too?

William Lloyd Garrison began calling for immediate emancipation of the slaves and his fiery rhetoric caused an already shaken South to look north with suspicion and foreboding. Overshadowing all was the fact that in 1833 Great Britain eradicated slavery with the stroke of a pen, owing largely to the efforts of evangelical parliamentarian William Wilberforce. Many asked why in America, in God's chosen nation, the same could not be done. (Page 39)

10. Someone to Point the Way.

. . . Options hardened, that North and South polarized, that churches divided, that families parted, and that nation unraveled. Soon there would be violent, wrenching war, a bloody storm of such devastation that the passing of generations would not heal it. Hundreds of thousands would die and weeping would spill out into the land. In the end, blacks would be free, but only before the law, and even then not always. They could not be free if they could not read. They could not be free if they had nothing the buyers of the world wanted. They could not be free if they harbored a debilitating bitterness, no matter how justified. And they could not break free if they did not know who they were, what they could do, and why they were made. When the great Armageddon was finished, blacks would find they were free only to pursue real freedom. And they would need someone to point the way, someone who knew the price of the promised land. (Page 40)

11. Freedom to Change the World Forever.

During the great civil war, in a tiny cabin in Hale's Ford, Virginia, a child slept. He slumbered on a pile of rags atop the dirt floor of the cabin where his mother cooked for their white owners. Rumors of battles and troops had swept the slave quarters of the little plantation for months and each bit of news danced on the hope of a bound people. The sleeping boy stirred, aware that some –one was near, that words were floating about him. As his mind cleared he focused on what he would recall throughout his life as his earliest memory. They were the words of his mother: she was on her knees at his side, praying that Mr. Lincoln's armies would be successful

and that she and her children might be free. The future seemed to crash in upon him, for it was at that moment the boy first realized he was a slave and it was at that moment he first considered the possibility that what the grownups called freedom might change his world forever. He would never forget this awakening.

The boy was a small, completely unremarkable black child and the folks around the plantation called him “Booker.” (Page 40-41)

12. Viewing a Whipping.

There is another scene from his childhood that Booker could never erase, for it was a harsher, more disturbing image. Slaves on the Burroughs plantation were rarely beaten, but it did happen and on at least one occasion Booker was a witness. For some offence real or imagined, Booker’s uncle was stripped naked, tied to a tree, and whipped with cowhide. It was a gory, humiliating scene. One can imagine the assembled slaves looking away in horror, Jane’s pitiful screams for her brother, and the heartbreaking sound as the bloodied slave cried, “Pray, Master. Pray, Master” with each stroke. It was an experience designed to crush the spirit and forever mark the memory. It worked. Booker later wrote that the degrading moment “made an impression upon my boyish heart that I shall carry with me to my grave.” (Page 47)

13. School Was Paradise.

One of his many chores was to accompany the Burroughs girls to school, which allowed him to go right to the door of their schoolroom but not to enter. As he later wrote, “The picture of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in study made a deep impression upon me, and I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and to study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise.” Page 49

14. Torn Loyalty to Freedom and The Master.

Since Booker was only five when the war began, it is possible that the weight of the divided loyalty did not bear upon him as it did the other slaves. Still, the slaves on the Burroughs farm were caught, as with thousands of slaves throughout the nation, between their hope for freedom and their natural devotion to their master’s family. They knew “that the freedom of the slaves would be the one great result of the war, if the Northern armies conquered” and, therefore, “Every success of the federal armies and every defeat of the Confederate forces was watched with the keenest and

most intense interest.” Daily they prayed, as Booker’s mother did, that Mr. Lincoln and his armies would set them free.

Yet this hope was not as often rooted in bitterness or hatred toward the master and his family as might be imagined. Indeed, the slaves often loved their master and served faithfully even as the plantation went into decline under the strain of war.

When the master’s sons were killed in war, as one of James Burroughs’s was, “the sorrow in the slave quarters was only second to that in the ‘big house.’” When the family’s silver was buried to protect it from approaching Yankees, not a slave on the farm would have betrayed the secret, even to his liberators. And if anyone attempted to harm the master or his family while he was away, they would “have had to cross the dead body of the slaves to do it.” (Page 50-51)

15. How to Act With No Obstacles.

In those days, and later as a young man, I used to try to picture in my imagination the feelings and ambitions of a white boy with absolutely no limit placed upon his aspirations and activities. I used to envy the white boy who had no obstacles placed in the way of his becoming a Congressman, Governor, Bishop, or President by reason of the accident of his birth or race. I used to picture the way that I would act under such circumstances; how I would begin in at the bottom and keep rising until I reached the highest round of success. (Page 59)

16. Loving Work.

Before going there I had a good deal of the then rather prevalent idea among our people that to secure an education meant have a good, easy time, free from all necessity for manual labor. At Hampton I not only learned that it was not a disgrace to labor, but learned to love labor, not alone for its financial value, but for labor’s own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants done brings. (Page 71)

17. Foundation Needed in Education, Industry, and Property.

The temptations to enter political life were so alluring that I came very near yielding to them at one time, but I kept from doing so by the feeling that I would be helping in a more substantial way by assisting in the laying of the foundation of the race through a generous education of the hand, head, and heart.” “What our people most needed,” he had come to believe, “was to get a foundation in education, industry,

and property, and for this I felt that they could better afford to strive than for political preferment.” Politics might grant him individual success, but it would be “success at the cost of failing to do my duty in assisting in laying a foundation for the masses.” (Page 76)

18. Doing Noble Deeds.

The words of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, and it is taken “not in planning but in *doing*, not in talking noble deeds, but in *doing* noble deeds. (Page 77)

19. Train People of Character.

Booker had to “lift them up,” had to elevate them from a slavery-induced near-animal existence. He felt compelled to train them to be not imitation whites, but black people of character with something to offer the world. (Page 89)

20. Stolen Glory as a People.

It was this kind of pride that Booker Washington tried to plant in his people. For centuries they had been told they were nothing, that they were animals without souls or created only to serve whites. For centuries they had been denied the nobility of their heritage and the chance to make their honor known. Their glory as a people had been stolen. Booker Washington wanted it back. As often as he could, he proclaimed, “I was never prouder than I am today of being a Negro and of being identified in some slight degree with the struggles and triumphs of a race in which I have such confidence.” (Page 206)

21. One Percent Negro Blood.

Sometimes he chided the white man for his inconsistent thinking about blacks: “It takes one hundred percent of Caucasian blood to make a white American. The minute it is proven that a man possesses one one-hundredth part of Negro blood in his veins, it makes him a black man. He falls to our side; we claim him. The ninety-nine percent of white blood counts for nothing when weighed against one percent of Negro blood.” (Page 206)

22. Christlikness

If we imitate the life of Christ as nearly as possible, heaven will come about more and more here on earth. -- Booker T. Washington. (Page 145)