

Booker T. Washington

Educator

First Stamp to honor African American

Scott # 873

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Booker T. Washington was the first president and founder of Tuskegee University and the most influential spokesperson for African Americans from 1895 until 1915. Booker was born a slave in Franklin County, Virginia on April 5, 1856.

In 1865, after emancipation, the family moved to Malden, West Virginia. Booker's family were very poor, they couldn't afford regular schooling for any of their children and at age nine, Booker began working in the coal mines.

Booker was determined to better himself and in 1872 he enrolled at the [Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute](#). He worked at odd jobs and as a janitor to pay his tuition and living expenses. Booker graduated in 1875 and began teaching in Malden. He taught adults at night and children during the day. In 1878, Booker enrolled at Wayland Seminary in Washington D.C. and in 1879 he took a job teaching at the [Hampton Institute](#).

In 1881 Booker founded the [Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute](#). The school was modeled after the Hampton Institute and consisted of only two small buildings. Tuskegee was to become Booker's life work and a monument to his perseverance and dedication to the cause of educating and bettering the lot of African Americans. The Tuskegee Institute became [Tuskegee University](#) in 1985 and has a current enrollment of over 3000 students. Today, the University offers degrees in architecture, business administration, computer technology, engineering, teaching, liberal arts, agriculture, nursing and the veterinary arts. The school encompasses over 5000 acres and contains 70 buildings.

Booker believed that the interests of African Americans in the post-[Reconstruction](#) era could best be served by obtaining an education in crafts and industrial skills. Booker felt that African Americans should concentrate on improving their industrial and farming skills rather than pursue full civil rights. His beliefs and attitudes in this area later led to a break between Booker and [W.E.B. Dubois](#). Early Civil Rights leaders considered him an [Uncle Tom](#) and this stain on his reputation persists today. Booker summed up his beliefs in a speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895, stating, In all things that are purely social we can be separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.

The majority of African Americans in those times agreed with Booker's approach and white leaders and politicians doled out support and funds to Black institutions based on his recommendations. Booker received an honorary degree from Harvard University in 1896 and Dartmouth in 1901. He wrote over a dozen books including his autobiography, [Up From Slavery](#) in 1901.

Booker T. Washington died in Tuskegee, Alabama on November 14, 1915.

Famous Alumni of Tuskegee University include:

[Keenan Ivory Wayans](#)

[General Daniel "Chappie" James](#)

[Lionel Richie](#)

[Ralph Ellison](#)

[William Levi Dawson](#)

Admiral Roscoe Moore - Military Veterinarian

[Robert Benham](#)

[Senator Floyd Griffin](#)

Dr. Vera King Ferris - College President

Dr. Marvelene Hughes - College President

Sources:

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

Encyclopedia Africana

[Tuskegee University](#)

[University of Virginia - American Studies](#)

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