

Character Building

Booker T. Washington

A wonderful collection of essays on character that transcends time and race

Booker T. Washington was a man who believes that hard work and character were the determining factors in life. Born into slavery, he became educated by the force of his own determination and personality. He arrived penniless at the Hampton Institute in Virginia and left with an education. Not too long thereafter, in 1881, 18 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, he went on to found the Tuskegee Institute. His objective was to provide a college-level education for blacks so they could go forth to become schoolteachers in the rural South, and to teach mechanical skills which would help black people earn a living, free themselves from debt and become property owners in an agricultural society.

This is a series of homilies on the virtues of character. It is pretty similar to what you would read from white preachers of the same era. Horatio Alger stuff. You get some sense of the life of black people from the things that he lectures against, drinking, dissipation, and dandyism. But his spirit was always to accentuate the positive.

Of the two books I have read by Washington, I found "The Future of the American Negro" to be more informative. While this book provides good lessons for life in any age, The Future gives very useful insights into the situation of black Americans around the turn of the 20th century.