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THE OMAHA GUIDE

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"REMINISCENCES"

By MARY WHITE OVINGTON

CHAPTER IV

Two Leaders

Many of the younger generation today think of Washington as a myth and of DuBois as a back number. But at the time that I began my investigations these two men filled the stage, overshadowing other figures. And with due respect to the youth of the present time, they were greater figures than the new generation has yet produced.

Of Washington I can only speak as a casual acquaintance. He was far too busy a man to give his time to a woman of very moderate means who, if she subscribed at all to his school, would not be able to go beyond the ten dollar bill. He meant Tuskegee to be one of the best-equipped, best-taught schools in America. Such time as he could take from his work, his home and his friends was needed in making contacts that would bring him large returns.

I first met him through John E. Milholland at the Hotel Manhattan where he always stayed. He gave me one of the best pieces of advice I have ever had: "Always ask for more money than you think you can get. I made the mistake of asking Carnegie for six hundred thousand. I believe he would have given me a million."

Mr. Washington's autobiography, "Up from Slavery," is still one of the world's best sellers. The story of how he dusted the schoolroom at Hampton three times over and was accepted because of his thoroughness is typical of his zest for perfection, his ability to eat up work. He had a great flow of ideas and when at Tuskegee (much of his time was taken up with raising money) he kept his teachers so long in consultation that they had to neglect their classes. When he boarded a train the faculty drew a sigh of relief, but soon telegrams came ordering innovations. He introduced many of the best methods of today for rural education.



Mr. Washington

Farm demonstration was done by Tuskegee long before the government took it up. From Hampton he learned the value of relating education to life, and it became a religion with him. His people were struggling, often blindly, for a chance to develop their power. He told them to do this where they were, to become master workmen.

His famous Atlanta speech, "put down your buckets where you are," applied to the colored laborer as well as to the white employer. Hard work was now divorced from slavery. The Negro must respect it, must buy land, plant crops, white-wash houses, clean up back-yards.

One time he sent word to the Negroes for miles around Tuskegee to come to the school. They obeyed. When they got there he told them to go back and clean up their yards. His favorite animal was the pig, because, as he says in "Working with the Hands," it brings in the largest returns.

Many of his graduates went out to teach, and the gospel of making the most of life where you are spread among the race.

Whites Ate up This Doctrine
Of course, the whites ate up this doctrine. Some distrusted him in

the South, he spent too much time in the North where social equality was practiced, but the North found him a glorious prophet. The Negro had of late been a harassing responsibility. Now some one had come with a happy solution of the whole problem. Cease to think of lynchings, of injustice, of the loss of the ballot. Help the Negro to help himself. Make the Negro a good workman by giving money to Tuskegee. Washington was greeted with acclaim and with profound relief. He lectured in the largest hall the town he visited could offer and saw many turned away. Large gifts of money came to him and Tuskegee grew.

Monroe Trotter Resists; Lands in Jail
From the beginning there was an element among the Negroes that viewed the situation with alarm. Monroe Trotter of Boston was the first to offer resistance and landed in jail.

Jealousy of Washington's power grew. He held the purse strings. Whom he endorsed received dollars for their enterprises, while those he failed to endorse had to be contented with stray pennies.

The whites wrote to him about everything—the number of bath tubs for the new Y.M.C.A. (did the Negro really care to wash?), the best book on the color question. Washington was too level-headed to become an Emperor Jones, but he enjoyed his power and meant to keep it. He was surrounded with followers, not equals. A stream of young teachers entered Tuskegee one year and a swift-running rill left it the next. Some felt the place too much a spectacle. They could no longer endure the procession entering the chapel to the blare of trumpets, with the white visitor infallibly rising to exclaim with the Queen of Sheba, "The half was not told me." Others found the principal failed to uphold their authority with their pupils. And outside the school, from Monroe Trotter on, men began to question Washington's leadership.

White World Was Delighted
The white world, in the meantime, was delighted with their panacea. "Give money to Hampton and Tuskegee," they said, "teach the Ne-

On Both Sides of the Fence



RICHARD T. GREENER

gro to be a good worker, and other needful things will be added."

But when Washington rose to power, other things were taken away.

To vote in the South became impossible. School funds were voted by the legislature according to the per capita population, and divided by the whites among themselves. This gave the southern portion of state like Alabama an enormous advantage over the northern part where there were no Negro children to be counted out.

Public opinion, moreover, demanded that the Negroes should not complain. They must work hard and live on friendly relations with their white neighbors. In the cities Negro quarters were unimproved, high schools did not exist and should not be demanded. Industrial education was enough. This affected the schools supported by philanthropy.

Even Fisk University had to introduce industrial training. And Washington said nothing against this. He probably felt that it was his job to look after his school. Let others look out for themselves.

A Recommendation from Booker T.
I used to be amused and saddened by what I saw. Before long I was known as one interested in the Negro and I had many calls from colored men and women who needed money for their work. Almost invariably they began by handing me some recommendation from Washington endorsing them. It might be a note or perhaps only a newspaper clipping. It was presented as more precious than gold. I would say casually: "But I am not in sympathy with Dr. Washington's opinion. Industrial training is only a small part of what the Negro needs."

Then it was as though an actor dropped his mask. One man said to me with tears in his eyes: "I've sat on Washington's doorstep for four years to get this piece of paper. I couldn't raise a penny without it. Four years."

When the mask was dropped, I would have a real talk, a talk as between equals, and I would learn that every Negro worth his salt wanted the same thing, his rights as a citizen of this republic.

Booker T. Never Captured Atlanta U.

There was one school that Washington never captured, Atlanta University. Here that good old New Englander, Horace Bumstead, was president, and here instruction in higher education went on without apology. And here was the only Negro who at any time was a seri-

ous rival to Washington, Burghardt Du Bois.

Dr. Du Bois has written a slight sketch of his life in "Dark Water." He had no dramatic background of dire poverty. He was poor, but so were the most of his public school playmates, the farmers' and factory workers' boys and girls. He grew up in the Berkshires and had a higher education than his classmates, taking his Ph.D. at Harvard after graduate study at the University of Berlin. He wrote a monumental volume on the Negro in Philadelphia and then went to Atlanta, where he remained for many years leading the department of economics and instituting the Atlanta Sociological Studies, the first extensive sociological studies of Negro conditions in the United States.

Criticism and the \$20 Check

I made his acquaintance originally through his writing. Some of the essays in "The Souls of Black Folk" appeared first in the Atlantic

Monthly where I saw them and learned of the inhumanity of race prejudice. I wrote to him as soon as I received my fellowship, asking his advice. He was unendingly kind. I have a file of his letters with me now in which he advises me regarding my method of attack

gives me introductions to important men and women, accepts some of my criticisms of his writing. I seem to have been free with criticism, and in return gave criticism.

At the end of a year, knowing that his studies required support, at some sacrifice I sent a check for twenty dollars to the University's Sociological Fund. In his letter of thanks he expressed disappointment: "I didn't know," he said, "that I was dealing with a mere millionaire." Back of the joke was something real. DuBois and his followers wanted from the white man some-

thing more than money. They wanted a state of mind.

I attended two notable conferences in 1906, reporting each for the New York Evening Post, of which Oswald Garrison Villard was then the editor. One was the Niagara Movement, headed by DuBois, the other the National Negro Business League, headed by Washington.

The league was an effort of Washington to get the Negroes who were accomplishing something in business to meet and pool their experiences that they might learn from one another. It met in the summer in Atlanta shortly before the terrible riots. The sessions were designed to be practical talks, though orator occasionally added savor to the feast. There were, I remember, a few contractors, one from New Orleans did a large business, a number of bankers, and some men in real estate.

Philip Payton

Philip Payton of New York was in the audience. I went down the church aisle and talked with him, but though we were in a colored church I could see that I made him uneasy. Lynchings were going on at that time in the city, and perhaps he was right in thinking that my cordial greeting might endanger him. It was the farmers, however, who gave the meetings color and interest. They told noble tales of money made in cotton and corn.

"And don't let your neighbor know you got a cent," one advised. "Money's harder to keep than ter nake."

Through all the meetings, Washington presided with great tact. When the talk grew acrimonious, he came in with an amusing story.

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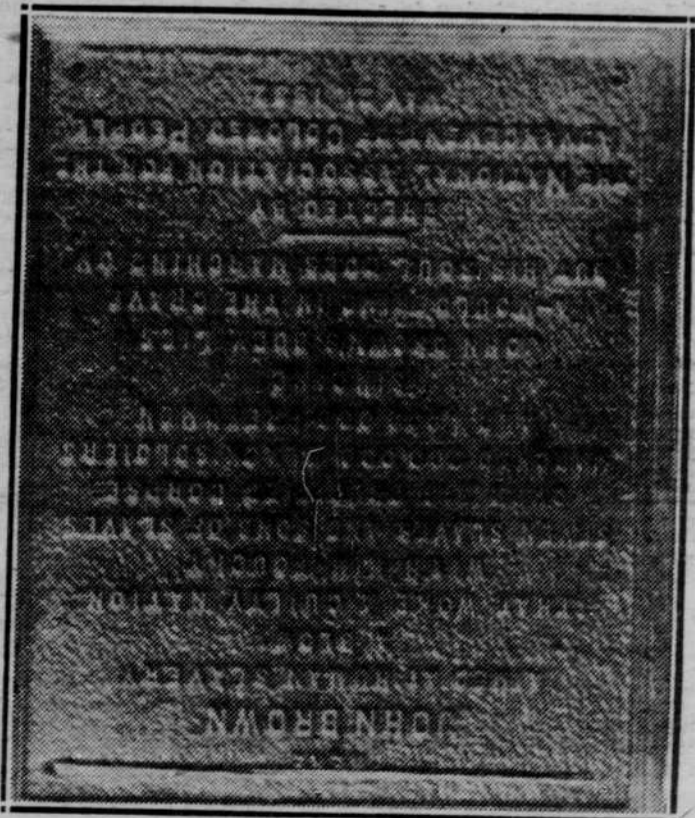


Dr. Du Bois



Payton

How Times Change



Storer College, Harpers Ferry, so progressive forty years ago that it was host to the radical Niagara movement, last year turned down this bronze tablet to John Brown offered by the N.A.A.C.P.