

## Booker T. Washington, Atlanta Address, 1895

1 A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly ship. From the mast of the unfortunate ship was seen a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly ship came back at once, "Cast down your bucket where you are." A second time the signal, "Water, water; send us water!" ran up from the distressed ship. It was again answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." And a third and fourth signal for water was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain of the distressed ship, at last listening to the advice, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who don't realize the importance of developing friendly relations with southern whites, who are their next-door neighbors, I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are." Cast it down in making friends of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.

2 Cast it down in agriculture, in industry, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. In this connection it is well remembered that whatever other signs the South may have, when it comes to business it is in the South that the Negro is given a chance in the commercial world. Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that most of us are to live by the productions of our hands and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor and put brains and skill into our occupations. We shall prosper if we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental things of life and the useful things. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, not at the top. Nor should we permit our problems to overshadow our opportunities.

3 To those of the white race who look to the immigrants of foreign lands for the prosperity

of the South, I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket where you are." Cast it down among the eight million Negroes whose habits you know, whose loyalty and love you have tested. Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labor wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, built your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the earth. Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them, you will find they will buy your extra land, grow crops in the waste places in your fields, and run your factories. While doing this, you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen. We have proved our loyalty to you in the past, nursing your children, watching by the sickbeds of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-filled eyes to their graves. So in the future, we shall stand by you with a loyalty that no foreigner can equal. We are ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours. We shall join our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in the way that shall make the interests of both races one. 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.

The wisest among my race understand that demonstrating on questions of social equality is foolish. Progress in enjoying all the privileges that will come to us must be the result

of severe and constant struggle rather than of forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is banished for long. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours. But it is much more important that we be prepared for making use of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth much more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera house.

### Questions:

1. What did Washington mean when he told Southern blacks to "cast down your buckets where you are?"
2. What did he mean when he told Southern whites to "cast down your buckets where you are?"
3. How did Washington believe that blacks could improve their conditions?
4. How did Washington believe blacks should deal with the issues of segregation and the denial of voting rights? Explain.

## *Dr. William E. B. Du Bois Answers*

*Booker T. Washington 1903*

[In his famous book, *The Souls of Black Folks*, written in 1903, Negro scholar Dr. William E. B. Du Bois answered Booker T. Washington.]

. . . in the history of nearly all other races and peoples the doctrine preached . . . has been that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and houses, and that a people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth civilizing.

In answer to this, it has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things,—

- First, political power,
- Second, insistence on civil rights,
- Third, higher education of Negro youth,—

and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South. . . . As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years [since Booker T. Washington's Atlanta speech] there have occurred:

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority.
3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

These movements are not, to be sure, direct results of Mr. Washington's teachings; but his propaganda has, without a shadow of doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment. . . .

[Negroes] do not expect that the free right to vote, to enjoy civic rights, and to be educated, will come in a moment; they do not expect to see the bias and prejudices of years disappear at the blast of a trumpet; but they are absolutely certain that the way for a people to gain their reasonable rights is not by voluntarily throwing them away and insisting that they do not want them; that the way for a people to gain respect is not by continually belittling and ridiculing themselves; that on the contrary, Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to proper manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys. . . .

So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial Training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him. . . . But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds — . . . we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them. By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the [Founding] Fathers would fain forget: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."