BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

COLLECTION

The New York Public Library

Schomburg Center for Research
in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Blvd.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WASHINGTON, BOOKER T. (1856-1915). COLLECTION, 1889-1913.
1/2 a.b.

Biography

Booker Taliaferro Washington was born April 5, 1856 in Franklin County, Virginia. His mother, Jane, was the slave of a small planter, and his father was a white man. He was the middle child of three, having an older brother, John, and a younger sister, Amanda.

At the age of nine Booker, along with his family, moved to Malden, West Virginia, where they joined his stepfather, Washington Ferguson. In 1871, Booker began work as a houseboy for the wife of General Lewis Ruffner, owner of the coal mines. Mrs. Ruffner, a strict New Englander, was to exert a very important influence on Booker's life. In Malden, Washington attended school while working in the mines, acquiring some fundamentals of an education. In 1872, at the age of sixteen, he entered Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia. Arriving penniless, he was given work as a janitor to pay the cost of his room and board. The founder and principal, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, arranged for a benefactor to pay Washington's tuition. Washington studied academic subjects and agriculture; his special interests were public speaking and debate. At his commencement he was chosen to give a class address. Washington derived much of his educational philosophy from Armstrong, one of the foremost proponents of industrial education for blacks.

After graduating from Hampton with honors in 1875, Washington returned to Malden to teach school. In 1878 he went to Washington, D.C., where he spent eight months as a student at Wayland Seminary, an institution with an entirely academic program. In 1879 he returned to Hampton to teach in a program for American Indians.

In 1881 General Armstrong recommended Washington for the position of principal at the newly established normal school at Tuskegee, Alabama. Washington was offered the position and accepted responsibility for an institution that at the time of his arrival lacked land, buildings, and appropriations for anything other than salaries.

Washington went to work to sell the idea of the school and to recruit students from black families while at the same time seeking the support of local whites. The school opened in a shanty lent by a black church. Eventually an abandoned plantation on the outskirts of Tuskegee was purchased with funds borrowed from the treasurer of Hampton Institute. Students built a kiln to make bricks, and within a few years a classroom, dining room, dormitory and chapel had been built. By 1888 the school owned 540 acres of land and had an enrollment of more than 400. It offered training in trades such as carpentry, cabinetmaking, printing, shoemaking and tinsmithing. Through their own labor students

supplied most of the needs of the school.

Much of Washington's time was spent in raising money for Tuskegee and publicizing its philosophy. His success in securing financial aid from Northern philanthropists was one of his most remarkable achievements. His work as a educator, however, was only one part of his many-faceted career. His national fame as an orator was established when he addressed the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta on September 18, 1895. The accommodationist speech, which was about fifteen minutes in length, was enthusiastically received by the audience and widely reported in the press. Washington's fame was also spread by his writings, especially his autobiography *Up from Slavery*, which was published in book form in 1901. When Theodore Roosevelt became president, Washington held far more political power than any other black person.

The essence of Washington's philosophy was that through hard work, thrift, self-help and economic progress blacks would improve their status and be accepted by whites.

In 1896 Harvard University gave Washington an honorary M.A. degree, the first granted by the University to a black person. In 1902 he began attending the national conventions of the National Afro-American Council in which he played a guiding role. He served as president of the National Negro Business League until his death in 1915.

Washington was married three times. In 1882 he married Fannie N. Smith. She died, leaving an infant daughter Portia. In 1893 he married Margaret Murray, the first woman principal at Tuskegee. Washington died of arteriosclerosis and overwork in Tuskegee on November 14, 1915. He was fifty-nine years old. He was buried on a hill overlooking Tuskegee institute in a brick tomb made by the students.

Scope and Content

The Booker T. Washington Collection covers the period 1889-1913. The material consists of letters from Washington to two principal correspondents, Emily Howland and Francis J. Garrison.

The majority of the letters are those written to Emily Howland, a benefactor of Tuskegee Institute. The letters cover a variety of issues, including requests for financial assistance, progress reports and the annual reports to the Board of Directors of the Institute, as well as informal reports on his activities. The letters reveal frank expressions of his feelings regarding the criticism he received from black people (January 19, 1904), his surprise at being asked to speak at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta (September 6, 1895) where he delivered his now-famous accommodationist speech (a photocopy of

the handwritten speech is in the collection, folder 1), and a forceful statement of support for black people's efforts to protect

their constitutional rights (October 15, 1900). In addition, there are several letters in which he discussed some of the adminis- trative problems at the Kowaliga School, a school for black children in Alabama (1896-98) and the response to his autobiograph- ical articles which appeared in *Outlook Magazine*.

The letters to Francis Jackson Garrison (1848-1916), the son of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, similarly deal with a number of subjects. Among the Washington-Garrison letters of particular interest are those concerning the conflict between Washington and William Monroe Trotter (August 3, 1903, May 8, 17, 1905). Trotter, editor of the *Boston Guardian*, was philosophically opposed to Washington on a number of issues. Also, two letters regarding the Brownsville Affair (December 3, 1906 and attachment) and the Atlanta riot of 1906 (October 2, 1906). There are also letters from Mrs. Margaret Washington to Emily Howland. Two letters to William E. Curtis (January 24, 1905, April 1, 1905) are also of interest. The first discusses Washington's dinner at the White House and the second includes a list of black men in government service who received presidential appointments.

Provenance

Letter dated February 3, 1909, gift of Don Fowle, SCM79-10. Letter dated December 29, 1904, gift of John Strachan, SCM81-21. SCM82-76 from the Miscellaneous American Letters and Papers Collection.

D. Carter/D. Lachatanere
April 30, 1984

Container List

Box	Folder	
1		CORRESPONDENCE
	1	1899 - 1899
	2	1900 - 1904
	3	1905 - 1913