

On the 18th of September, 1895, Professor Booker T. Washington - founder of the University now known as Tuskegee - gave an important speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition held in Atlanta, Georgia. His speech was attended by both blacks and whites.

In it, Washington told the story of a boat crew dying of thirst. When the sailors cried out for water, to a passing ship, they were told to cast down their buckets where they were.

Again and again the same answer came - cast down your buckets where you are - but the sailors believed they were in salt water. When the crew finally did as they were told, dropping their buckets into the water where they were, they understood the message. Their ship was in the fresh water of the Amazon River Delta.

Washington told the story to make a point. He urged African-Americans to "cast down your bucket where you are," even though life in the South, after Reconstruction, was still extremely difficult for them.

This clip features Professor Washington, in 1904, personally recording the speech (for Columbia Records) which he had previously given in 1895. Follow the link to see his manuscript of the address also known as "The Atlanta Exposition Compromise Speech."

Highly respected, Washington was a friend of U.S. presidents (seen in this photo with Theodore Roosevelt) and captains of industry (seen here with Andrew Carnegie [seated next to him] and Robert C. Ogden [seated next to Washington's wife, Margaret James Murray]).

Other African-American leaders - like W.E.B Du Bois - did not always agree with Washington's approach. (See, for example, Chapter 3 of Du Bois' book, The Souls of Black Folk, where he quotes Byron: "Know ye not, Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?")

While he lived, Professor Washington was known as the greatest African-American educator in the United States.

Credits:

Booker T. Washington's recorded speech, online courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Booker-T.-Washington-Atlanta-Compromise-Speech1>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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