

George Washington Carver

There is leadership that talks and there is leadership that works and in the hall of fame of great black leaders over the decades, George Washington Carver was a leader that worked. His leadership was not the kind that tried to capture publicity or make great fame for himself. He didn't try to start a movement or achieve change through violence or confrontation, although those things are sometimes necessary.

Instead George Washington Carver showed leadership by making contributions to the welfare of his people that would last a lifetime. His selfless spirit is an inspiration to all peoples of any race, creed or color.

George Washington Carver is probably best known for his discoveries in the use of the peanut. And while it's true that Carver was credited with over 300 discoveries to find new uses for the common peanut, his innovations did not end there. He continued his research to find important uses for other common agricultural products such as the sweet potato, pecans and soybeans.

George Washington Carver truly took the hands of his people where they were at the time and lead them forward to a better life. And where the black community was in the nineteenth century was agriculture. This was where a black family looked for their food, their living and their opportunity to better themselves. And that is what George Washington Carver made possible.

He was in every way a self made man, setting out at a young age to attain a better education for himself, he set an example to all that education was the path to freedom for his people and for all people. He truly had to struggle to achieve his success as he worked his way up through high school and then at Simpson Collage in Iowa where he was the first and only black student and then on to Iowa Agricultural College.

His success at Iowa Agricultural College came from determination and his ability to use his natural genius to succeed against all odds. But his breakthroughs were nothing short of revolutionary introducing such ideas as crop rotation to southern agriculture that revolutionized how farming could be done and gave his people the chance to become genuinely profitable in their daily work.

As he found success in his private career, he never used his discoveries to gather wealth of fame for himself. Instead he wanted his work to benefit his people and all of mankind. He was quotes as saying concerning his talents, "God gave them to me. How can I sell them to someone else?"

These were not just idle words that he spoke because he lived that philosophy

evidenced by when he donated his life savings to start the Carver Research Foundation at Tuskegee to make sure that an institution existed to continue his important work in agriculture. Small wonder that the fitting remembrance that was etched on his grave read "He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."

The legacy of George Washington Carver would be one that set the standard high for black leadership in decades to come. It was a legacy of servant leadership, of concern for his people and for making genuine contributions to improving what was really important, the living standard and well being for all African Americans, not just the fortunate few. He is truly an inspiration for all of us who look at the struggle the black community has endured over the centuries and a figure to celebrate as a bright and shining leader in black history.

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