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Finance

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**Wesley Fall Book Scholarship – Up From Slavery**

The most terrorizing and oppressive form of slavery in recorded history was abolished on December 6, 1865 with the ratification of the 13th Amendment. By this point in U.S. history about 4 million Blacks had gained their freedom from this vicious enslavement. For these newly freed women and men, the joyous occasion of freedom from physical bondage was swiftly greeted by the enormous uncertainty of how one was to earn a living and provide for their family. Millions of illiterate, impoverished, unemployed, non-property owning Blacks were thrust onto a foreign land and told to survive. One of these formerly enslaved individuals was Booker T. Washington. Booker T. Washington was merely a child when he was granted freedom. He, like the aforementioned former slaves, was tremendously unequipped for this new reality. Due to these mountainous obstacles, he could have simply accepted the conditions of his people and no one would have found fault with this judgment. However, Booker T. Washington made the choice to work diligently for the betterment of himself, Black people, and the citizens of the South and has displayed a level of resiliency and determination that was truly a rare commodity during this time. He was able to make such unfathomable strides by sticking to the core principles that he developed in his early life. Booker T. Washington’s life journey is one that we all can and should learn from. The qualities that were developed within Booker T. Washington are such qualities that we too should hope to develop in order to make advances in our lives and to positively impact the lives of others.

Initially, the challenges that Booker T. Washington faced were that he was impoverished and illiterate. As a young boy, he greatly wanted the opportunity to gain a meaningful education. These ambitions were met with the immediate need to work in the coal mines to help support his family. Despite these great responsibilities, Booker T. still pursued this education which he so greatly sought after. He eventually worked out an agreement with his mother that allowed him to go to school in the afternoon, if he worked in the mines in the morning and returned to work when school let out. Even as a child Booker T. displayed a type of initiative that is foreign to many individuals. The immediate challenges he faced did not deter him from laying the foundation for his education, and he compounded these aspirations with the goal of attending the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute to greaten his future opportunities. While in preparation of attending Hampton and while at the institute, Booker T. was the personification of hard work and the ability to endure difficult times. During this period he was constantly without money, food and suitable clothing for the various seasons. He worked very diligently to earn his keep at the university as a custodian and never complained about his misfortune, but rather looked for ways to improve his condition. Upon the completion of his studies at Hampton, Booker T. earned a teaching position at the university and proved to be a tremendous addition to the school. Due to his terrific performance as an educator, he was recommended by General Samuel C. Armstrong to become a head administrator at Tuskegee and was offered the position. Booker T. was largely responsible for the establishment and continuance of Tuskegee University and made a strong commitment to help others of his race. He constantly referenced that fact that he wanted not to use his proficiencies for commercial use but rather for the advancement of people. Booker T. stayed committed to his work for decades and never strayed from the course. In this span, he rarely took time off for himself and had to be pressured from peers to take vacation. He documented that his work was very tiresome and often caused him great anxiety. He most effectively managed these complications by the efficient utilization of his time. He has noted that he never wanted to carry over work from a previous day and worked meticulously to accomplish this. Along with this impressive showcase of self-discipline, Booker T. Washington is a prime example of integrity and class. He has shown what it means to stand by your words and own up to your personal decisions. Despite receiving backlash on a multitude of occasions for statements at his various speaking engagements, he never recanted a single word. Considering the times in which he lived in, this was a true testament to the bravery and fearlessness that he must have possessed.

The qualities that Booker T. Washington developed are ones that would greatly benefit my life. I cannot imagine having to endure the trials that Booker T. faced in order to become such a success, but I too have faced obstacles while working to obtain an education and become successful. Although our challenges are not comparable, my time in college has definitely been faced with many financial and personal difficulties. Although I have reaped much academic success, early in my collegiate career I had considered dropping out of school multiple times. The pressure of weekly eviction notices, constantly having my meal plan cut off and family and relationship dysfunction kept me distressed. Luckily, through resiliency and the utilization of a strong academic foundation, I was able to pull through these tough times and reroute myself towards a brighter path. I currently am excelling in school academically; however, there are a couple of qualities that I must develop that are vital to my educational and professional growth. The first of these qualities would be the ability to efficiently organize my time. Although I am very well intended, I have poor time management skills and often find myself with not enough time to effectively work on things that I have committed to. Secondly, I need to work on having the initiative to act on ideas and recommendations that I have for professional and academic assignments rather than deferring to someone else.

Similarly to how Booker T. Washington was, I too am now at a crossroad in my life. I am being faced with the decision of using my capabilities for either personal gains or to make an impact in the lives of others. As a finance major I am constantly taught of the importance of money. A countless number of administrators at the university view the significance of career opportunities by the amount of money you have the potential to earn in that specific role. These same ideologies have been pushed onto to me as a student and it is frowned upon if I consider anything that isn’t connected with the making of a dollar. However, being a resident of Third Ward, I see the pain, suffering and anguish on the faces of those in the community. I see the grandmothers walking miles from the grocery store with arms full with bags because there are no quality stores within a reasonable walking distance. I hear the confusion of the youth because of the miseducation and under education that is being taught at the local schools compounded onto the lack of meaningful job opportunities being afforded to them. I feel the hopelessness of mothers and fathers when seeing them break down crying while holding children in public. I understand the terrible predicament that our people are in even 100 years after the passing of Booker T. Washington. It is because of these things that I know there is still much work for us to collectively complete in order to pull ourselves out of such bondage. For the past year I have been constantly battling with how I plan on doing my part in what has seemed like an everlasting struggle. With time running out in my collegiate career, I soon must own my destiny and stand firm in my beliefs regardless of where they take me.

I would sometimes wonder how useful it would be for me to try to improve the conditions of our people when so many others have previously attempted to no avail. It would definitely be simpler to focus on my own wellbeing. Especially considering that at times the conditions of our people seem infinitely dismal. However, when I find these questions in my conscience, I must think of Booker T. and the commitment that he made to our people. The same commitment that ultimately helped pave the way for me and those that I love. Money without a doubt plays a huge role in all of our lives. I would be foolish to say that money has no significance. However, the primary goal of life is not about how much money a single person can obtain. I want my life to be valued by the amount of lives that I am able to positively influence, not by the amount of money that I can gain at the expense of others. I truly believe that God attributed me with this passion for the sake of building people’s lives. Learning so much about a man who spent his life doing the same has definitely reaffirmed my belief in what my purpose is. It is important for us to collective uphold the legacy of Booker T. Washington. However, it is even more important for us to continue the work that he begun over 100 years ago.