

# Chapter Seventeen: Booker T. Washington\_Virginia, 1856

In Chapter Seventeen, titled "Booker T. Washington," we learn about the early life of Booker T. Washington, who was born into slavery in Virginia in 1856, without a last name, as his mother was enslaved and his father was unknown. Despite his desire for education, he was barred from attending school and instead watched from outside a one-room schoolhouse where the daughters of his enslavers learned. After the Civil War, when his mother was emancipated, poverty prevented them from accessing proper education, leading them to West Virginia. There, Booker worked in a salt factory under his stepfather, Wash Ferguson, who kept his wages. He learned to read by identifying the number "18" on the barrels he worked with, driving his desire for formal education.

At the age of nine and against his stepfather's wishes, Washington finally enrolled in school, adopting the last name "Washington." By sixteen, after various jobs, he aimed to attend a school for Black Americans in Virginia. He saved money and traveled to the Hampton Industrial and Normal School, where he impressed the admissions staff with his diligence while cleaning a classroom. This led to his acceptance and a janitorial position to cover tuition.

Founded by Samuel Armstrong, the school aimed to provide education for African Americans post-Civil War. Armstrong believed in vocational education and felt it was critical for the formerly enslaved to receive guidance. Washington admired Armstrong, who had complex views; he supported education but opposed Black voting rights, thinking the community would benefit more from moral guidance first.

In 1881, Washington moved to Tuskegee, Alabama, to establish a school with minimal financial support from the state, prompting him to fundraise extensively. His autobiography, "Up from Slavery," garnered attention and led to significant support from philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. Despite facing racial violence, Washington advocated for Black empowerment through education.

The partnership between Washington and Rosenwald resulted in the creation of nearly five thousand schools across the U.S., providing essential facilities and resources for African American children, thereby dramatically impacting education and community development. Their initiative was pivotal, emphasizing community investment in education while adapting to the existing racial structures. Through this effort, Washington and Rosenwald not only educated individual children but laid a foundation for future generations of leaders, profoundly influencing civil rights and social progress in America .