

The Future of the American Negro

1899

Booker T. Washington's *The Future of the American Negro* (Boston, 1899) brought together in a single volume a number of his public addresses after the Atlanta Exposition address and articles in *The Independent*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Appleton's Popular Science Monthly*, and other periodicals. Though the style is uneven and there are some repetitions, it was the closest Washington ever came to an inclusive and systematic statement of his social philosophy and racial strategy.

Washington stressed by repetition the economic means to black advancement and the philosophy of self-help, mutual aid, and education. He pronounced Reconstruction a failure because of its political approach, its wrong kind of education for blacks, and its encouragement to the freedmen to begin at the top instead of at the bottom. He stressed the mutual interdependence of whites and blacks in their common southern homeland. While he urged blacks to make themselves useful to whites as a means of gaining the full civil and political rights currently denied them, in occasional bursts of frankness he admonished those whites who practiced discrimination, exploitation, and violent repression against blacks.

When Washington asked his close adviser T. Thomas Fortune to edit and proof the galleys, Fortune took the opportunity to lecture Washington on both his writing style and his conservative outlook. "Clearness of thought and lucidity of diction in a book are indispensable," he wrote of Washington's convoluted sentences. He also chided Washington for his "unconscious habit of apologising for the shortcomings of white men." Conceding that the scissors-and-paste preparation of the manuscript had given him "a great deal of uneasiness," Washington thanked Fortune for his modification