

# American Renaissance

There is not a truth existing which I fear, or would wish unknown to the whole world.

— Thomas Jefferson

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## How Legends are Created The Counterfeit Glory of George Washington Carver

**There was affirmative action long before it had a name.**

by Marian Evans

The discovery and promotion of black "role models" is now an important industry. It lifts long-dead cowboys, inventors, and ship captains from obscurity and presents them as significant figures ignored by racist white society. It accounts for why so many unknown blacks suddenly appear on postage stamps or in black-history-month displays.

George Washington Carver is very much the reverse. He was a legend in his own time, as the man who brought modern agriculture to the South and who discovered hundreds of ingenious new uses for the peanut. Along with people like Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. DuBois, he is a central figure in the history of black achievement, but his fame is absurdly out of proportion to his meager accomplishments. How did a good and engaging but unremarkable man win a reputation as a brilliant scientist long before affirmative action? His story, like that of Martin Luther King's plagiarism (see book review, p. 5), says more about white people than about the man himself.

### Traded For a Horse

Carver was born in Missouri during the last years of slavery, probably in 1864. An important part of the Carver myth is the dramatic story of his abduction when he was no more than six months old. "Night riders" made off with him and his mother with the intention of selling them in the deep South. Their owner, Moses Carver,

did everything within his power to get the mother and child back, but managed to have only the child returned—in exchange for a horse.



George Washington Carver

Biographers would later call it "the most valuable horse in American history."

After emancipation, his owners kept him as a foster child and did their best to educate him. Through persist-

### How did an engaging but unremarkable man win a reputation as a brilliant scientist?

ence and despite hardships, Carver earned bachelors and masters degrees in agriculture, and in 1896 was hired by Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute. He spent his entire career at Tuskegee and it was there that he built his reputation as the great peanut genius.

According to the official story, Carver quickly turned the loss-making

farm at the Tuskegee Experiment Station into a money-maker and set about instructing Southerners in modern agricultural methods that transformed the region. His first known involvement with peanuts was in 1903, and his first serious effort to promote their cultivation was a 1916 bulletin called *How to Grow the Peanut and 105 Ways of Preparing It for Human Consumption*.

According to the myth, it was Carver who, almost single-handedly, introduced crop rotation to the monoculture South and it was his substitution of peanuts for cotton that saved the region from the boll weevil. Then, appalled that he had promoted peanuts to the point of overproduction and falling prices, he rushed into the laboratory and invented hundreds of profitable new ways to use the crop. As we shall see, the truth is quite different.

Carver was, nevertheless, an enthusiastic spokesman for the peanut, and in 1920, the United Peanut Association of America invited him to address its convention. This was a calculated public relations measure by the newly-formed association. There was news value in having a black man address its convention and in Carver's entertaining claims for 145 different, practical uses for the peanut.

The association, which was lobbying Congress for a protective tariff, then sent Carver to Washington to present the peanut to the House Ways and Means Committee. Some of the legislators treated him with amused condescension, but by showing them samples of peanut soap, peanut face cream, peanut paint and a host of other improbable products, he held

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## Letters from Readers

Sir — The differences Prof. Levin expresses with me in the March issue are quite small. He interprets the results of the Scarr-Weinberg cross-racial adoption study as indicating that 85 percent of the intelligence difference between blacks and whites is genetic, whereas I consider that the study shows that the black-white difference is 100 percent genetic. The main point on which we agree is that genetic factors are overwhelmingly the main reason for low black IQ and the associated disadvantages of poor education and low occupational achievement, together with high rates of unemployment and crime.

Regarding the policy implications of this conclusion, Prof. Levin suggests that the first objective should be to convince the public that white racism is not responsible for low black achievement. I think that among serious social scientists this battle is already largely won. For instance, William Julius Wilson (*The Truly Disadvantaged*, 1987) and Christopher Jencks (*Rethinking Social Policy*, 1992), both leading social scientists on the political left, have accepted that it is no longer possible to blame the social pathology of the black underclass on white racism. Prof. Jencks even recognizes that genes play some role, although he is still in need of education as to their importance. Nevertheless, I certainly agree with Prof. Levin that there is more work to be done hammering home the point that white racism cannot explain black underachievement.

My concern is that this could well take some years. Meanwhile, third world immigrants with low levels of

intelligence are entering the United States at a rate of about one million a year. One of the major objectives of policy must be to alert the public to the damage this influx will inflict on the social fabric of America.

Richard Lynn, Coleraine, Northern Ireland

Sir — Congratulations on producing a magazine that deals directly with the race issue without taking a load of ideological baggage on board at the same time. All the best with your conference.

Your March issue addresses the subject of black and white IQs and cites further evidence that black IQs are on average lower than those of whites. In their heart of hearts, most people, white and black, know this. The problem lies not with the average black but with the white trend-setters who have drummed into blacks the idea that they are equal to whites.

Now that the damage has been done, blacks are not going to take kindly to the truth about IQ. Who can blame them? What can "soften the blow?" I think one thing that needs to be stressed is that intelligence is not everything. What about loyalty and love, for example? A street cleaner with an IQ of 95 is a more worthy member of society than a property shark with an IQ of 130. Nor is intelligence always something to be proud of; blacks need not be ashamed that their race was not smart enough to invent nuclear bombs.

Part of the anger and emotion aroused by the IQ issue can be defused by putting brains into perspective: They aren't everything. Blacks do not suffer from white "racism" but they do

suffer from the priority given to intelligence in Western society as the measure of a man or woman's true worth.

Michael Walker, *The Skorpion*, Lutzowstrasse 39, 50674 Koln am Rhein, Germany

Sir — I am writing in response to Mr. Ostlund's letter in the March issue. He calls the [Tom] Metzgers, [George Lincoln] Rockwells, and the KKK victims of "hysterical tunnel vision" and calls them "despicable." I challenge the view that they are hysterical just because their writing is more vehement than that found in *AR*. They are trying to do something about America's problems. What do *AR* readers do besides wring their hands?

Robert Briggs, Punta Gorda, Fla.

Sir — I read with interest your March review of *The Rage of a Privileged Class*. The author points out that many middle-class, apparently successful blacks burn with resentment against what they think is an unjust society. Many are wealthy and have benefited from affirmative action, but still seethe with racial resentment.

Let me call your attention to another book by a black man, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*. The author is a former armed robber who decided to reform himself and is now a newspaper reporter. He writes that when he visits the old neighborhoods where he used to be a criminal, he finds that young blacks are even more violently angry against white America than his generation was.

Is there not a lesson in these books? Are these men not telling us that despite years of legally enforced equal and even preferential treatment, blacks hate white America more than ever? There was much less resentment among blacks when they were treated as outright inferiors. The rise of black hatred only proves the folly of our policies. People will always resent you for giving them something they do not deserve. They will hate you if you then apologize because you did not give even more.

William English, Newport News, Va.

## American Renaissance

Samuel Taylor, Editor  
Thomas Jackson, Assistant Editor  
Marian Evans, Contributing Editor

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their attention for nearly two hours—far longer than the 10 minutes originally allotted him. This appearance was widely reported and was an important step towards fame.

Carver became a favorite on the exhibit and lecture circuit, and his laboratory was opened to admiring visitors from all around the world. The number of peanut products continued to grow, with a final tally of something around three hundred. The wizard turned his attention to other lowly plants and reported over 150 uses for the sweet potato. He

**Carver did not record the formulas for his products so it is impossible to reproduce or evaluate them.**

reportedly made synthetic marble from wood shavings and paint from cow dung. By the 1930s, he was the legendary “Mr. Peanut,” and admiring articles appeared about him everywhere. An early issue of *Life* magazine published photographs of the great man.

Carver's death in 1943 prompted countless newspaper eulogies. President Franklin Roosevelt's statement on the occasion—“The world of science has lost one of its most eminent figures . . .”—was typical of public pronouncements across the nation. Senator Harry Truman introduced a bill to make Carver's birthplace a national monument. It passed without a single dissenting vote, making Carver only the third American to be so honored, along with George Washington and Abraham

Lincoln. A new star had joined the American firmament.

### The Real Record

What were Carver's real achievements? The mainstays of his fame are easily unstrung. First of all, he was unable to make the Experiment Station farm profitable. He was interested in laboratory work, not administration, and had no talent for scheduling and overseeing the black students who worked the farm. His boss, Booker T. Washington, upbraided him for his failure to make the farm pay and pointed out that Carver did not even practice the sensible agricultural methods he preached to others.

Far more important is the question of his influence on peanut production. National production records show that the crop doubled from 19.5 million bushels to over 40 million bushels from 1909 to 1916, a rise that the Department of Agriculture called “one of the striking developments that have taken place in the agriculture of the South.” However, the increase took place *before* the publication of Carver's first peanut tract, *How to Grow . . . and 105 Ways . . .* and before he seriously promoted the crop.

During the 1920s, when Carver was enthusiastically boosting the peanut, national production actually fell. In Alabama, the state in which Carver worked, the 1917 peak was not reached again until the mid-1930s—and with little help from Macon County where Tuskegee is located. Carver himself noted sadly in 1933, that few peanuts were grown on the farms nearest to and most easily influenced by the institute. It is undoubtedly true

that his peanut evangelism persuaded some to grow the crop, but his influence was by no means decisive.

What of the miraculous products Carver derived from the peanut? In 1974, the posthumously established Carver Museum at the Tuskegee Institute listed 287 peanut products, but much duplication inflates the figure. Bar candy, chocolate-coated peanuts, and peanut-chocolate fudge are listed as separate items, as are face cream, face lotion, and all-purpose cream. No less than 66 of the 287 products are dyes—thirty for cloth, 19 for leather and 17 for wood.

Many of the products were obviously not invented or discovered by Carver—“salted peanuts” are on the list—and the efficacy of many, including a “face bleach and tan remover” cannot be guaranteed or even tested. Astonishingly enough, Carver *did not record the formulas* for his products, so it is impossible to reproduce or evaluate them.

Although the popular understanding about Carver is that he launched whole industries that ran on peanuts, scarcely any of his products were ever marketed, and his commer-



cial and scientific legacy amounts to practically nothing. He was granted only one peanut patent—for a cosmetic containing peanut oil—but this slim achievement was interpreted as pure generosity. “As each by-product was perfected,” wrote one admirer in 1932, “he gave it freely to the world, asking only that it be used for the benefit of mankind.”

Little benefit ensued because he never explained how to make the things he claimed to have discovered. In 1923, for example, Carver announced “peanut nitroglycerin” in an article called “What is a Peanut?”, published in *Peanut Journal*. He cheerfully reported that “This industry is practically new but shows great promise of expansion;” in fact, there was no peanut nitroglycerin industry and never would be. It is im-

possible to confirm if there was ever even any peanut nitroglycerin.

Other promising products were announced in articles with titles like "The Peanut's Place in Everyday Life," "Dawning of a New Day for the Peanut," and "The Peanut Possesses Unbelievable Possibilities in Sickness and Health." These possibilities remained largely as he characterized them: unbelievable.

Carver's methods can be attributed, in part, to his gifted laboratory assistant. He recounted to many audiences how he turned to God in the despair of learning that farmers, following his advice, had produced a peanut glut:

"'Oh, Mr. Creator,' I asked, 'why did you make this universe?'"

"And the Creator answered me, 'You want to know too much for that little mind of yours,' He said.

"So I said, 'Dear Mr. Creator, tell me what man was made for.'"

"Again He spoke to me: 'Little man, you are still asking for more than you can handle. Cut down the extent of your request and improve the intent.'"

"And then I asked my last question. 'Mr. Creator, why did You make the peanut?'"

"'That's better!' the Lord said, and He gave me a handful of peanuts and went with me back to the laboratory and, together, we got down to work."

On at least one occasion, Carver told a church audience that he never needed to consult books when he did his scientific work; he relied exclusively on divine revelation.

### An Appealing Old Wizard

Upon close examination, therefore, "the Wizard of Tuskegee" resembles a different wizard of stage and movie fame. How did he become, as *Reader's Digest* put it in 1965, "a scientist of undisputed genius"?

His appealing personal qualities certainly helped. He was genuinely uninterested in money, and refused to accept a pay raise during his entire 46 years at Tuskegee. When a group of Florida peanut growers sent him a check for diagnosing a peanut disease, he returned it, saying, "As the good Lord charged nothing to grow your peanuts I do not think it fitting of me to charge anything for curing them."

He was also a black man segregationists could love. He was unmarried and celibate, apolitical, and always deferential. He really did "shuffle" and "shamble" wherever he went, and journalists enjoyed saying so.

A 1937 *Reader's Digest* article written at the height of his fame begins with these words:

"A stooped old Negro, carrying an armful of wild flowers, shuffled along through the dust of an Alabama road . . . I had seen hundreds like him. Totally ignorant, unable to read and write, they shamble along Southern roads in search of odd jobs. . . . Fantastic as it seemed, this shabbily clad old man was none other than the distinguished Negro scientist of the Tuskegee Institute . . ."

In 1923, the *Atlanta Journal* wrote happily of Carver that "He combines all the picturesque quaintness of the ante-bellum type of darkey [with] . . . the mind of an amazing scientific genius . . ."

Even after he became famous, Carver never attempted to cross the color bar, even declining invitations to eat with whites. After the death of the

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### He never needed to consult books; when he did research, he relied solely on Divine revelation.

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equally accommodating Booker T. Washington in 1915, Carver took his place as the nation's foremost docile but achieving Negro.

There is also no doubt that Carver himself helped inflate his reputation. He did not explicitly claim to have invented all the products he spoke of, but he glossed over the difference between invention and list-making in a way that can only have been deliberate. When given an opportunity to correct exaggerated claims

on his behalf, he did so in humorously humble ways that no one took seriously. On taking the podium, he might say, "I always look forward to introductions about me as good opportunities to learn a lot about myself that I never knew before." To an author who had written of him favorably, he

wrote, "How I wish I could measure up to half of the fine things this article would have me be."

When asked for details about his inventions, he might reply, "I do dislike to talk about what little I have been able, though Divine guidance, to accomplish." George Imes, who served for many years on the Tuskegee faculty with Carver, later wrote of his "enigmatic replies" to queries from scientists.

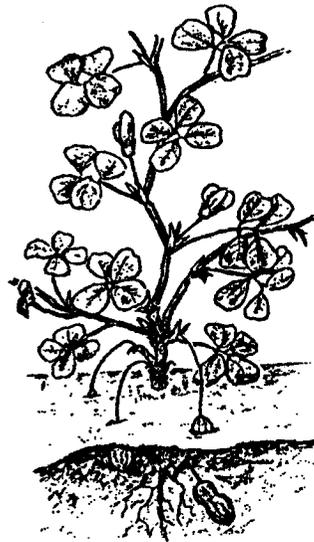
To a writer who asked in 1936 for material on the practical applications of his discoveries, Carver replied that he simply could not keep up with them.

Of course, there always were people who knew that the reputation was a soap bubble, but they kept quiet. In 1937, the Department of Agriculture replied thus to a request for confirmation of Carver's achievements:

"Dr. Carver has without doubt done some very interesting things—things that were new to some of the people with whom he was associated, but a great many of them, if I am correctly informed, were not new to other people. . . . I am unable to determine just what profitable application has been made of any of his so-called discoveries. I am writing this to you confidentially . . . and would not wish to be quoted on the subject."

In 1962, the National Park Service commissioned a study of Carver's scientific achievements in order to best represent them at the George Washington Carver National Monument. Two professors at the University of Missouri turned in such an unflattering report that the Park Service's letter of transmittal recommended that it not be circulated:

"While Professors Carroll and Muhrer are very careful to emphasize



Carver's excellent qualities, their realistic appraisal of his 'scientific contributions,' which loom so large in the Carver legend, is information which must be handled very carefully. . . . Our present thinking is that the report should not be published, at least in its present form, simply to avoid any possible misunderstanding."

By the 1950s, a few realistic appraisals of Carver's career had appeared in print, and the 1953 edition of the 1700-page *Webster's Biographi-*

*cal Dictionary* has no entry for him at all. Naturally, he has been rehabilitated in subsequent editions, and at a time when virtually any black of modest attainments is fair game as a "role model," Carver's chances of resting in peaceful obscurity are slim to none.

From today's perspective, one of the most significant aspects of the Carver legend is that it grew to giant proportions in a segregated America that had never dreamed of quotas or busing and in which virtually no one

believed blacks to be the intellectual equals of whites. It is instructive—and sobering—to realize that even then the affirmative action impulse was at work in the minds of whites. ●

*The single best source for material on the Carver legend is "George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth," which appeared in The Journal of Southern History, November 1976. It contains excellent bibliographic material and was an important source for this article.*

## The Doctor in Spite of Himself

Theodore Pappas (Ed.), *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Plagiarism Story*, The Rockford Institute, 1994, 107 pp., \$10.00 (soft cover)

**An astonishing tale of misbehavior and the cover-up that followed.**

Reviewed by Thomas Jackson

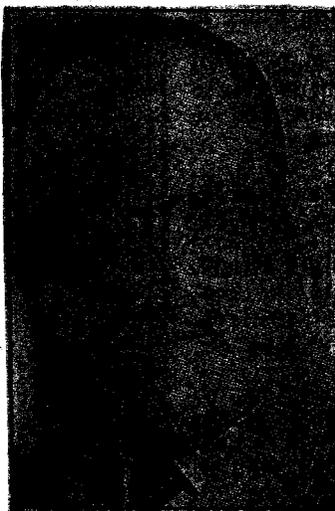
Late in 1987, a graduate student working on the project to publish the collected papers of Martin Luther King discovered that King had plagiarized huge parts of his doctoral dissertation. Clayborne Carson, the director of the project, decided to suppress this fact, thus setting in motion one of the most sordid tales of academic dishonesty and race-based special pleading in recent memory.

This book is an invaluable collection of several accounts of what King did and of the contemptible coverups and justifications that followed. Not surprisingly, its editor, Theodore Pappas, could not find a commercial publisher, so the book is unlikely to be in book stores or even in libraries. Only if enough people buy and read it will its story survive the whitewash.

### Starting Early

It is now clear that King began plagiarizing as a young man and continued to do so throughout his career. At Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1951, his papers were stuffed with unacknowledged material lifted verbatim from published sources. The King

papers project has dutifully collected this juvenilia, and Mr. Pappas explains how it strikes the reader today:



Martin Luther King, Jr.

"King's plagiarisms are easy to detect because their style rises above the level of his pedestrian student prose. In general, if the sentences are eloquent, witty, insightful, or pithy, or contain allusions, analogies, metaphors, or similes, it is safe to assume that the section has been purloined."

Mr. Pappas notes that in one paper King wrote at Crozer, 20 out of a total of 24 paragraphs show "verbatim theft." King also plagiarized himself, recycling old term papers as new ones. In their written comments on his papers, some of King's professors chided him for sloppy references, but

they seem to have had no idea how extensively he was stealing material. By the time he was accepted into the PhD program at Boston University, King was a veteran and habitual plagiarist.

Some of the most devastating parts of Mr. Pappas' book are nothing more than side-by-side comparisons of material from King's PhD thesis and from the sources he copied without attribution. King was overwhelmingly dependent on just one source, a dissertation written on the same subject as his own—the German-born theologian, Paul Tillich—by another Boston University student named Jack Boozer.

Here is a typical passage from King's thesis that is lifted, word for word, from Boozer's:

"Correlation means correspondence of data in the sense of a correspondence between religious symbols and that which is symbolized by them. It is upon the assumption of this correspondence that all utterances about God's nature are made. This correspondence is actual in the logos nature of God and *logos* nature of man."

There is word-for-word copying throughout the thesis. Mr. Pappas notes that the entire 23rd page is lifted straight out of Boozer, and that even when King was not stealing Boozer's words without attribution, he was stealing his ideas: "There is virtually no section of King's discussion of Til-