In Honor of Black History Month
George Washington Carver
1864 – 1943

Growing up in Nebraska, I recall reading a book about George Washington Carver with my 6th grade class. I was completely captured by his ingenuity, closeness with nature, humble generosity and his deeply spiritual persona. He accomplished so much with few resources despite racial prejudice and blocks on his path. It stuck with me all these years. If this impactful piece of history/science isn't taught in all schools, it's my opinion that it should be. I think I still have my copy of that book somewhere….

The following are excerpts from History.com

George Washington Carver was an agricultural scientist and inventor who developed hundreds of products using peanuts (though not peanut butter, as is often claimed), sweet potatoes and soybeans. Born an African American slave a year before slavery was outlawed, Carver left home at a young age to pursue education and would eventually earn a master's degree in agricultural science from Iowa State University. He would go on to teach and conduct research at Tuskegee University for decades, and soon after his death his childhood home would be named a national monument — the first of its kind to honor an African American.

In 1894, Carver became the first African American to earn a Bachelor of Science degree. Impressed by Carver's research on the fungal infections of soybean plants, his professors asked him to stay on for graduate studies.

His idea of crop rotation proved to be most valuable. Through his work on soil chemistry, Carver learned that years of growing cotton had depleted the nutrients from soil, resulting in low yields. But by growing nitrogen-fixing plants like peanuts, soybeans and sweet potatoes, the soil could be restored, allowing yield to increase dramatically when the land was reverted to cotton use a few years later.

Carver set to work on finding alternative uses for these products. For example, he invented numerous products from sweet potatoes, including edible products like flour and vinegar and non-food items such as stains, dyes, paints and writing ink.

But Carver's biggest success came from peanuts. In all, he developed more than 300 food, industrial and commercial products from peanuts, including milk, Worcestershire sauce, punches, cooking oils and salad oil, paper, cosmetics, soaps and wood stains. He also experimented with peanut-based medicines, such as antiseptics, laxatives and goiter medications

In the last two decades of his life, Carver lived as a minor celebrity but his focus was always on helping people. He traveled the South to promote racial harmony, and he traveled to India to discuss nutrition in developing nations with Mahatma Gandhi.

Carver was buried … on the Tuskegee Institute grounds.

Soon after, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed legislation for Carver to receive his own monument, an honor previously only granted to presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. The George Washington Carver National Monument now stands in Diamond, Missouri. Carver was also posthumously inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. [end History.com excerpts]

<u>George Washington Carver quotes:</u>

- Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can learn more than what is in books, for they speak with the voice of God. - George Washington Carver
- No books ever go into my laboratory. The thing I am to do and the way are revealed to me the moment I am inspired to create something new. Without God to draw aside the curtain, I would be helpless. Only alone can I draw close enough to God to discover His secrets. - George Washington Carver
- I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in. - George Washington Carver

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