

Ben franklin and booker t. washington



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Benjamin Franklin and Booker T. Washington were both American personalities that assumed great importance in the history of the United States. Franklin was born in 1706, in Boston, to an English father and an American mother. Washington, on the other hand, having a family history of slaves, did not know his origins or anything about his ancestries. As the author himself says in his autobiography, “ My life had its beginning in the midst of the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings. (Washington, p. 15). He only knew his mother, a brother and a sister and he did not even know the time or the place of his birth. In spite of some significant differences in their early lives and, after, along their trajectories, Benjamin Franklin and Booker T. Washington’s autobiographies reveal that similarities between them are prevalent. Even separated by a gap of a hundred and fifty years between their birth dates, they shared same thoughts, same principles and resembling aims.

Since they have so much in common, it is valid to say that Washington’s “ Up From Slavery” can be considered a black version of Franklin’s autobiography. Born in a family of slaves, Booker T. Washington was a typical African-American of the 19th century, used to be a working-man. After the Civil War, which had as its main consequence the emancipation of the slaves, Booker worked as a salt-miner and as a coal-miner, before he becomes a houseboy, working as a servant for the wife of the owner of the mines.

After that, he applied to Hampton Agricultural Institute and had to split his time between working and studying. Benjamin Franklin was an important personality of American History, a versatile man who was an intellectual, a scientist, an inventor, a diplomat, a politician and best known

for being among the political leaders who took part in the American Revolution, by signing the United States Declaration of Independence, as one of the “ Founding Fathers”.

Born to a middle-class family, Franklin went to a grammar school but, for financial reasons, he had to be transferred to another one to study writing and arithmetic. Yet, just like Booker, he was also a working-man during his boyhood. He left school to work as a chandler, making and selling candles with his father, who, later, noticed Franklin’s interest in books, so he was sent to work with his uncle as a printer. Perhaps because of the previous tough time they had in life, each one his particular ways and in specific situations, both of them put all of their efforts on an attempt of eaching better ways of living, and they succeeded. That is why they are considered examples of what is called the “ self-made man”, the man who makes himself by what he does and command his own destiny; people who rise from poverty and bad living conditions and who are able to achieve success and recognition on their own merit. Since he was not enrolled at school, Benjamin Franklin provided himself a self-education, based on the Socratic method, which he ended up abandoning later on.

He also was trying to improve his English. Also trying to fight for a chance of acquiring some knowledge, Booker had to cheat on his boss to be on time for school, face his classmates who were more well off than himself and invent a last name, considering it was a request of the school and, as an ex-slave, he did not have one. When he went to Hampton Institute, he was refused shelter for being black and he could not count on anybody, so he had to sleep on the streets and work for meals.

He could not even afford his books and clothes, but he did not give in and he did not give up on his studies. Further on, he would say “ Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work” (Washington, p. 135). Both Franklin and Washington believed that education and a good job would guide people to self-respect and an economic independence. Moreover, their entrepreneurial spirit was a common outstanding aspect of their personalities.

Under his direction, Booker inaugurated the Tuskegee Institute, a school for black people which was focused on industrial training, praising the virtues of thrift and patience, mainly: “[...] by patience and hard work, we brought order out of chaos, just as will be true of any problem if we stick to it with patience and wisdom and earnest effort” (Washington, p. 60). Earlier, in 1729, Franklin had begun a newspaper called The Pennsylvania Gazette. “ Lose no time; be always employ’d in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions” (Franklin, p. 4), this is what leads people to success; industry is the way to get there. Booker T. Washington was a humble man, but he knew how to balance his modesty with a touch of ambition. However, he attributes his success to his belief in many of the virtues that were also praised by Benjamin Franklin, as selflessness, industry, pragmatism and optimism. Franklin based the course of his entire life on a list of thirteen virtues he thought were a must in the process of arriving at moral perfection.

There are some of them that can summarize everything he used to preach along his life, which would be: order - “ Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time”; resolution - “ Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve”; frugality - “

Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i. e. , waste nothing”; sincerity – “ Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly” (Franklin, p. 94); and, of course, industry.

Franklin was raised by a Presbyterian family, but he turned out to become a Deist. Thus, he thought he would succeed in the pursuit of his moral improvement as an individual - by following some virtues and putting their concept into practice - not as a member of any church. Nevertheless, he believed in the existence of a deity, a God that has to do with the creation and maintenance of the world, but has nothing to do with one's life. To this God, he thanks for the blessings that were given to him through his way to a successful life. “ And now I speak of thanking God, I desired with all humility to acknowledge that I owe the mentioned happiness of my past life to His kind providence, which lead me to the means I used and gave them success” (Franklin, p. 7). Likewise, Booker also expresses his gratitude to God for the same kind of support, but, in opposition to Franklin, he was thankful to a Christian divinity and faithful to the doctrine of his church. Due to their ideal conduct, Benjamin Franklin and Booker T. Washington were considered examples of good citizens. Franklin wrote his life story as an intent of immortalize himself through his behavior, also immortalizing his actions by featuring all his great deeds. This way he could motivate and encourage people to do the same: “...and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducting means I made use of, [...], my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated. (Franklin, p. 6). And so did Washington in “ Up From Slavery”, through which he intended to serve as a

model for others to follow but, differently from Franklin, he didn't have the self-promotion as one of his purposes. Booker expected his readers to feel instigated and stimulated to keep going on with his good manners and become followers of his moral principles. Besides the will of telling people their lives, the attempt of helping others to pursue their own self-making was among their objectives.

In conclusion, both the autobiographies narrate two lives that, despite of the time, were founded on similar values that were regarded as tools to achieve a better future life. These two works aim to inspire people to do things that could lead them to social ascension. Besides, their authors used a literary style and a structure very much alike - enlightening some virtues and speaking with a sense of humor, employing direct prose and punctuating the narrative with lively illustrative anecdotes.

The main difference between them is that Booker T. Washington was involved with black people issues, since he was born a slave and had been always dealing with the Negroes turbulent and troubled reality as a “ tough-minded analyst of power who had to balance the demands of blacks with the constraints imposed on him by whites” (<http://ukcatalogue.oup.com>), whereas Benjamin Franklin acted in the white majority scene, with no need to be worried about any racial question as a priority.