

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

SCIENTIST

b. January, 1864

d. January 5, 1943

George Washington Carver is best known for his advances in the agricultural field. He devised and taught impoverished farmers uses for nutritious, commonly grown crops.

“Where there is no vision, there is no hope.”

George Washington Carver was a groundbreaking agricultural scientist, known for discovering innovative uses for peanuts, sweet potatoes and clay. A black man born during the Civil War, Carver overcame racism to establish himself as a preeminent scientist and renowned academic.

Carver was born a slave in southwest Missouri. As an infant, he was kidnapped by slave raiders, and then abandoned when they discovered he suffered from whooping cough. His mother's former owners, Moses and Susan Carver, adopted and raised him.

At the age of 13, Carver left home to attend a school for African-Americans. In 1890, he matriculated to Simpson College in Iowa, where he was the only black student. In 1891, he transferred to Iowa State College to focus on his passion for agriculture. After graduating, he served as the only black member of the Iowa State faculty. Carver was invited to head the agriculture department at the Tuskegee Institute, a university for black students founded by Booker T. Washington.

As a professor, Carver encouraged students to think creatively and independently. He emphasized self-sufficiency and resilience, and he pursued broad interests, including painting and religion. Throughout his life, he maintained a positive approach. Even in the face of overt racism, Carver said, “I can't do my work if my heart is bitter.”

Carver is best known for his advances in the agricultural field. He devised and taught impoverished farmers uses for nutritious, commonly grown crops. He was the first scientist to discover multiple uses for peanuts, developing products as diverse as flour, ink and face cream. He experimented with developing rubber from the sweet potato. Carver's discoveries are seen as the basis for many products, including biofuels and fruit-based cleaning products.

In 1916, Carver was offered membership in the Royal Society of London. In 1923, he was awarded a Spingarn Medal by the NAACP. Simpson College awarded him an honorary degree in 1932.

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