



George Washington Carver: A Life

Christina Vella

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The extraordinary life of this brilliant botanist attains its only-in-America moniker not only because George Washington Carver was born into slavery and subject to the vile-level racism of the Jim Crow era, but because of his Andy Griffith-like good cheer, his optimism, and his friendships with Mahatma Gandhi, Teddy Roosevelt, and Henry Ford. Moreover, as an infant, he nearly died of whooping cough, which permanently left him speaking with a high, girlish voice—a fact that further distinguished him the whole of his life.

Biographer Christina Vella excels on every level in her approach and execution of this work, most notably the depth of her research and witty, humorous, delightful writing and storytelling. Referring to men like two-term congressman and US Secretary of Agriculture James C. Wilson, one of George's professors at Iowa State, she writes, "Those were the teachers who became George's heroes, generous men who loved both books and cows, men who were as happy examining soil samples as listening to Bach. George wanted to be like them in every detail."

Rising above the scores of books written for kids, this is the first scholarly biography of Carver in thirty years, and surely excels above all others in examining how his personal life and love interests impacted his career.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2016)

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