



Sarah stands next to Booker T. Washington (holding hat) at the dedication of the Indianapolis YMCA in 1913.

Sarah had sat quietly, planning how and when she would find a way to get the floor. Other men and women needed to hear her story in order to encourage them to pursue their own dreams. At last, Sarah was standing and she spoke in a loud, clear voice.

“Surely you are not going to shut the door in my face,” she began. “I went into a business that is despised, that is criticized and talked about by everybody—the business of growing hair.” The rest of the delegates shifted their attention to her and Sarah continued, all traces of nervousness fading away.

“I am not ashamed of my past...I have built my own factory on my own ground...I employ in that factory seven people, including a bookkeeper, a stenographer, a cook, and a house girl.”

Sarah continued, “Now, my object in life is not simply to make money for myself or to spend it on myself...I love to use a part of what I make in trying to help others.”

That afternoon, Sarah sat down to the applause of the delegates. Perhaps Booker T. Washington was stunned that she had taken the initiative to speak, uninvited. But he did not remain stunned for long. The next year, Booker T. Washington invited her to come back to the convention as one of the scheduled speakers!



Sarah impressed Booker T. Washington with her determination to succeed.

In Their Own Words

“I am not a millionaire, but I hope to be some day, not because of the money, but because I could do so much more to help my race.”

—Madam C. J. Walker