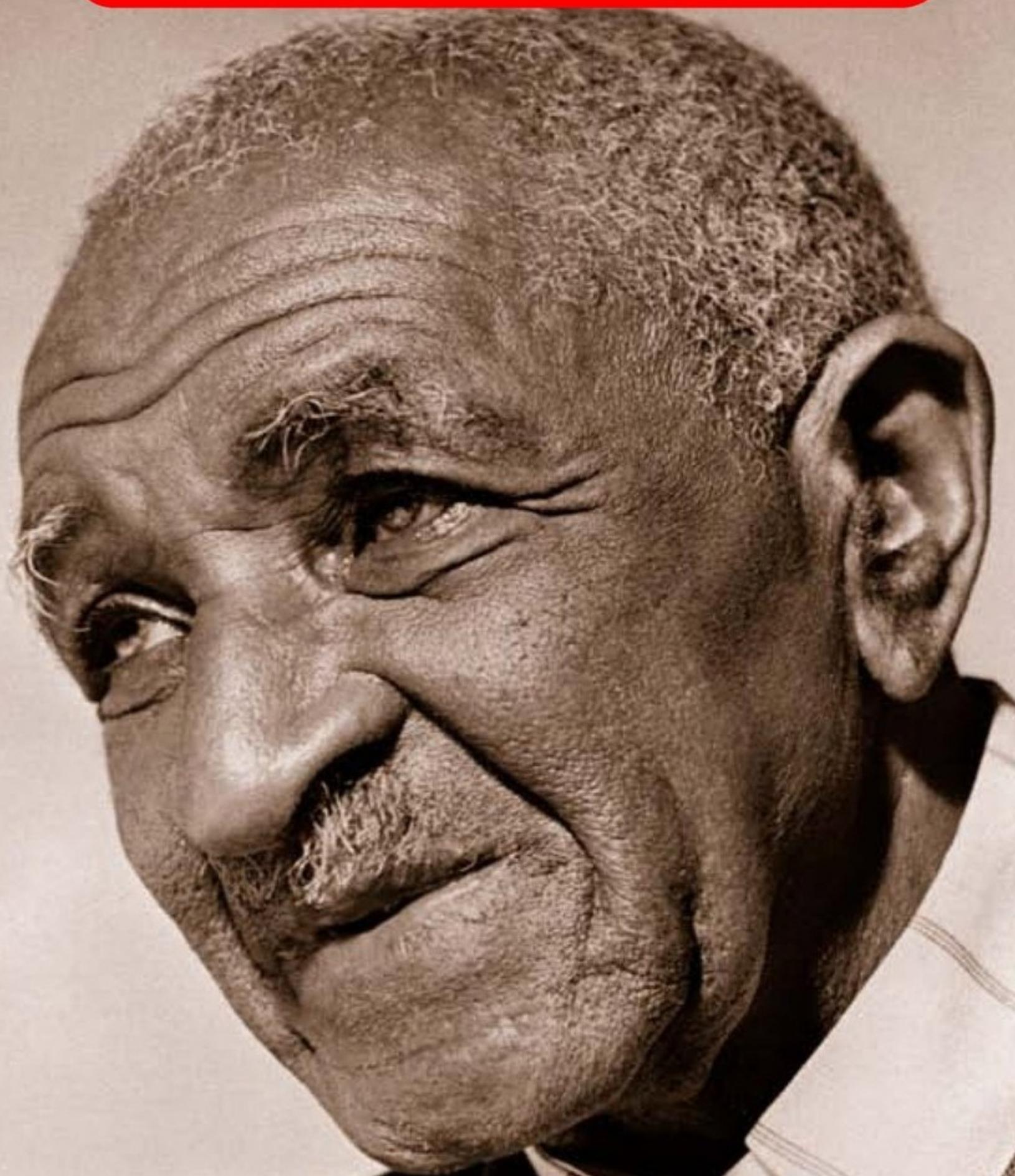


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George Washington Carver

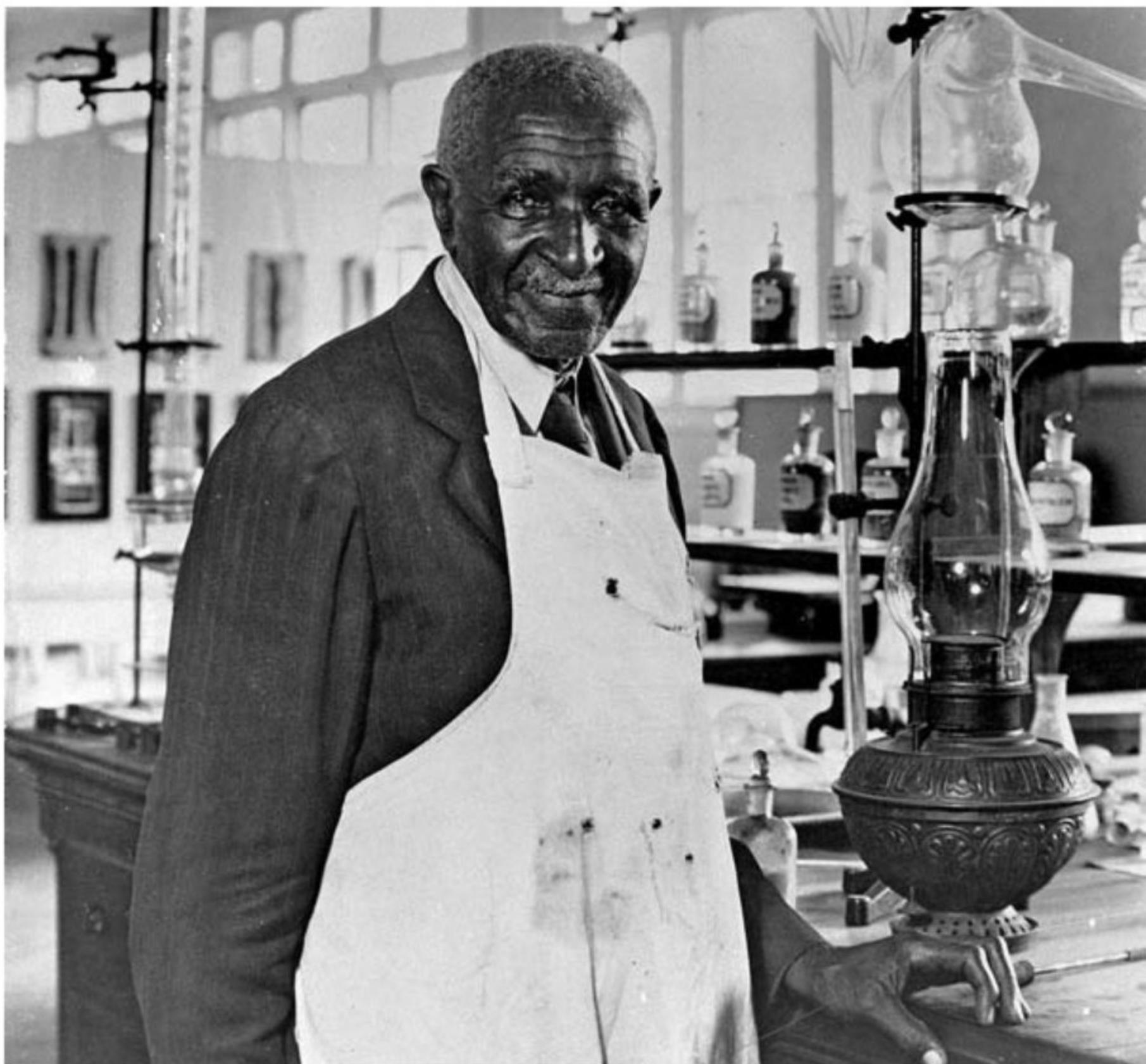
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Written by Cynthia Kennedy Henzel

George Washington Carver



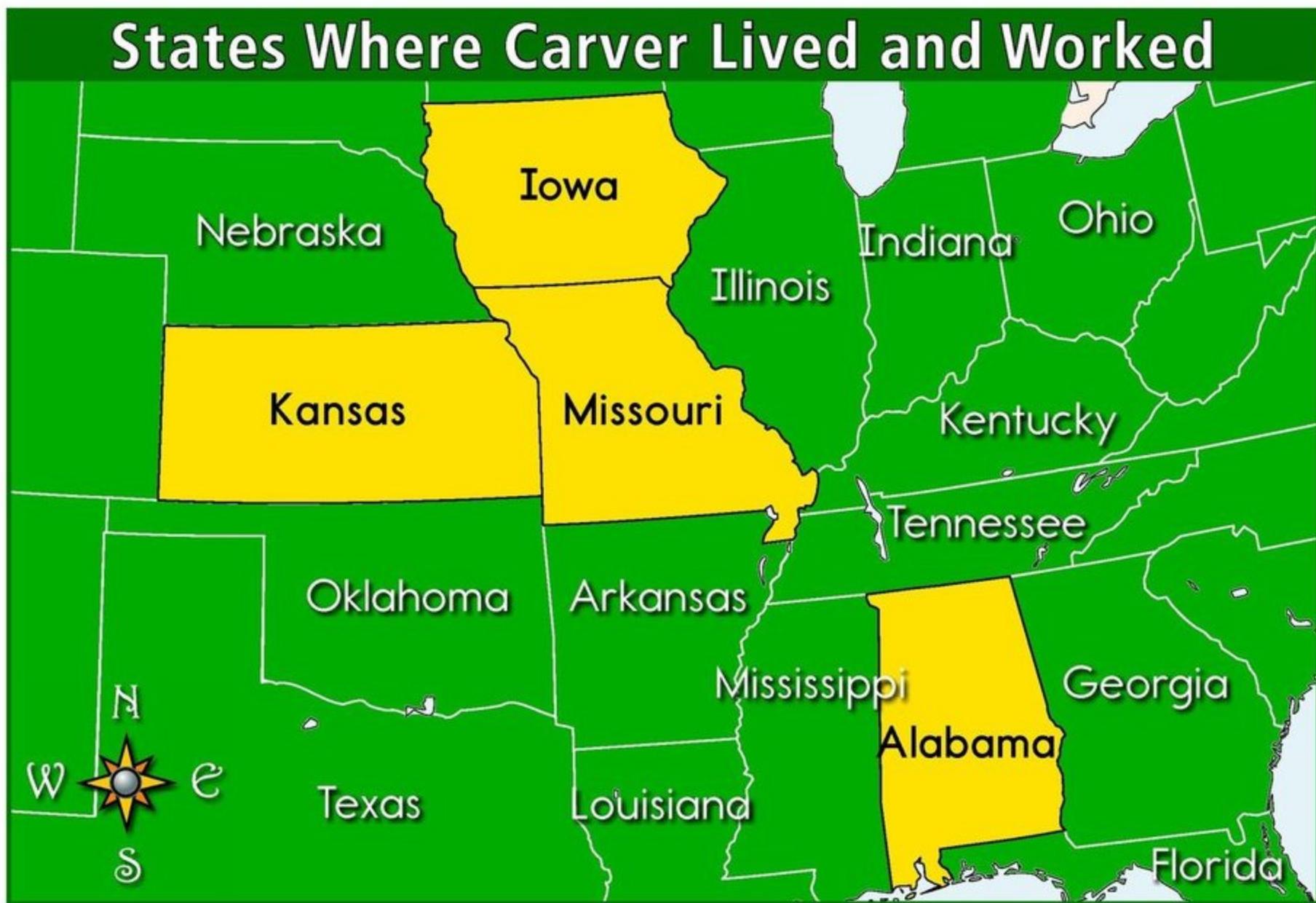
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George Washington Carver in the lab, 1940

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Carver grew up in Missouri, studied in Kansas and Iowa, and worked in Alabama.

Born a Slave

George Washington Carver was born in Missouri in 1864, during the Civil War.

The Civil War (1861–1865)

The Civil War was a fight between two sides of the United States, the North and the South. When it began, slavery was legal in fifteen “slave states” in the South and illegal in seventeen “free states” in the North. Many people in the North wanted to end slavery in all the states. Many people in the South wanted to keep slavery legal. In order to do this, they tried to break away from the North and start their own country. The North went to war to keep the United States just that—united. After the North won the war, all the slaves were freed.

George was born a slave, but when the Civil War ended, he and his older brother, Jim, were freed. Moses and Susan Carver, the couple who had owned them, gave the orphaned boys a home. Jim helped Moses in the fields, but George was often sick and stayed at home to help Susan. She taught him to read, write, and sew. What George liked best, though, was to garden and explore nature.



Moses Carver



The Carver home in Diamond, Missouri

Learning on His Own

George taught himself about plants and animals. He wanted to go to school to learn even more, but many schools at that time were **segregated**. This meant that white and black students could not go to the same school. Since the nearby school did not allow black students, George left home for another school when he was twelve. He lived with the Watkins family and worked for his meals and room. At thirteen, he moved to Kansas.



A segregated school in Kentucky, 1916



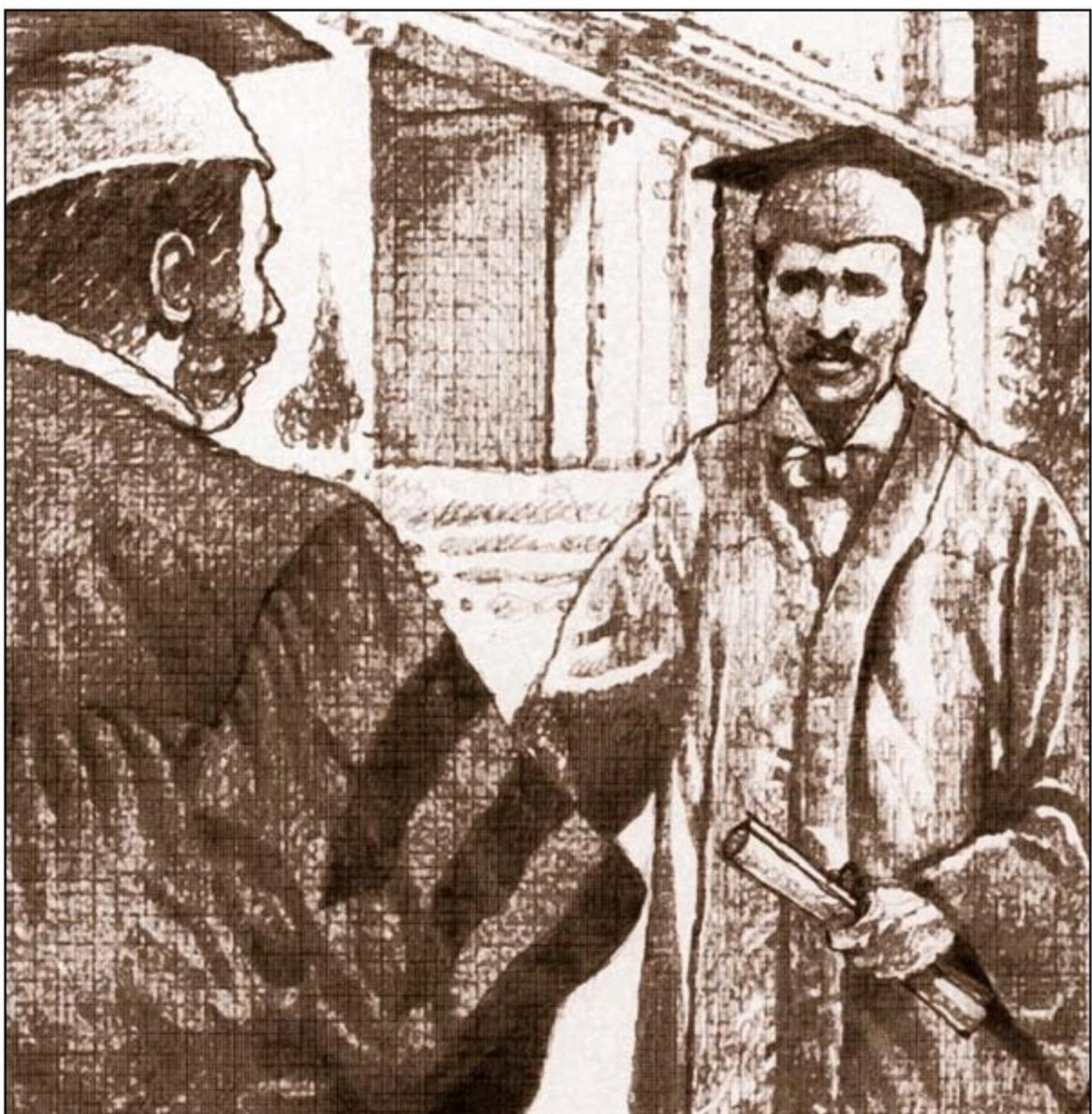
George could not attend college in Kansas because of his skin color.

When George graduated from high school, he earned a scholarship to go to a Kansas college. When George arrived at the college, however, the school turned him away because he was black.

George was unhappy, but he did not give up learning. He farmed and taught himself to paint. His friends told him to try a different college. He went to Simpson College in Iowa to study art. This time, the college let him stay.

Making a Difference

George liked Simpson College, but he wanted to help others more. He decided to study **agriculture**—the science of farming—at another college in Iowa. He was the school's first black graduate. He later became the school's first black **professor**.



George receives his diploma from Iowa State Agricultural College.

Professor Carver went to Alabama in 1896 to help the farmers there. These farmers had a big problem. Each year their crop was smaller, and the farmers were poorer.

Carver quickly realized that years of growing cotton had worn out the soil. The farmers barely made enough money to buy food, so they had no money to buy **fertilizer** that would help the plants.



Children help pick cotton on a Mississippi plantation in the late 1800s.



Carver held a chunk of soil from a worn-out field.

Professor Carver taught the farmers that dead leaves and swamp muck could be added to the soil as free fertilizer. Planting sweet potatoes, peas, or peanuts in the fields after the cotton was picked also helped the soil. These crops put important nutrients back in the soil after they were used up by cotton plants.

Carver sent out information about how to grow and cook these crops. By eating them, farmers spent less money buying food from stores.

Farmers also needed a way to sell the new crops, so Professor Carver became an **inventor**. He invented more than a hundred ways to use sweet potatoes and three hundred ways to use peanuts!



Carver at work

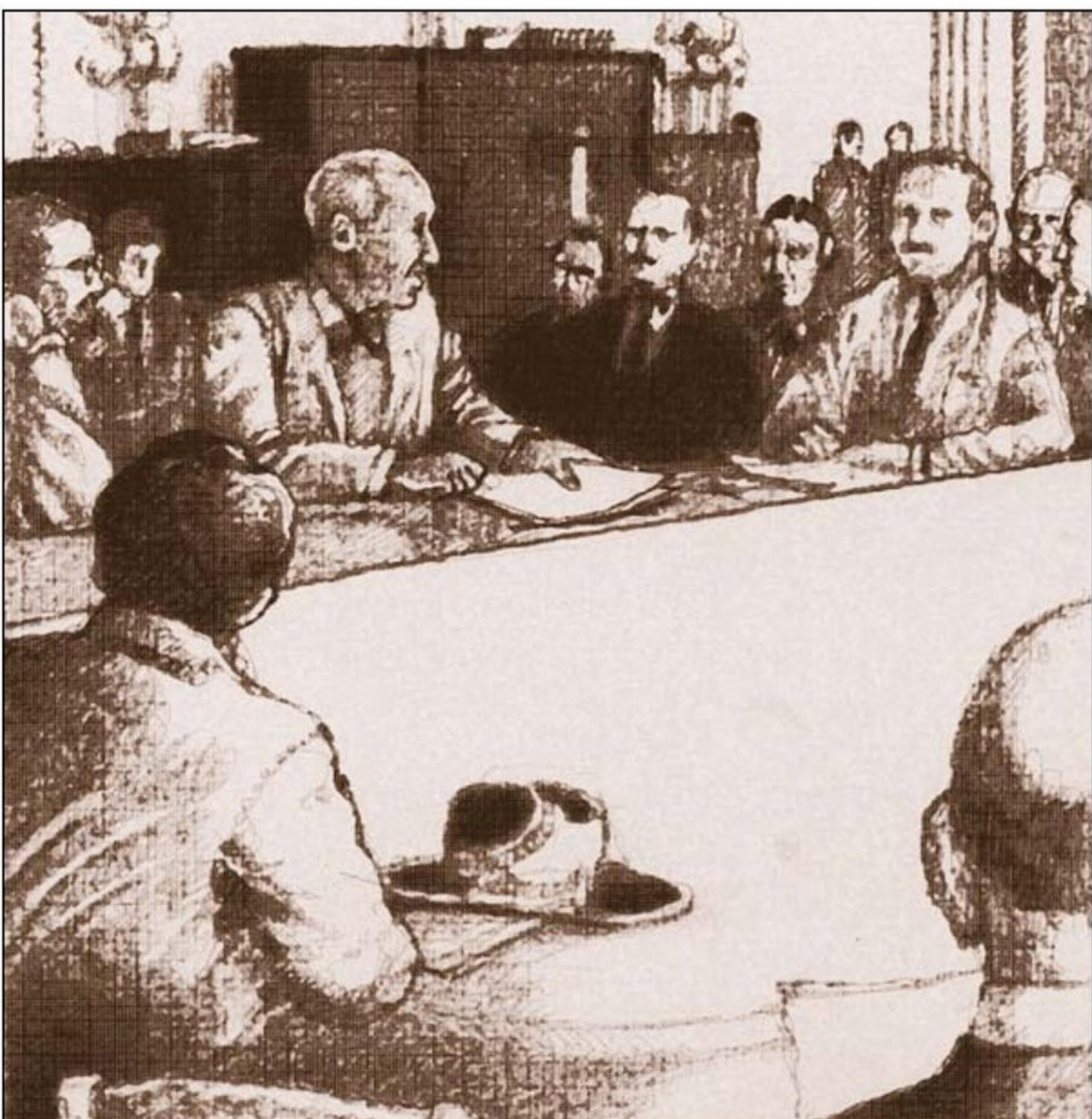
The Truth About Peanut Butter



Carver invented up to 300 uses for the peanut: pavement, grease, medicines, peanut coffee, peanut mayonnaise, peanut flour, peanut milk, shoe polish, bleach, sandpaper, and more. Contrary to popular belief, however, he did not create peanut butter. A Native American tribe is known to have eaten a paste made from peanuts more than 500 years ago. It wasn't as creamy as the tasty goo we eat today, though.

Ideas Are Free

By 1921, people were listening to Carver's ideas. He was asked to speak before the U.S. Congress—the country's lawmakers. Some members of Congress laughed and made fun of him. He had been given ten minutes to talk, though, and he made the most of them.



Carver spoke to members of Congress.

Carver talked about all the things that could be made with the tiny peanut. The men fell silent. When Carver's ten minutes were up, they gave him more time. In the end, they passed a law to help U.S. peanut farmers.

Over the years, Carver became as **famous** as many rock stars are today. Crowds gathered to hear him speak. He turned down jobs and money because he thought helping people was more important. He believed that ideas were free and should be freely given.



Carver greeted President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, around 1936.



Not long before he died, Carver donated \$33,000 to the Tuskegee Institute to carry on the agricultural work he began. (That would be about \$450,000 today!)

A Lasting Message

George Washington Carver believed that people should treat each other with respect. He won the respect of a nation at a time when few black people got much respect at all.

Carver also believed that people should respect and care for the Earth. If they did, nature would provide the things they needed. Many years later, we are discovering that he was right.

Glossary

agriculture (*n.*) the science of farming and raising livestock (p. 8)

famous (*adj.*) well known (p. 14)

fertilizer (*n.*) a natural or chemical substance that promotes plant growth (p. 9)

inventor (*n.*) a person who creates, designs, or builds something that did not exist before (p. 11)

professor (*n.*) a college or university teacher (p. 8)

segregated (*adj.*) kept apart based on group differences, such as race (p. 6)

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George Washington Carver
Level O Leveled Book
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