



A READING OF NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS' SPEECH ON APRIL 5, 1922 AT TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE ON THE UNVEILING OF THE BOOKER T. WASHINGTON MEMORIAL STATUE.

BY THIS TIME MORE PEOPLE HAD BECOME AWARE OF HER EXTRAORDINARY SPEAKING ABILITY, AND SHE WAS ASKED TO ADDRESS COUNTLESS AUDIENCES ACROSS COLOR LINES ON SUBJECTS RANGING FROM RELIGION TO EDUCATION TO SOCIAL INJUSTICE. SPEAKING BLUNTLY AND MAKING STATEMENTS THAT OTHERS WERE AFRAID TO SAY, NANNIE OFTEN TAUGHT IMPORTANT LESSONS USING EXPRESSIONS THAT WOULD TYPICALLY BE CONSIDERED OFFENSIVE AND TABOO.

AS SHE VOICED HER OPENING COMMENT "SLAVERY WAS A SUCCESS" THE AUDIENCE OF 2,500, MOSTLY AFRICAN AMERICAN BUT SOME WHITE, WAS SAID TO GASPED IN DISBELIEF.

"UNDERSTAND ME" SHE CONTINUED, "I HATE SLAVERY. IT WAS THE WICKEDEST INSTITUTION KNOWN TO MAN. BUT ANYTHING FOR WHICH MEN ARE WILLING TO DIE IS A SUCCESS, AND WHITE MEN OF THE SOUTH WERE WILLING TO DIE TO PRESERVE SLAVERY. ANY MAN OR ANYTHING THAT IS SUCCESSFUL TO THAT EXTENT IS WORTH STUDYING, AND SLAVERY IS WORTH STUDYING. WHAT MADE IT GROW? IN THE FIRST PLACE, THE SLAVE OWNERS OWNED THE NEGROES, AND THEY DID THREE THINGS WITH THEM---THEY WOKE THEIR NEGROES UP; THEY MADE THEIR NEGROES WORK; THEY BROUGHT THEIR NEGROES IN. AND THEY WERE WILLING TO DIE FOR THEIR SLAVES, BECAUSE THEY KNEW THEIR SLAVES WERE VALUABLE. FURTHER, THEY DIDN'T LEAVE THOSE VALUBLE NEGROES TO WAKE UP OF THEMSELVES. THEY SAW THAT THEY WERE AWAKE IN TIME. AND AFTER THEY HAD MADE THEM WORK, THEY DID

NOT LEAVE THEM TO RUN ABOUT AT NIGHT, FOR THEY KNEW THE VALUE OF REST; AND AFTER WORK THEY BROUGHT THEIR NEGROES IN. "NOW SLAVERY HAS GONE FOREVER, AND WHITE MEN OWN NEGROES NO LONGER. BUT NEGROES ARE OWNED STILL. EVERY NEGRO IN THIS HOUSE OWNS A NEGRO. EVERY ONE OF YOU OWNS WHAT THE SOUTH WAS WILLING TO DIE FOR. ARE YOU WILLING TO DO FOR YOUR NEGROES WHAT THE SOUTH DID FOR THEIRS?"

I HAVE BEEN THINKING OF WHAT THIS INSTITUTION HERE MEANS, AND I HAVE FOUND OUT. THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS. WAKE YOUR NEGRO UP. MAKE YOUR NEGRO WORK. BRING YOUR NEGRO IN. THE THING IS SOLVED."

THOSE POWERFUL WORDS MAY HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO HEAR, BUT SHE GOT HER POINT ACROSS. ONE JOURNALIST WHO COVERED THE EVENT SAID HER WORDS STRUCK HER WHITE LISTENERS AS HARD AS THEY STRUCK THE AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE AUDIENCE. HE SAID: "PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME SOME OF THEM REALIZED THAT EVERY WHITE PERSON OWNS A WHITE PERSON AND SHOULD WAKE THAT WHITE PERSON UP, AND MAKE HIM WORK, AND BRING HIM IN"