

## Shmanners 246: George Washington Carver

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**Teresa:** Today we're gonna talk about George Washington Carver.

**Travis:** Aw, nuts!

**Teresa:** It's *Shmanners*.

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

**Teresa:** And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

**Travis:** And you're listening to *Shmanners*!

**Teresa:** It's extraordinary etiquette...

**Travis:** For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:** Hello, dear.

**Travis:** How are you on this snowy Thursday?

**Teresa:** You know, fine.

**Travis:** Would you still call—I mean, there's snow outside, but it's not snowing.

**Teresa:** Not snowing anymore. Uh, it's, you know... fine. [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** It's fine. Bebe went sledding for the first time this morning, after asking about it—so, we've had a couple, like, light flurry snowfall, and any time there's snow in the air she's like, "[excited] We can go sledding!" And it, uh, never sticks. And this time it stuck, and there was enough to go sledding. She went down a tiny hill twice.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** And then we were like, "Do you wanna go down again?"

And she was like, "No, that was not awesome."

And I said, "What? Why not?"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And she said, "My pants got snow on 'em." And she was like, "As you can see, my pants now have snow on them. Wh—why would I want to do this again?"

**Teresa:** I offered—should she want to go again, I offered to put her, like, ski bibs on her, her snow bibs. "No."

**Travis:** "No."

**Teresa:** Couldn't be bothered.

**Travis:** She checked it off the list. She was done. "Nope! I did it. Sledding? Don't need to sled anymore."

**Teresa:** Maybe once Dot is a little more ambulatory I could put them both out in the snow.

**Travis:** [holding back laughter] And lock the door.

**Teresa:** [laughs] No, and they'd have fun together.

**Travis:** So now we're doing another one of our classic, patented biographies. We were the first person to come up with—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —telling a story about someone else's life.

**Teresa:** Yeah. And one of the best parts about doing these biographies is—you know, you think you know a person.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** And—[laughs]

**Travis:** The—the classic example of this being when we did the Emily—uh, we did the—

**Teresa:** Emily Post, dear.

**Travis:** —Emily Post episode. Julia Child was another one that I was blown away by. Uh, Miss Manners. I feel like every time we talk about somebody it's like, "Wait, what? What is this?"

So, George Washington Carver. Here's all—I know two things.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** He was an inventor, and he invented peanut butter. And I know he invented other stuff too.

**Teresa:** Okay. Well...

**Travis:** Wha? What?

**Teresa:** He definitely has a lot to do with peanuts, and that does seem to be the thing that people know about him, but he didn't invent peanut butter.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Teresa:** So, here's the—here's something first.

**Travis:** Wait, hold on. Can I have one second?

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** To get back from this pit I've just fallen into? Okay, 'cause I feel like even though you didn't really lead me to it, I feel like you were waiting for me to say peanut butter.

**Teresa:** I mean, you definitely... that's definitely what people think. That that's—

**Travis:** But you were—you wanted me to say it, right?

**Teresa:** I did!

**Travis:** Okay. So that you could say, "No."

**Teresa:** [laughs] That's become a little bit of our thing here.

**Travis:** It's great. I love it.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Um, first of all, let's give a shout out to the PBS documentary, *George Washington Carver: An Uncommon Life*, and NPR's *Code Switch* for their article, "George Washington Carver: The Black History Monthiest Of Them All."

**Travis:** Oh, wow, okay.

**Teresa:** Sooo... he was definitely a creative person.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Definitely a conservationist.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** An educator, a trailblazer, and a scientist.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Not actually an inventor, really.

**Travis:** Oh, really? I—a lot of things I know now are based off of children's shows that I've watched that are educational. There is a George Washington Carver *Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum*, and he's, like, a botanist kind of person.

**Teresa:** Yeah, and he definitely did that.

**Travis:** Okay. Do I not know anything about George Washington Carver? He wasn't an inventor, and he didn't invent peanut butter. The two things I thought I knew [wheezes] about George Washington Carver are apparently wrong!

**Teresa:** Let's start at the beginning.

**Travis:** That was politic of you not to say, like, "Yes, you don't know anything, dear."

**Teresa:** He was born around 1864 on an isolated Missouri Farm, owned by a man named Moses Carver. Both of his parents were enslaved on this farm. Uh, his father was tragically crushed by a lumber cart.

**Travis:** Ooh.

**Teresa:** After he was born. And before he was a year old, he and his mother were actually kidnapped and trafficked to Arkansas—

**Travis:** Oh, man!

**Teresa:** —where they were going to be resold into slavery. Um, Moses Carver sent a dispatch to retrieve his hostages, and while the man found baby George, he never found his mother, Mary.

**Travis:** Aw, man! Aw, boy. Listen, I don't mean to sound flippant, but I can't curse, and so I would be cursing, here. I can see why starting off it is important we think about this historical figure, and already it's like, "Hey, here's just a small reminder of all of the hardship and tragedy that Black people went through during the period of slavery and onward," that, like, is just not discussed about because people are like, "[whiny voice] Well, that's too sad. Let's not include that in the history books." And I think that—ugh. Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so Moses and Susan Carver took George and his older half-brother, Jim, into their home, and raised them as their own.

**Travis:** Okay, that's nice.

**Teresa:** Uh, he was newly freed from slavery, but he was still an orphan, and kind of sickly as a child. From a very young age, though, he found himself drawn to nature. And everyone agreed that there was something very special about this boy, who seemed to master nearly everything he tried, and was still hungry for more. He was very curious and intelligent, and really loved being outside. So, *Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum* got that fact on point.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** It's said that throughout his life, he always had a love of nature, which went into the plant life, which went into how he could take plants and break them down chemically in order to create other products, all for the benefit of helping people.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so botanist, yes, chemist, sure, creator, creative, all of those things. But here's the thing. It was clear very early on that George had some kind of higher purpose in mind.

**Travis:** Hmm, okay.

**Teresa:** And had what could be called visions. According to Gary Kremer—

**Travis:** What?!

**Teresa:** —well, he told the documentary, *George Washington Carver: An Uncommon Life*, he said that, quote, "As a very small boy, exploring the almost virgin woods of the old Carver place, I, George Washington Carver, had the impression that someone had been there just ahead of me. Things were so orderly, so clean, so harmoniously beautiful. A few years later in these same woods, I was to understand the meaning of this boyish impression, because I was practically overwhelmed with the sense of some great presence. Not only had someone been there, someone *was* there. I even knew then that it was the great spirit of the universe."

**Travis:** What?!

**Teresa:** "Never since have I been without this consciousness of God speaking to me through the plants, rocks, and every other aspect of his creation."

**Travis:** Holy moly! Whoa!

**Teresa:** I know, right?

**Travis:** Listen. You don't need to worry about the veracity of that statement so much as the confidence of that statement.

**Teresa:** Indeed. Okay, we've established that he is obviously intelligent, gifted—

**Travis:** Yeah, and special.

**Teresa:** —and special.

**Travis:** A higher purpose, got things to do.

**Teresa:** Not really very physically strong.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** So as a young man, he was often sickly. It made him hard to kind of, like, help out around the farm, so while his brother Jim assisted Moses Carver in the field, George assisted his wife Susan, learning things like how to cook, sew, wash clothing, do needlework, things like that. Um, and probably Susan teaching him these things had a big hand in shaping his personality. Uh, so he loved music, art, he had a strong work ethic and a deep hatred of wastefulness.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Seems like a renaissance man, to me.

**Travis:** Yeah, it does—like, it's the kind of thing where—I guess it would be weird to find a biography of somebody where it was like, "Well, they were pretty lazy, and they weren't really interested in doing the work and, you know, they were never really drawn to anything, [holding back laughter] and then they changed the world!"

**Teresa:** [laughs] I suppose you're right. Okay, so—

**Travis:** [through laughter] The—the Travis McElroy story.

**Teresa:** [snorts] At this point in this retelling of his life, you might be a little confused about what—what this deal with this family was.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Uh, it seems paradoxical.

**Travis:** Well, 'cause we kind of seemed to gloss over the fact that it was, like, they were slaves of the Carvers, then they were kidnapped, and then George and his brother were brought back, and now they're adopted and freed.

**Teresa:** Okay, so it was immediately post-Civil War. It was an isolated farm, really. At this time, while George and his brother were living on this—on the Carver's farm, they probably didn't have a lot of contact with not only any other Africans, African-Americans, but also with anybody. Um, so they really had to... go outside of their homes, their... community, in order to really experience life. They were just kind of, like, self-sufficiently holed up. You know what I mean?

**Travis:** Okay, got it. Yeah.

**Teresa:** And even though George was clearly very intelligent, he didn't really have an opportunity to go to school. The nearest school that was, you know, available to him, because schools were still segregated—

**Travis:** For a long time after that.

**Teresa:** —for a very long time, was eight miles away. Uh, so at 12 years old, he walked the whole way there, by himself.

**Travis:** And assumedly back.

**Teresa:** Uh, no.

**Travis:** What?

**Teresa:** So, he arrived eight miles later in Nesho. Neosho, Noshoh.

**Travis:** How's it spelled?

**Teresa:** N-E-O-S-H-O.

**Travis:** N-E-O-S-H-O. Ne—nope! I got nothin'. Okay. Noshoh. Noshoh.

**Teresa:** So he moved in with Mariah and her family. She was a midwife in the community, and again, he kind of, like, waltzed into the life of someone who he had great interest with. She loved plants and their medicinal properties, and he was very enthralled by botany. Um, and so Mariah influenced that, and his strong faith and dedication to community.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** It seems like every single person he's come in contact in his life has, like... just added another, like, level to his pyramid of building blocks. You know what I mean?

**Travis:** Well, yeah, and it seems like he's the type of person that, like, when he encounters somebody, says, "I think you are interesting, and I think you have a lot to offer, and I would like to take you up on that. I am interested in you."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** "Uh, so tell me how to do these interesting things that you know how to do."

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Once again, the schoolhouse there could not satisfy his curiosity and intelligence. Again, he moved on to Kansas. [sighs] All of this sounds very hunky dory, right? It sounds very, like...

**Travis:** He's wandering the land, learning and making friends!

**Teresa:** Right, but that's certainly not true. Um, he was definitely witness to racial violence. It even made such an impression on him that he immediately left town. He went to Fort Scott in Kansas, and immediately left town once he saw a public lynching.

**Travis:** Oh man. Yeah.

**Teresa:** I think that the best part so far about George Washington Carver is that he was always drawn to help people, even though there were a lot of people who were not willing to help him.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** That is really wonderful, and I can't wait to learn more. But first, how about a word from some other Max Fun shows?

**Teresa:** Alright!

[theme music plays]

[music plays]

**Jackie:** I'm going first! It's me, Jackie Kashian.

**Laurie:** Man, she's always this bossy!

[all laugh]

**Laurie:** Uh, hi, I'm Laurie Kilmartin. We're a bunch of stand up comics, and we've been doing comedy, like, 60 years total of both of us—

**Jackie:** [laughs]

**Laurie:** But we look amazing. And—

**Kyle:** [laughs]

**Jackie:** It's all working out. We drop every Monday on Max Fun, and it's called *The Jackie and Laurie Show*, and you could listen to it, and learn about comedy, and learn about anger management, and all the things.

**Laurie:** And Jackie is married but childless, and I'm unmarried but childful, so together we make...

**Jackie and Laurie:** ... One complete woman.

[pause]

**Kyle:** [through laughter] Is that just where that one's gonna end?

**Laurie:** Yeah! Yeah!

[all laugh]

**Jackie:** And we try to make Kyle laugh just like that and say "Oh my God" every episode.

**Kyle:** It's a good job.

**Speaker Four:** *The Jackie and Laurie Show*. Mondays, only on Maximum Fun.

[music and advertisement end]

**Teresa:** Fortunately... for George—

**Travis:** Oh, we're back! Hey, we're back. Hi.

**Teresa:** Yes. [laughs]

**Travis:** Okay. Fortunately for George...

**Teresa:** There—there were a select few willing to assist him.

**Travis:** Oh, good.

**Teresa:** Um, he made his way to Iowa in 1888, and in the town of—

**Travis:** So at this point, just to check, he's 24 I believe, right?

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Yeah? He was—[stammers] 1864, you said? Yeah, okay, great.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Uh, in the town of Winterset, he met a white couple named John and Helen Mulholland. This seems to be really the cornerstone of his foray into his expertise, which would, you know, become teaching and working with sharecroppers, and all sorts of things I'll tell you about later.

**Travis:** Okay, I do—I'm dying to know, please.

**Teresa:** They saw him as a person who had worth, and was going places. Um, and so they took the time to really see what they could do to encourage his potential. This period in his life is where he decides to really go against the tides and apply to Simpson College in Iowa. He was accepted and enrolled in 1890, and he really came into his own there. Uh, again, it was not without strife. He wasn't allowed to live on campus, and he didn't really have any money. And he did find some—some, you know, some great friends there.

But here's the funny thing. He didn't go there to be a botanist or a chemist like we've talked about.

**Travis:** He went and got a theater degree.

**Teresa:** He wanted to be a painter.

**Travis:** Oh, okay!

**Teresa:** Actually.

**Travis:** I was kinda joking, but okay!

**Teresa:** I know—[laughs] and, uh, he was only led to science after his art teacher, Etta Bud, mentored him through their art program.

Um, so she was reluctant to accept him because he didn't have, like, a portfolio or anything, he just showed up and kind of was like, "I wanna do art."

But of course he was amazing at it.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** The guy was amazing at really everything that he did. Um, and so he encouraged him to go to Iowa state and enroll in their agriculture program. Uh, and she had a little in because her father taught horticulture there. So, he went there.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** He did great.

**Travis:** Yep.

**Teresa:** Got a Master's degree.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And, uh, wasn't just—

**Travis:** I bet he is the first person to get a Masters degree in, like, botany, [through laughter] off of an art degree undergrad.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Uh, and he wasn't just their first Black student. He was also their first Black faculty member.

**Travis:** He went on to work there, okay!

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah. Uh, again, wasn't allowed to eat with the other students, and he had to live in a laboratory, and finally was accepted into polite society by a friend named Sophia Liston who came to visit Carver. She decided that as a white woman, she would walk around town with Carver so people could see them, and she insisted that she would eat wherever he ate.

So, before, where he had to eat with, like, hired hands or workers, the powers that be decided that, uh, he should be allowed to eat with the other students.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And this feels a little bit like, um... [sighs] I don't know. It seems a little bit like white knighting.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Right?

**Travis:** White savoring, yes.

**Teresa:** White savoring. Um, but I think that it was also probably hard for her to stick her neck out like that, too, you know? Um, the times were hard for women and for people of color, and I think that this was her little piece of resistance, and I don't think it was very easy for her either.

**Travis:** I will also say, just kind of seems like one of the running themes of George Washington Carver's life so far is just kind of pushing through boundaries.

**Teresa:** Gently.

**Travis:** Yeah. Well, and not just that but just, like, because everybody could not deny, like, how impressive he was. Not that that should be the reason people are able to push through boundaries, but it definitely makes an impressive person that is just, like—there was so much bigotry and hatred, and he, like—people still had to give it up for how talented he was.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Is very, uh, meaningful, I think.

**Teresa:** Okay. Um, so he probably could've, like, hung out and taught at this school and, you know, done great things here. But really where the greatness, I would say, crests, is when he is contacted by Booker T. Washington.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And at the time, Booker T. Washington was the principal of an industrial and teaching institute for Black students in Tuskegee, Alabama.

**Travis:** Okay. Home of the Tuskegee Airmen, right? That's the same pla—yeah! Sorry.

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Washington desperately wanted George to teach at Tuskegee. He knew it would be difficult work, and he never minced words about it, but Carver responded to a letter he wrote him.

Quote, "It has always been one ideal of my life to do the greatest good to the greatest number of my people as possible, and to this end I have been preparing myself for these many years, feeling as I do that this line of education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom to our people."

And that, at Tuskegee, is where he remained for the rest of his life. He didn't always teach. He did a lot of research as well.

**Travis:** Did you say Tuskegee, Alabama, or Tuskegee, a different place?

**Teresa:** Tuskegee, Alabama.

**Travis:** Okay, yes. I was wondering how many different Tuskegees there could be in America. Okay, go on.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay. So, here is where he started doing... I mean, the peanut stuff.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Right? Um, he never spent time in the deep south, and Alabama's reliance on cotton as well as the sharecropping policies, like, appalled him, pretty much. He saw the homes of the sharecroppers and he knew that he could do meaningful work to give local farmers better lives.

And... he used an old shack to build a lab. He went through junkyards—

**Travis:** A lab shack!

**Teresa:** [laughs] He went through junkyards to find Bunsen Burners and—

**Travis:** I was trying to do a "Love Shack" thing with "Lab Shack".

**Teresa:** Oh.

**Travis:** "Lab Shack"! That's where it's at. Okay, now we can go on. Okay.

**Teresa:** Ohh, sorry. Sorry about that.

**Travis:** That's okay, you didn't know. You didn't know, it's alright. I was interrupting you to say my thing, and my thing was barely a joke. [through laughter] So don't worry about it.

**Teresa:** [laughs] I mean, it wasn't very easy. He needed jars and beakers and glasses and, you know, equipment that there wasn't money for and they didn't have. So, it was not easy. Um, but he was determined, because he wanted to teach the sharecroppers how to do a better job of taking care of the land, and therefore taking care of themselves, right? Uh, he said, "Whenever the soil is rich, people flourish, physically and economically. Whenever the soil is wasted, the people are wasted. Poor soil produces only a poor people."

And this is where his agricultural genius shines! Uh, he started sharing the values of conservation and restorative agriculture in a way that very few people were doing at the time. Um, rotating crops and trying to, like, diversify their different products and produce, and that's where—

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Is that where the peanuts come in? Okay.

**Teresa:** —peanuts come in!

**Travis:** Sayin' it doesn't have to be cotton. Maybe we could grow peanuts, people.

**Teresa:** Right. Peanuts, sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas, soybeans, all of those crops actually put something back into the land, where cotton really pulls a lot of nutrients out of the soil.

His first pamphlets—one of his first pamphlets has to do with the peanuts, right? "How to grow the peanut, and 105 ways of preparing it for human consumption."

**Travis:** Okay, wait, hold on. Is that why we think of, like, peanut butter?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Yes, that's why. He did think of, like, 300 uses for the plant. You know, beverages and medicines and paint and—

**Travis:** Beverages?! Like peanut soda, peanut juice, peanut... milk, peanut... fillin'—peanut water.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** I mean, I haven't read the pamphlet, but there's gotta be a lot of that stuff in there, right?

**Travis:** Okay. Peanut butter smoothies...

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** ... is my favorite.

**Teresa:** And I think that's why he's remembered for that. I mean, that's really cool! [laughs] 300 uses for one single legume?

**Travis:** I just imagine this guy when people are like, "I don't know, George. Peanuts? I mean, are people really gonna buy 'em?"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** He's like, "[speaking quickly] Are people—okay, hold on! Here's some things you can do with peanuts, just off the top of my head. You could—" and he just lists off, like, 300 things, and they're like, "Alright, George, you convinced us after the first ten."

He's like, "No, no, no! I got 290 more!"

"George, okay, please, stop yelling."

**Teresa:** But here's the thing, right? You remember him as the peanut guy.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** And that is a really great, like, crack in the door to opening his life, which was not super easy, which was pretty complicated, and was—I mean, he was some kind of genius, right? And—

**Travis:** Yeah, for sure! He sounds like a polymath to me. He sounds like he was—at art he could do this, I'll bet he was pretty good at, you know, the needlework he was doin'?

**Teresa:** Yeah! And he was deeply involved in the community. He wanted to raise the standards of living for people like him.

**Travis:** I mean, yeah. That's something—I mean, that's interesting, right? 'Cause when you think about it, it doesn't sound like he was like, "Oh, I've got a great product I can sell to get rich." That he was like, "Okay, I'm gonna put out some pamphlets so people can learn how to grow peanuts, so that their lives are better."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** You know? That it's not like, "Oh, I know exactly how I'm gonna make my millions."

That it was like, "I'm just working so that people can have better lives."

**Teresa:** Exactly. And he was so much of a public figure that people wrote him thousands of letters, with often very specific questions about how to make their lives better, I mean, agriculturally speaking, and it seems that he answered every single one of them. Over the course of his life, he would write over 25,000 letters to people who asked for help.

**Travis:** Wow.

**Teresa:** Yeah. And he was very involved with his students. They often addressed letters to him as "Dad."

**Travis:** Aww!

**Teresa:** Isn't that sweet?

**Travis:** Aww! Yeah, that really got me!

**Teresa:** Yeah! And he would write back as such, signing the letters as their father, which I think is really cool. He never married, he never had kids, but he—

**Travis:** Sounds like he had a *lot* of kids.

**Teresa:** —he deeply cared about his students in a very similar way.

**Travis:** Oh, that made me tear up! My—my ears are watering. That's very lovely.

**Teresa:** Okay. So, we're about two decades into his tenure at Tuskegee.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, he was very known and respected, but everything changed in 1915 when Booker T. Washington unexpectedly died.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, he, Carver, wanted to dedicate more and more time to the lab, and losing his best friend was like the straw that broke his back, you know? So he pretty much shut himself away in the lab and stopped teaching at that point. But he wasn't, you know—he wasn't gone from the community. He was elected to the board of the National Agricultural Society, and became the first Black man to be elected a fellow in Britain's Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts.

**Travis:** Okay!

**Teresa:** So at the end of the day, only three of his ideas were patented. Two for paint, and one for cosmetics. But it doesn't seem that he ever really minded. He wasn't really in it for the money or the fame. He seemed to genuinely want to help people, and when a friend of his was interviewed about him once he recalled [laughs quietly] that Carver was often, um, badgered by the auditor [holding back laughter] to remind him to cash his checks.

**Travis:** [holding back laughter] Oh!

**Teresa:** I thought that was... bananas.

**Travis:** That is. Man, George Washington Carver sounds like a cool dude. You know?

**Teresa:** He was a cool dude!

**Travis:** I didn't think I would get so emotional—really, just sitting here thinking about it, I really am, like, about to cry. Just thinking about this dude who is clearly so talented and so intelligent, and clearly worked hard to push through so

many barriers, and then used all of that not to, like, you know, make himself rich or famous or anything, but just, like—

**Teresa:** He was kind of famous. I mean, like—

**Travis:** Yeah, but I mean, like, that wasn't his goal. Like, he wasn't out there doing—he was just, like, helping people. I think that's amazing!

**Teresa:** He, um, was close friends with Henry Ford, who called him, quote, "The world's greatest living scientist," who is troublesome in many ways. But in 1940—

**Travis:** You mean Ford is.

**Teresa:** Ford is.

**Travis:** Not George Washington—okay.

**Teresa:** Ford is. Uh, in 1941, *Time Magazine* declared Carver the Black Leonardo, which I have to assume is da Vinci.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Da Vinci, yeah.

**Teresa:** Right? [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** Not like the ninja turtle.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Which, I'm sad to say, *is* where my brain went.

**Teresa:** [laughs] And even Thomas Edison offered him a 100,000 dollar salary to come and work with him in Menlo Park, but he turned it down to stay in Alabama.

And the other side of the coin of the peanut fame is that sometimes Carver's work was really just, like, relegated to that very small aspect. But the sustainable farming practices is really what he used to help people in the South, um, and unfortunately, due to the racist Jim Crow era, these outreach programs to sharecroppers slowly dwindled and eventually died.

**Travis:** Well... that sucks.

**Teresa:** Yes. Okay. He had a very great career, and he was built a school in Alabama, Henry Ford built him one, and got the city to install an elevator in his home after he had a more difficult time going up and down the stairs in his school, and home. Um, and it would've been easy for him to, you know, put up his feet and be like, "I've done all I can do."

**Travis:** "Time to retire."

**Teresa:** But here's the thing. He continued to be such a voice for his community that he never did hang it up. He always went to work. He was writing letters, he was working from his bed, he was, you know, until the very end. 1938, he was diagnosed with anemia and hospitalized for over a year, and he tried to return to his lab and get things going again, but it never really, like... the train was slowin' down on the way to the station, and in 1943, he passed. He was buried next to Booker T. Washington on Tuskegee's campus, and his epitaph reads:

"He could have added fortune to fame. Caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."

So he was—he was about two decades away from the Civil Rights movement, but people all over wanted to memorialize this wonderful man. There were stamps, there were coins, there were things like naval vessels and public buildings that were named for him. Um, and his birthplace is now a national monument!

Alex put this very, very special thing in here. She says, "He's the only person I've ever heard of to have been honored by both the NAACP as well as The Daughters of the Confederacy."

**Travis:** Huh! [holding back laughter] Okay! Well—

**Teresa:** What a wide breadth. And to think of the thing that we, you know, teach third graders in Black History Month is peanuts.

**Travis:** Yeah. It's a very much—a diminutive way of looking at it.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Really diminishes his true impact. And this is, I think, the r—I think the reason that I am feeling very emotional now, hearing about it, right? Is that it sounds very much to me like not only was his contribution scientific, but humanitarian in a way that, like, is almost never talked about. Like, you think about the advancements, but also that it was done to save people and help people primarily, I think that's absolutely incredible. And I thank you were telling me and our listeners about George Washington Carver, I thank Alex for suggesting the idea, and I thank George Washington Carver for being, uh, incredible!

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** And I thank everybody else for listening. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to Maximumfun.org, our podcast home. [sniffs] And I'm hurrying to wrap this up before I start crying.

**Teresa:** [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** Um, let's see. What else, Teresa?

**Teresa:** We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. We also thank Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. When we ask for questions on topics, you can submit those topics to our Twitter @shmannerscast. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmanners* Fanners. Please join that group if you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans.

If you'd like to submit a topic or an idiom for us to discuss, we're always lookin' for those. Uh, you can—

**Travis:** I'm just gonna lean and say, um, February is Black History Month, so if there are more great biographies we should do or topics we should cover, anything like that that you have ideas for, this is a great time to submit them. We would love to be able to put a spotlight on historical figures and occurrences and stuff that are applicable to the topic, so please email us those if you have any ideas.

**Teresa:** *Shmannerscast@gmail.com!*

**Travis:** And go check out all the other shows at mcelroy.family. Um, there's a bunch of stuff there, and I think you are absolutely great. Uh, thank you to our research assistant, Alex. As I said, we wouldn't be able to make the show without her. Uh, and I think that is gonna do it for us. Join us again next week.

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

**Travis:** You've been listening to *Shmanners*...

**Teresa:** Manners, *Shmanners*! Get it!

[theme music plays]

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