

# THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE

DREAMING BIG DREAMS:  
GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER,  
HENRY A. WALLACE,  
NORMAN E. BORLAUG AND THE  
TUSKEGEE - WORLD FOOD PRIZE - IOWA CONNECTION

Remarks by

AMBASSADOR KENNETH M. QUINN  
PRESIDENT, THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE FOUNDATION

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Six years ago this very month, in December 2008, I was invited by Iowa State University to deliver the commencement address at their winter graduation ceremony. This came just one month after the unprecedented presidential election, one of the most historic elections our country has ever experienced. And they all knew, as I am sure you know, that presidential elections begin in Iowa with the presidential caucuses. And so I begin my speech to those graduates with remarks which everyone saw as being closely linked with the caucuses and the outcome of that election.

I said that I wanted to tell them a story: A story of a man who had come to Iowa from a neighboring state; of a man whose name clearly indicated his African ancestry; of a man who had come to Iowa in quest of something that no one of his background or race had ever been able to do. I told the students further that this man had traveled from one small Iowa town to another and eventually concluded his wandering on the campus of Iowa State University in Ames.

I told them that in his journey, this man was seeking acceptance; acceptance from a group of people very different from himself. And that this man and others like him had always previously faced rejection, rejection based on prejudice and long standing discrimination. But now, but now, in a

transformational moment, he had found acceptance. He had done what no one before him had ever accomplished. He had made history.

But then I told those Iowa State University graduates that I knew that they were likely thinking that the man to whom I was referring was someone who came from Illinois, Iowa's neighboring state to the east; that they thought I was referring to a United State Senator, whose name came from his Kenyan father; and who had come to Iowa and had traveled the state going from one small town to another looking for votes during the Iowa presidential caucus; and that I was referring to the last event on his caucus election campaign which took place in the Student Union on the Iowa State campus; and that he had found acceptance, as his unprecedented victory in the Iowa caucuses had led to his nomination and historic election as President of the United States.

But I surprised them when I said that I was not speaking about events of 2008 in the 21st-century, but rather of what had occurred in 1888 in the 19th century. The man I spoke of was not president elect Barack Obama, but George Washington Carver, the man who had been born in Missouri, Iowa's neighbor to the south, and who had found unprecedented acceptance in Iowa and made history as Iowa State University's first black student.

Born 150 years ago in Missouri in 1864 and emancipated following the Civil War, George Washington Carver had a big dream: he desired to attain a college education. But he was turned away, repeatedly in several other states because of the color of his skin. Eventually, somehow, he ended up in the

small town of Winterset, Iowa, near the Bridges of Madison County, where he was making a living by doing laundry.



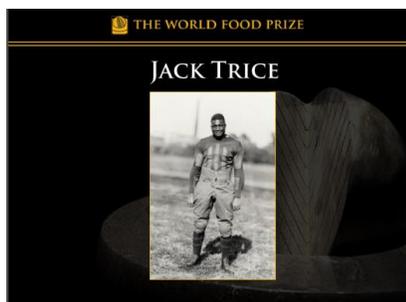
Befriended by a family, he was encouraged to attend Simpson College in another small Iowa town, where he studied art (Carver was an exceptional artist and some of his work was exhibited at the Columbian exposition in Chicago in 1893). His art teacher at

Simpson, a woman named Etta Budd, saw in Carver some scientific potential and so she encouraged him to apply to Iowa State College where her father was a faculty member in the Horticulture Department.

And so, Carver ventured to the small town of Ames in 1889, seeking admittance, seeking acceptance, seeking to do something that had never been done; because up to that day, Iowa State University had never before admitted a black student. To its everlasting credit, Iowa State admitted him and over the next six years George Washington Carver earned a Bachelor's and Master's of Science degrees in horticulture and agricultural science.

During that same period, he became acquainted with the Wallace family and would often take young Henry A. Wallace on walks where he would teach him to identify various plants. Carver instilled in Henry Wallace, who would become Secretary of Agriculture and Vice President of the United States, some dreams about plant science, which would impel Wallace to develop hybrid corn and to found the company now known as DuPont Pioneer.

Professor Carver, now a faculty member, would have no doubt stayed at Iowa State for the rest of his life. But, he could not refuse the call of Booker T. Washington in 1896 to come to Alabama and join him on the staff of Tuskegee Institute, in fulfilling his dream to educate a generation of young black students in the south. It was here on this campus that George Washington Carver would become one of the greatest agricultural scientists of the first half of the 20th century.



Even though Professor Carver was only at Iowa State for six years, his legacy lives on in Iowa in many ways. One that is little known surrounds his impact on football, which came in 1923 when Iowa State had its first African-American football player.

His name was Jack Trice.

He was from Ohio but had been drawn to Iowa State not because of football but rather because of a dream he had: "Trice was determined - and idealistic. Enrolled in the animal husbandry program, he hoped to work with black farmers in the South, teaching them modern methods to cultivate their crops and support their families. He planned to put his education at their service in the spirit of Iowa State's famous black alumnus, the scientist, botanist and inventor George Washington Carver."



Tragically, Jack Trice died of injuries inflicted by players from an all-white team in only the second

game he ever played. fifty years later, when Iowa State University built a new football stadium, the Board of Regents planned to name it after the largest financial donor. However, the Iowa State student body demanded that it be named for Jack Trice.

This struggle lasted for several years and was only settled when the Governor of Iowa, Robert Ray, intervened on the side of the students which ensured its success. Today, the only football stadium at any Division I school anywhere in America named after an African American athlete is Jack Trice Stadium in Ames, Iowa, on that same campus where George Washington Carver found his acceptance and named for a student athlete whom Carver had inspired.



There is another Tuskegee/Carver connection to the Iowa State University, related to the development of agricultural extension services in the South in the first decades of the 20th century. This involved a man named Seaman Knapp. Knapp, who had been president of Iowa State University in the early 1890s was engaged by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop a new American rice industry in Louisiana and to create an agricultural extension system across America.

In 1906, building on their Iowa State connection, Seaman Knapp met with Professor Carver on Tuskegee developing a network of black extension agents to help black farmers. By 1914, though their collaboration there were

over 100 black agents covering eleven states, the very program that years later would inspire Jack Trice.



Today, Professor Carver is at the center of the great pantheon of Iowa's agricultural and humanitarian heroes, celebrated in a mural I commissioned at our World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Iowa's capital city.

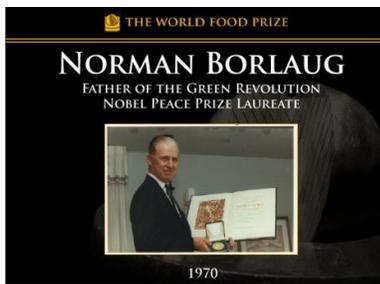
That small group of esteemed Iowans includes Henry Wallace to his left; and on his right is Jessie Field Shambaugh, the Mother of 4-H, who started after school clubs for boys and girls at her one room school house that grew into that organization of 6 million members; and Herbert Hoover, the 31st president of the United States, who was born in Iowa, and who was considered a failed president because he presided over the start of the Great Depression.

However, Hoover is, in my opinion the greatest humanitarian in the history of our country. While working for a Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson, Hoover, a Republican, orchestrated taking food to Europe to feed hundreds of millions of people at the end of World War I. Then after World War II, he did it again while working for another Democrat, President Harry Truman.



The last individual in our Pantheon of Heroes is the man whose centennial we've celebrated this year: Dr.

Norman E. Borlaug, founder of the World Food Prize. After growing up on an Iowa farm, Dr. Borlaug got a Ph.D. and worked for several decades in Mexico with the poorest farmers, until he fulfilled his dream of developing a variety of high-yielding, disease-resistant, miracle wheat.



He took his wheat to India and Pakistan in the mid-1960s, as they faced massive famine and starvation, and convinced both countries to adopt it, saving hundreds of millions from starvation and death.

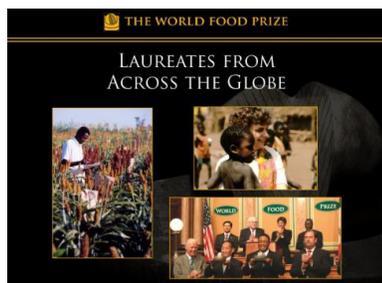
Indeed, it is said that Borlaug, through his high-yielding wheat, saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived. In 1970, Borlaug received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo.



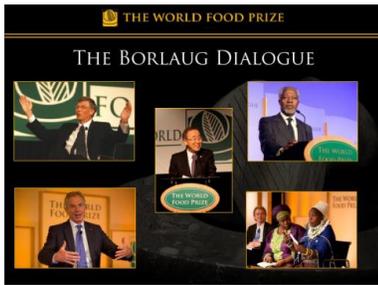
Borlaug created the World Food Prize in 1986 to be "the Nobel Prize for food and Agriculture." Each October, we hold a ceremony in the magnificent Iowa State Capitol to present our \$250,000 award to



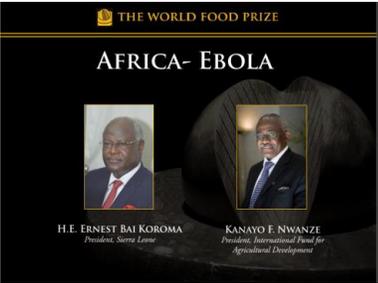
laureates from around the globe for making a breakthrough achievement in increasing the quality, quantity and availability of food in the world. Laureates like Gebisa Ejeta of Ethiopia,



Catherine Bertini from the United Nations and Monty Jones from Sierra Leone and Yuan Longping of China.



At that same time, we also hold the Borlaug Dialogue symposium, which has featured some of the leading experts in global food security and fighting hunger. It has been called the “premier conference in the world on global agriculture” and has featured such speakers as Tony Blair, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Kofi Annan and Bill Gates, as well as smallholder farmers from Africa.

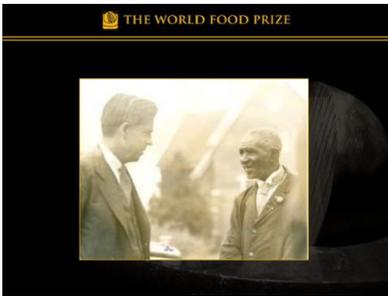


This year we had a special focus on Ebola with leaders from the countries most affected, as well as the presentation of a \$150,000 prize to for young innovators in Africa as part of our 40 Chances program.



Our youth education programs offer the opportunity to inspire high school students to pursue STEM subjects in school, including agricultural science, and to travel the world and gain valuable research and cultural experiences through our Borlaug-Ruan International Internships in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.





George Washington Carver is also an inspiration to another Iowan, the current Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. There is a wonderful photo of Professor Carver and Henry A. Wallace that sets above Secretary Vilsack's desk.



Two years ago, Secretary Vilsack and I signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding creating The USDA- World Food Prize Wallace Carver Fellows program. Last year we placed 32 young students who are alumni of our World Food Prize high school

youth education programs in paid USDA summer intern positions across the United States.

Beginning this past year, we partnered with Tuskegee University to inspire high school students here in Alabama to research and propose their own solutions to the greatest challenge we face – feeding 9 billion people by 2050. The top two students – two brilliant young women – flew to Iowa and shared their ideas with world experts and other students from across the U.S.

We look forward to growing this partnership and creating new ways to inspire the next generation of big dreams to aspire to be great scientific and humanitarian leaders like Professor Carver, Henry Wallace and Dr. Borlaug.



Professor Carver is inspiring even younger students. Remember that little town of Winterset where young George Washington Carver was working before he went to college? Young 4-H students there were so taken with his story that they made tiles and created a

mural to honor him – titled “Dream BIG Dreams.” George Washington Carver dreamed big dreams. Henry Wallace’s biography is titled, “American Dreamer” and Norman Borlaug would tell students like you to “reach for the stars.”

And, we have a second World Food Prize program honoring Professor Carver for college students. Each year we have undergraduate and graduate level students who wish to gain experience in international issues and nonprofit management, who serve as George Washington Carver Interns as part of our staff. All of them learn about who Professor Carver was, and how we can carry on his legacy.



This year, 2014, marks the centennial of Norman Borlaug's birth. The most significant event of this yearlong celebration was the unveiling of his statue in Statuary Hall of the U.S. Capitol on March 25, which would have been Borlaug's 100th birthday. It

was a great moment. The statue shows Borlaug at work in the field. But even this has a special Tuskegee connection.



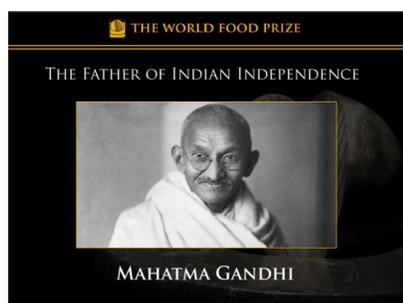
Perhaps by chance -- or maybe grand design -- Borlaug's statue is situated right next to that of Rosa Parks, born here in Tuskegee, in 1913, just one year before Borlaug. Her statue, which was installed just a few months earlier with President Obama offering powerful remarks, shows her in her everyday clothes, seated, as intransigent in bronze as she was in the flesh on December 1, 1955, when she refused the order to give up her seat and thus helped spark the civil rights revolution that swept our land.

So different in many ways, Rosa Parks and Norman Borlaug share the fact that both have received the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the two highest civilian honors our country can award. On Rosa Parks' gold medal it is written, "Mother of the Modern Civil Rights Movement." On the front of the pedestal of Borlaug's statue is inscribed "The Father of the Green Revolution."



It seems so fitting that there, almost side-by-side in one of the most hallowed spaces of our American democracy, now sit these two individuals of humble origins, both depicted in their working attire, so different from almost all of the other statues of political leaders, usually outfitted in their finest coats, who populate Statuary Hall.

These two Americans of diverse backgrounds, who never sought publicity or the limelight for themselves, who never met in real life, are now, cast in bronze, together emanating a glow that radiates inspiration to the millions and millions who will see them.



Researchers and farmers have also erected statues of Norman Borlaug in Mexico and India reflecting the heroic status he has in those countries. And that brings me to one final story about George Washington Carver and Tuskegee's own connection to India. And it is this story that has brought me to your campus today. For it was here at Tuskegee that a letter from Mahatma Gandhi, that greatest of all iconic figures of India's independence, would reach George Washington Carver in 1929; a letter that would lead to a personal correspondence between them that would continue at least through 1935, and perhaps beyond.

In 1929, Gandhi, who dreamed the big dream of his country being free, made the fateful decision to form the Congress party and begin the struggle to throw off British colonial rule and secure India's independence. Realizing it would be a protracted and difficult journey, Gandhi feared that his vegetarian diet might not be sufficiently nutritious to sustain him during this long, hard slog.

And so, he reached out through friends to try to be in contact with a scientist in America, whose name he did not yet know, to get advice on how to enrich his diet. And this led to a correspondence between these two great men.

I only became acquainted with this historic relationship by chance when a young Iowa State University graduate named Paxton Williams, who used to do one-man plays about Professor Carver's life, visited me at the World Food Prize in 2005. Williams was working at the Carver birthplace memorial in Missouri and was back in Des Moines to show the chief Park Service Ranger of that installation some of the local Carver lore.

I mentioned that our World Food Prize Laureate that year was from India, which prompted Williams to tell me that the archives in Missouri had copies of letters exchanged between Gandhi and Carver. I nearly jumped out of my chair telling him that I had to have copies of them, which he subsequently was good enough to send to me. In reading those letters, suddenly this exchange between those two great men, who also never met during their lifetimes, became very real. Carver's letters addressed to "my beloved friend Mr. Gandhi," contained advice in regard to additional soy in his diet and other ways to enhance his nutrition.



I became so enamored of the story and felt that it deserved to have a place in Iowa's humanitarian and agricultural history. So I commissioned this painting to be done by a wonderful Des Moines artist named

Mary Kline-Misol, which now hangs in the Iowa Gallery at the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates. I had the great pleasure to show it to Dr. Hill and Professor Olga Bolden-Tiller when they visited last April.

When I told them the story, I ended it by saying that in Washington D.C., directly across the street from the White House, is Lafayette Park. It was dedicated as a tribute to those foreigners who played an instrumental role in America's obtaining its independence. I said it was a considerable point of pride for us that a man who was educated in our state of Iowa had played a small but perhaps not insignificant part in India's quest for independence, just as it should be a point of everlasting pride for all of you at Tuskegee University.

I told Dean Hill that to reflect that connection between Professor Carver and Henry Wallace, that Alabama-Iowa bond, that Tuskegee-World Food Prize relationship, I would present to this great university a copy of that painting. I am so honored to be here today to do just that.

It is interesting to note that India's independence will be celebrated next month on January 26, Republic Day, with a spectacular parade in Delhi at which the special guest of honor will be that other man from a state adjacent to Iowa, that man who dreamed the biggest big dream of all and found acceptance in Iowa by winning the 2008 presidential caucuses, President Barack Obama.



Wouldn't it be appropriate if, at some point while watching the festivities, President Obama would lean over to Indian Prime Minister Modi and tell him the story about that scientist with the Iowa-Tuskegee-Gandhi connection who played a small

but very meaningful role in India's independence, that man whose 150-year-old legacy we celebrate today, George Washington Carver. Dean Hill, I have a proposal: Why don't you and I write to President Obama and suggest that he share this story with the Indian Prime Minister.

I am so proud of the relationship the World Food Prize has with this great institution, and I am so pleased at how we are working together to inspire the next generation to follow the inspiration of Borlaug and Wallace and Carver and dream BIG dreams as we confront the greatest challenge in human history: whether we can sustainably and nutritiously feed the 9 billion people who will be on our planet in 2050. I am so honored that you invited me to



deliver this address as we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that great Iowa-Tuskegee hero, George Washington Carver that man who dreamed big dreams and who is inspiring all of you to dream big dreams.