On September 18, 1895, African-American spokesman and leader Booker T. Washington spoke before a predominantly white audience at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. His “Atlanta Compromise” address, as it came to be called, was one of the most important and influential speeches in American history. Although the organizers of the exposition worried that “public sentiment was not prepared for such an advanced step,” they decided that inviting a black speaker would impress Northern visitors with the evidence of racial progress in the South. Washington soothed his listeners’ concerns about “uppity” blacks by claiming that his race would content itself with living “by the productions of our hands.”

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| **Paragraph 1:** One-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. No enterprise seeking the material, civil, or moral welfare of this section can disregard this element of our population and reach the highest success… | **Translation:**  |
| **Paragraph 2:** Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden. |  |
| **Paragraph 3:** A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, “Water, water; we die of thirst!” The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” … The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: “Cast down your bucket where you are”— cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded. | **Draw metaphor:** |
| **Paragraph 4:** We learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life…No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top.  |  |
| **Paragraph 5:** Nearly sixteen million of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward. We shall constitute one-third and more of the ignorance and crime of the South, or one-third [of] its intelligence and progress; we shall contribute one-third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic. |  |
| **Paragraph 6:** The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house. |  |

Source: Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 3, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 583–587.

**Summarize Booker T. Washington’s argument on how to achieve racial equality.**

**Do you agree or disagree with his method? Why or why not?**