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| **More BTW-TR Dinner** **Dee-lightful Discoveries** **by Toby Selda** |

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| **Fame of BTW by 1901**tBooker T. Washington, renowned African-American leader and founder of the Tuskegee Institute, was widely known and respected by the time of the 1901 White House dinner. In 1896, he was the first Black man to receive an honorary degree from Harvard (along with Alexander Graham Bell and the commander of the US Army). In 1898, President McKinley, along with members of his cabinet and several generals, spent the day being part of a huge celebration at Tuskegee. In 1899, on a European tour, Washington and his wife were received by statesmen, diplomats, aristocrats, and royals, and invited to parties and weekends at their country estates. The American ambassador held a reception for him where he met Mark Twain for the first time. The Washingtons were invited (along with Susan B. Anthony and several hundred other women in town for an international conference) to take tea with Queen Victoria. (1) His bestselling autobiography, *Up From Slavery,* had recently been published, and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt planned a visit to meet with him at Tuskegee later that year.  |

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| **William McKinley, standing on platform, between Gov. Joseph F. Johnston and Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee, 1898.** **﻿(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)**  |

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| **Lunch or Dinner?**To downplay the seriousness of the dinner some found so offensive, there were claims it was really only lunch. Several main sources say it was dinner. “In the Roosevelt papers there is a note in Dr. Washington’s hand, dated October 16, 1901: ‘Dear Mr. President: I shall be very glad to accept your invitation for dinner this evening at 7:30.’ ” (2) TR said “I was not at *luncheon.* I asked him to come and take *dinner* with me that night.” (3) “In the 1930’s a journalist wrote to Edith Roosevelt and asked if it was lunch or dinner. Edith promptly replied, “My dear sir, an entry in my diary of October 16, 1901, notes ‘Mr. Booker Washington at dinner.’ Believe me, Very truly yours, Edith Roosevelt.” (4) TR once asked his Black valet his opinion of the dinner. (5)“Now James, what did you think about it?” “I think it was all a mistake,” I said. “You do?” he said looking up rather surprised. “And what was the trouble with it?”“Of course,” I replied, “I don’t mean to say that you made a mistake, Mr. Roosevelt. I criticize Washington for accepting your invitation. He knew the white people of the South and he must have known that the affair would bring you – a true friend of the colored race – into a lot of unfriendly criticism. He had plenty of time to think it over and he could easily have found an excuse not to accept the invitation.” “So that’s what you think?” he asked.“Yes,” I answered.“Well, by George, I don’t agree with you,” he said and that was all. |

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