Handcrafting Whiteness: Booker T. Washington and the Subject of Contemporary Craft

Marie Lo
“40 Under 40: Craft Futures”

Left: Jenny Hart, born in Iowa City, IA 1972, La Llorona, 2005

The Problem with Contemporary Craft

How do racialized forms of labor shape our understanding of what “craft” is? Who is the subject of crafts, and how is this subject racially constituted and made legible? (425)
John H. Scott, Saddle-and harness maker, and family. The family portrait is probably representative of photographs made of New Bern’s successful black artisan families, no examples of which have been located.
“Civilizing” Power of Handicraft

From 1902–1910, these principles were listed at the beginning of each issue of Handicraft, the monthly publication of the Society of Arts and Crafts (later the National League of Handicraft Societies). Image courtesy of the University of Michigan.
“Civilizing” Power of Handicraft

Oppressed worker

Independent craftsmen
Rise of Industrial Education + Preservation of Industrial Capitalism

Samuel Chapman Armstrong founded the Hampton Normal & Agricultural Institute
Booker T. Washington & the Tuskegee Agricultural and Normal Institute

Left: Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

Right: Frances Benjamin Johnston, photo of Tuskegee students in a mattress-making class, 1902
Divergent Racialized Historical Formations

**Arts & Crafts**
- Free and independent of economic necessity

**Industrial Education**
- Function of financial need and race
Washington argues how “the value of hand work [was] in the building of character” (440)
Economic Model of Consumer & Lifestyle Choices

Frances Benjamin Johnston, *photo of Tuskegee students in a shoe-making class*, 1902
Present Implications

Who gets to reap the benefits of craft and self-sufficiency?
Sustainability & Eco Friendly Consumer Choices

Left: “Package Free” shop advertising
Right: Elate Cosmetics advertising