

Arthur George Gaston

July 4, 1892 – January 19, 1996

Adaptability



“Money is no good unless it contributes something to the community, unless it builds a bridge to a better life. Any man can make money, but it takes a special kind of man to use it responsibly.”

Arthur George (A.G.) Gaston

On July 4, 1892, Arthur George (A.G.) Gaston was born in a log cabin in Demopolis, Alabama. His father died when he was an infant and his mother took a job as a cook for a family in Birmingham, moving her son with her. As Gaston grew up, he was able to find work in a mining company. Realizing the needs within the African American community, Gaston spent his life filling the gaps through service and financial means, utilizing his **super skill of adaptability**.

As a young man, A.G. Gaston realized that there was a need in the African American community for proper funeral services. He decided to start a burial society, where members would pay \$.25 weekly to guarantee a fine burial.

Gaston went on to open and vertically integrate all needs of services with *Smith and Gaston Funeral Services*, *Booker T. Washington Insurance Company*, *Citizen's Federal Savings Bank* and the *Gaston Motel*, *A. G. Gaston Construction Company*, and the *Gaston Boys and Girls Club*, among other ventures. He was one of the first African American millionaires in Alabama. He learned how to navigate in a predominantly white-run city by understanding how to connect with others. His empathy for all people, along with his adaptability, allowed him to negotiate in ways others could not.

Gaston was a supporter of the

principles of the *Civil Rights* movement. His very high-end hotel was used as a “war room” and central hub for the *Civil Rights* movement leaders including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When Dr. King was arrested, A.G. Gaston bailed him out with his own money at the price of \$160,000.

Gaston was not always supported by more radical *Civil Rights* leaders as his empathy was sometimes viewed as siding with the white leadership. On the contrary, the reality was that he believed in the cause; he just approached the problem as a mediator between the two sides and he had a relationship in Birmingham with all leaders. His behind-the-scenes work helped bring success to the negotiations in his unique role in *Civil Rights* history.

Gaston lived to an astounding age of 103 as one of the wealthiest African American men in America. His work is largely missing from historical reference. As a result, his niece and grand-niece have completed a book in his honor, *The Black Titan*, about his success, his role in the *Civil Rights* movement and how his work paved a successful path for others. His use of his super skill of adaptability lives on as an example of the success it can bring.

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