

Richard R. Wright, Sr.

May 16, 1855 - July 2, 1947

Leadership



“Tell them we are rising.”

Richard R. Wright, Sr.

Richard R. Wright was a foundational leader for the benefit of African Americans in the United States. His many contributions included founding a high school, college, and a bank. His remarkable life left a mark in education, banking, politics, publishing, journalism and real estate, among many other accomplishments. As the founder of what would become Savannah State University, he continues to provide an opportunity on these grounds beyond his time on earth.

Richard Robert Wright was born enslaved in Dalton, GA in 1855. After emancipation in 1863, the family moved to Cuthbert, Georgia. In 1866, seeing promise in her son, Wright's mother walked roughly 162 miles to Atlanta to enroll her son in Storrs School, established by the American Missionary Association.

Wright was one of the first 400 students at the school. The commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau visited the school, asking the students what they would like to say to Northern friends. Wright an-

swered first by responding, “Tell them we are rising,” a tag line for which he has become famous by living and empowering in others. Wright graduated high school and then college at Atlanta University as the valedictorian at the first class in 1876. Wright went on to receive his master's degree at Atlanta University, as well.

Recognized for his many accomplishments, he was a delegate to three national Republican Conventions. This exposure introduced him to his next opportunity to organize Augusta's first African American High School, where he also became principal. Simultaneously, he owned the *Augusta Sentinel*, one of the largest African American newspapers in its time. Then, he was appointed president of the Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth in 1891, which became today's Savannah State University. Wright's remarkable **soft skill of leadership** across so many influential paths created the foundational setting in which we continue to learn and grow today.



REFLECT:

How are you showing leadership through your work at SSU in preparation for your future?