

TAKECHARGE PRESENTS:

# BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND THE ENDURING LEGACY

The first conservative cancelled by the Left has a legacy too strong to be kept from his proper place in history: that of an incomparable leader and American Hero

PART THREE OF A THREE PART SERIES

“*There is another class of coloured people who make a business of keeping the troubles, the wrongs, and the hardships of the Negro race before the public. Having learned that they are able to make a living out of their troubles, they have grown into the settled habit of advertising their wrongs — partly because they want sympathy and partly because it pays. Some of these people do not want the Negro to lose his grievances, because they do not want to lose their jobs.*” — [Washington](#)

## WASHINGTON'S SUCCESS WAS MET WITH ANIMOSITY

**B**ooker T. Washington was the epitome of the American Dream. He chose to defy the fate that so many established for him as a black man. But other prominent black leaders at the time, namely his contemporary D.E.B. Du Bois, felt Washington misused his prominent position and compromised the black condition to appease influential whites.

At no time was this more prominently illustrated than during Washington's Sept. 18, 1885 Atlanta Expedition speech. As a skilled orator and diplomat, Washington had a keen sense of his audience and what was at stake in making his arguments for social and economic equality of the black community. In the speech, he promoted vocational education and practical trade rather than higher education. Du Bois and other prominent black leaders dubbed this a “compromise” and harshly criticized Washington as trading equality for

appeasement. Du Bois was a product of his own jealousy and his quest for influence in the quickly forming post-Reconstruction New South. Du Bois, now is a more prominent figure in American history in general and black history in particular, branded Washington's speech as an endorsement of separate but equal.

But what is left out of the history books — the inconvenient truth of Washington's legacy — is that **he delivered the speech to almost one million people who had a hand in advancing the cause of civil rights**, far from the appeaser of which Du Bois branded him.

## FIGHTING FOR BLACK ADVANCEMENT AND SUCCESS AGAINST RELENTLESS ENEMIES

Washington was the first African American to address an integrated audience from an integrated stage in the segregationist South. He knew this speech was an invitation



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for lynching. Just a few years earlier, Ida B. Wells' printing press was bombed after she spoke out against lynching, forcing her to move to Chicago where she resumed her writing and activism. But Washington couldn't pick up and move his University. In his capacity as a leader of that institution, Washington was painfully aware that the risk of violence and a damaged reputation was shared with his students and the school.

The continuity of generations of successful black upward mobility was dependent on his life and his words. As such, he knew he had to walk a very fine line between the wealthy industrialists investing in the vision of the New South would support some form of black education and black economic advancement through jobs, rural whites concerned about being displaced, and black people who had to be assured his message wasn't bound by his rhetoric, but conveyed an underlying promise of emancipation of the black condition from the chains of ignorance, bitterness, and victimization.

Washington understood that a man can attain formal political rights but still live a life of economic and social inequality: simply having the right to vote isn't a sufficient condition for equality. But in an era then - as now - when demands are made through political ends and the government is seen as the solver to all systemic problems, having a self-reliant outlook and promoting education and tradecraft as Washington did was a threat to the political power brokers like Du Bois.

### HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF - BUT IT SHOULDN'T

The men who write history chose to mostly exclude Washington's incredible story of personal responsibility and strength, hard work, determination, and success despite nearly insurmountable odds. Even today, Washington's legacy isn't brought up without being in the context of men like Du Bois and his followers who regarded Washington's message and teaching as a betrayal of the black community - even as Washington's students and school proved the opposite. We see this same heated rhetoric in black leaders today who regards men such as Dr. Ben

Carson, Robert Woodson, Justice Clarence Thomas, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, and Dr. Thomas Sowell as sell-outs or betrayers of black justice. In reality, they are the embodiment of the American Dream: overcoming difficult childhoods or life situations without bitterness, animosity, or political weaponizing that so often poisons the conversation around the meaning of American success, and deepens the racial divisions among all of our communities.

**It's time we bring Washington to his rightful status as American hero and his legacy back to the prominence he deserves.**

We can honor his memory and his successes by championing the cause of black self-determination, community action and responsibility, openly support faith communities and organizations that emphasize family cohesiveness and career mobility. The battle will be hard, and as Washington experienced, the opposition will be fierce. But the enemies of success are fueled by political power, bitterness, and jealousy - all things that can be defeated in a unified fight against them.

Justice Clarence Thomas eloquently stated in a lecture at Notre Dame University on September 16th, "Today, there's a notable pessimism about the state of our country, and cynicism about our founding. There are some that would even cancel our founders. We are all aware of those who assert ... that American is a racist and irredeemable nation, but there are many more of us, I think, that feel that America is not so broken as it is adrift at sea."

**A lesson we could all benefit from. A lesson Booker T. Washington learned early in his life and spent the remainder of it fighting to right the ship adrift at sea.**

