



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on February 19, 2015

Shame

Today's liberals are not racists, but they often behave that way. They would benefit immensely from considering some of the arguments in award-winning scholar Dr. Shelby Steele's forthcoming book, *Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country*.

Steele, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, explains that in matters of race, there is an ideological vision that completely ignores truth — a vision he calls “poetic truth.” In literature, poetic license takes liberties with grammatical rules, as well as realities, in order to create a more beautiful or powerful effect than would be otherwise possible. Liberals have a poetic commitment to black victimization as the explanation for the many problems affecting a large segment of the black community. The truth that blacks have now achieved a level of freedom comparable to that of others has to be seen as a lie. People who accept the truth about that freedom are seen as aligning themselves with America's terrible history of racism. Accepting that racism is still the greatest barrier to black achievement is the only way liberals can prove themselves innocent of racism. Thus, “modern liberalism is grounded in a paradox: it tries to be ‘progressive’ and forward looking by fixing its gaze backward. It insists that America's shameful past is the best explanation of its current social problems. It looks at the present, but it sees only the past.”



Liberals believe that black people's fate is determined by the beneficence of white people and government programs. Steele points out that despite the handicaps of past racism and segregation, our fate was left in our own hands. In the face of more government opposition than assistance, black Americans created the most articulate and effective movement for human freedom that the world has ever seen — the civil rights movement. This was done without any government grants and in a society that ran the gamut from a cool indifference toward blacks to murderous terrorism.

Though not politically correct to acknowledge, there are cultural patterns within the black community



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that keep blacks from achieving true parity with whites. Sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan identified these patterns in his 1965 report, titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Moynihan, who later became a Democratic senator, was condemned as a racist by much of America's academic establishment for "blaming the victim." Worse than that, Moynihan's experience became an object lesson for other social scientists that any research that implies black responsibility for black problems is forbidden.

Moynihan's conclusions were no less than prophetic. Steele says that family breakdown is the single worst problem black America faces. It spawned countless other problems in black America, including gang violence, drug abuse, low academic achievement, high dropout and unemployment rates, and high crime and incarceration rates.

Liberalism is a moral manipulation that exaggerates inequity and unfairness in American life in order to justify overreaching public policies and programs. Liberalism undermines the spirit of self-help and individual responsibility. For liberals in academia, the fact that black college students earn lower grades and have a higher dropout rate than any group besides reservation Indians means that blacks remain stymied and victimized by white racism. Thus, their push for affirmative action and other race-based programs is to assuage their guilt and shame for America's past by having people around with black skin color. The heck with the human being inside that skin.

Shelby Steele argues that the civil rights movement's goal was a free society — one not necessarily free of all bigotry but free of illegal discrimination. After that, we minorities should be simply left alone, as opposed to being smothered by the paternalism, inspired by white guilt, that has emerged since the 1960s. On that note, I just cannot resist the temptation to refer readers to my [Proclamation of Amnesty and Pardon](#), which grants Americans of European ancestry amnesty and pardon for their own grievances and those of their forebears against my people so that they stop feeling guilty and stop acting like fools in their relationship with Americans of African ancestry.

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