



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on September 21, 2015

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What Killed Black Progress?

The Left is fond of saying, “Black lives matter.” Of course they do! But implicit in the statement is that modern victimization of blacks is a “legacy of slavery” extending to the present day, and that America’s continuing racism is what is blocking the path of black progress, with local police as a key exponent of the alleged white racist power structure supposedly suppressing blacks.



Reality is actually quite different. Upon the abolition of chattel slavery, accomplished by the 13th Amendment in 1865, emancipated blacks had limited skills; were without homes, savings, and education; and were often victimized by overt discrimination. Despite the legacy of slavery, with its dehumanizing effects, and the prospect of intense hostility on the part of much of the surrounding majority white population, blacks persevered over the next several decades, making steady progress. This progress was accomplished not only without governmental aid, but in spite of government, with its multiple legal roadblocks.

Walter E. Williams, an economist from George Mason University and a best-selling author, noted: “There is no question, though it’s not acknowledged enough, that black Americans have made greater gains, over some of the highest hurdles and in a very short span of time, than any other racial group in mankind’s history.”

In his famous autobiography *Up From Slavery*, famed black educator Booker T. Washington recounted not only his own amazing emergence from slavery, but showed the way for other former slaves and their descendants to overcome prejudice and achieve greatness. “The whole future of the Negro rested largely upon the question as to whether or not he should make himself, through his skill, intelligence, and character, of such undeniable value to the community in which he lived that the community could not dispense with his presence,” Washington wrote.

“I said that any individual who learned to do something better than anybody else — learned to do a common thing in an uncommon manner — had solved his problem, regardless of the color of his skin, and that in proportion as the Negro learned to produce what other people wanted and must have, in the same proportion would he be respected.”

As the years passed, blacks worked in all manner of jobs, slowly elevating their economic status, dramatically illustrating the wisdom of Washington’s sage advice. As segregation was established by law, blacks responded by carving out of their own community an economically vibrant society, with their own lawyers, doctors, businesses, and social life. They certainly did *not* look to the government for a handout, but usually did their best to stay out of its way. Most charity was provided by either private mutual aid societies or black churches. David Belto, in his book *After the Welfare State*, noted, “In 1920, about eighteen million Americans belonged to fraternal societies, i.e. nearly 30 percent of all adults.”



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The breaking of baseball's "color line" by Jackie Robinson in 1945 also demonstrates Washington's point, as his success was the embodiment of the strategy of making oneself "valuable" to society. When given the opportunity to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers, Robinson played the game so well that fans wanted to watch him play, and his personal conduct — not treating prejudice in kind — as well as his outstanding baseball skills won him the admiration of whites and blacks alike, including even many of the whites who had opposed the integration of baseball. In so doing, he blazed the trail for other great black athletes to follow. And he accomplished this feat without court orders or other government intervention of any kind to force the integration.

Washington and Robinson were of different generations and possessed different talents, but in their own ways they were exemplary role models who inspired millions to achieve greatness through hard work and initiative. Washington, through Tuskegee University, which he established, also provided the education many poor blacks so desperately needed to start climbing up the economic ladder and achieve their part in the American dream.

But what happened to stall this upward climb? Liberal programs claiming to help black Americans, such as the so-called War on Poverty launched in the early 1960s, have had the opposite effect. In particular, the black family, once strong, has been undermined by government programs.

Dinesh D'Souza wrote in *The End of Racism*, "More black males are in prison than in college," and that 65 percent of black children are born out of wedlock. Sister Souljah, an author and liberal black activist, contends that the unenviable state of black families, black crimes, and black employment is all about "racism," which she said "has turned our communities into war zones." Liberal politicians and opinion-makers generally agree with her.

But if racism were the primary problem facing the black community, then the multitude of problems they are suffering from should have been much worse before 1960. After all, the election of a person of black African ancestry as president of the United States would have been unthinkable 50 years ago, and even more so 100 years ago, when racism and discrimination were far more intense.

However, black problems weren't worse prior to the 1960s. Most of the problems encountered by blacks today can be traced to government, mostly the federal government. At one time, blacks had a lower unemployment rate than whites, but then minimum-wage laws often prevented young black men from getting jobs. Walter Williams explained that early work experience teaches youths "things like ... you come to work on time, you respect the supervisors, you dress in a certain way." Yet, the minimum wage creates a situation in which the potential employee costs more to hire than what that person can possibly earn for the business.

Other government policies affected blacks equally perniciously. If a young black person wished to offer taxicab service, for example, government policies effectively made that impossible. Most cities still require license fees of many thousands of dollars. Other types of businesses were closed to most blacks because of insurmountable permit fees, as well, shutting the door to a person of limited financial resources from launching a small business.

Then there's that "family thing." Today, fewer black children grow up in a two-parent family than under slavery. In 1925 New York City, Walter Williams noted, 85 percent of black households were two-parent. "As late as 1950, only 18 percent of black households were single-parent. From 1890 to 1940, a slightly higher percentage of black adults had married than white adults. In 1940, black illegitimacy



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was about 14 percent.”

Now black illegitimacy is 75 percent.

This has a definite correlation to poverty. As Williams noted, “Among married families it [the poverty rate] has been in the single digits for more than two decades.” And children raised by single parents are likelier to use drugs and become involved in criminal behavior.

According to FBI statistics, more than 6,000 blacks are murdered on an annual basis, with the murderer being another black person 93 percent of the time.

As mentioned previously, many have traced the present dilemma of black poverty, crime, and disintegration of the family to the Great Society of President Lyndon Johnson, which declared “war” on poverty in the 1960s. Since this massive expansion of the welfare state, there has been a three-fold increase in the number of children growing up in single-parent families.

In their article for the Heritage Foundation entitled “How Welfare Harms Kids,” Patrick Fagan and Robert Rector explained how this accelerating trend has affected the incidence of violent crime and burglary. They found that growing up in a single-parent family on welfare triples the probability that a young black man will engage in criminal activity. It is instructive that the explosion of illegitimacy and single-parent homes has occurred since 1960. It was in 1964 that President Johnson led Congress to enact his bundle of reforms dubbed the Great Society.

According Fagan and Rector, welfare “has made marriage economically irrational for most low-income parents. It has transformed marriage from a legal institution designed to protect and nurture children into an institution that financially penalizes nearly all low-income parents who enter into it.” Welfare pays for non-work and non-marriage — and thus, not surprisingly, we get more of both.



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Urban gangs in large cities have often replaced the male role model of the father in the home, leading young men into tragic confrontations with the local police. Yet without the police, these cities would be even more dangerous for their inhabitants — black and white alike.

Sadly, more federal control of local law enforcement is the rallying cry of liberal black activists and progressives in general, once again offering the creator of many of these problems — the federal government — as the solution.

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