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The right-wing talking point that Black poverty is the result, not of historic injustice, but of "Black culture" — and particularly the effect of Great Society welfare programs on Black culture — dates almost as far back as the Great Society itself.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, among other things a major early figure of neoconservatism, in the 1965 Moynihan Report (*The Negro Family*) blamed Black poverty on a "ghetto culture" of fatherless families and unemployment going back to slavery. Marvin Olasky took the argument a step further in his 1992 book *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, arguing that, while the problem indeed rooted in Black culture and family disintegration, it didn't go back to Jim Crow or slavery; rather, it was created mostly by the welfare state's "culture of dependency" — an argument popularized, in turn, by neoconservative politicians like Newt Gingrich and Jack Kemp.

The talking point has been repeatedly stressed over the years by people like columnist Thomas Sowell, who wrote in a 2015 column:

> The "legacy of slavery" argument is not just an excuse for inexcusable behavior in the ghettos. In a larger sense, it is an evasion of responsibility for the disastrous consequences of the prevailing social vision of our times, and the political policies based on that vision, over the past half century.

More recently John Stossel ("Slavery Was a Global Phenomenon," *Reason*, August 7) approvingly — and predictably — cited a comment by Wilfred Reilly, author of *Lies My Liberal Teacher Told Me*:

> "Most problems in the modern black community don't have anything to do with historical ethnic conflict 160 years ago."
>
> Reilly says today's problems began when government welfare began.
>
> "Crime in the black community," he says, "increased about 800 percent between [around] 1963 and 1993. Racism didn't increase between 1960 and the modern era. You're looking at the impacts of the Great Society, the welfare programs."

In fact, as Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward showed in their radical history of the welfare state, *Regulating the Poor*, while the rise in urban Black crime and poverty in the postwar period was associated with family disintegration, the causality was entirely different from what Sowell and Stossel imply. The rise in fatherless households was ultimately an outgrowth of powerlessness and economic exploitation. The primary driver of family disintegration and unemployment was actually Black sharecroppers mass-migrating to northern cities after they were tractored off their land by white landowners. The large-scale migration overwhelmed job markets in northern cities; unlike the Okies of a previous generation who at

least found agricultural work in California, former sharecroppers in New York and Chicago were essentially unemployable. Family breakdown was an inevitable result of economically superfluous fathers.

You'd think even the likes of Sowell and Stossel would be able to grasp that all of this was possible only because the Black population of the rural South were dependent for their survival on sharecropping other people's land in the first place. That was a state of affairs resulting directly from the fact that slaveowners' plantations were not expropriated and given to former slaves as reparations. Instead, the planter aristocracy retained its property and survived as an economic ruling class in the postwar period, and the propertyless freed slaves were left with no means of survival but continuing to work the land of their former masters.

Based on the very limited attempts local experiments with land reform that actually took place after the Civil War, we can see that a full-blown nationwide redistribution of plantation land to freed slaves would have fundamentally altered the balance of economic power. This was the finding of a paper by Melinda Miller, an economist specializing in racial inequality:

> After joining the Confederacy in 1861, the Cherokee Nation was forced during post-war negotiations to allow its former slaves to claim and improve any unused land in the Nation's public domain … I find the racial gap in land ownership, farm size, and investment in long-term capital projects is smaller in the Cherokee Nation than in the southern United States. The advantages Cherokee freedmen experience in these areas translate into smaller racial wealth and income gaps in the Cherokee Nation than in the South. Additionally, the Cherokee freedmen had higher absolute levels of wealth and higher

> levels of income than southern freedmen. These results together suggest that access to free land had a considerable and positive benefit on former slaves.

The project of right-wing economists to minimize the role of slavery and racial injustice in present-day racial inequality, and to promote a counter-hypothesis of "those people brought it on themselves," has become a full-blown industry. This has become especially so thanks to reaction against the 1619 Project. But simply put, Black poverty today is largely the result, whether directly or indirectly, of the fact that the dominant economic classes of the South were not only allowed to keep all the gains from injustice even after Emancipation, but to maintain a social order based on disfranchisement, petty apartheid, and naked terror for a century afterward. Since the raison d'etre of right-libertarianism and its funders is to defend the economic ruling class and the economic system that supports it, the prevalence of the "culture of poverty" trope is understandable