

## House Resolution #1: State's Apology for the Harm Done by the State's Historical Involvement in Slavery

If I am able to give public testimony for House Resolution #001, you could tell that I am a white male. Consequently, I have experienced many of the advantages of being a white male in our society and can only imagine the consequences of being a black male. Since I am also a sociologist and teach courses on social inequality, I do have some understanding of racial differences in our society and possible causes of these differences. I would first like to share with you some of "objective" consequences of being white or black using data from the 2000 census. These comparisons are for Connecticut residents only and compare African-Americans to non-Hispanic whites.

EDUCATION (25+ yrs old)	African-American		Non-Hispanic Whites	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Less than HS Diploma	27%	25%	13%	13%
Post-BA Education	5%	5%	16%	13%
<b>UNEMPLOYED</b>				
in Civilian LF	12%	10%	4%	4%
<b>MEDIAN INCOME (16+ yrs)</b>				
Full-time workers	\$34,384	\$29,849	\$48,890	\$35,404
<b>BELOW POVERTY LINE</b>				
Total	19%		4%	
Under 5 years old	28%		4%	
<b>% Householder OWNING HOME</b>	37%		72%	
<b>MEDIAN HOME VALUE</b>	120,000		170,000	

These statistics are derived from the [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en) website, using the 2000 census SF-3 dataset for Connecticut residents.

These contrasts are well known, but worth repeating. Among those 25 or more years old, more than one-fourth of blacks have not graduated from high school, which is twice the rate for non-Hispanic whites. About 15% of non-Hispanic whites have education beyond the bachelors, which is three times the rate for blacks. Among those in the civilian labor force, black males have a 12% unemployment rate, which is three times the white male rate. (I am sure the rate contrasts today are much worse.) Among full-time workers, black males earn 70% of what white non-Hispanic males do. Blacks are four times as likely to be living below the poverty line as non-Hispanic whites. For the 2000 census, the poverty line for a family of four was just \$17,000 and 25% of black children below 5 years of age are living in poverty, which is seven times the non-Hispanic white rate.

Only 37% of the black headed households owned their residence, but nearly twice as many of the non-Hispanic white households owned their residence. Among homeowners, the median home value for blacks was \$120,000---\$50,000 less than the median home value of white headed households.

Data on wealth is not available for just Connecticut residents, but national data from 1998 shows whites have seven times as much wealth as blacks. Striking differences exist even for those with similar income levels. Among families in the \$35-50,000 income range, blacks have half of the net worth of whites: \$40,000 vs \$80,000 (from Dalton Conley, *Being Black, Living in the Red*).

I could go on, but the important question is "Why do we see these differences between blacks and whites in Connecticut?" Are these differences at all related to Connecticut's participation in slavery? I think the answer is an unequivocal "Yes!" for at least three reasons. First, owning slaves provides cheap labor that benefits the owners and these benefits are passed on to one's descendants. Among the New England states Connecticut had the most slaves. In fact, it is estimated that "[a]t the height of slavery in Connecticut, half of

all ministers, lawyers and public officials owned slaves” (<http://www.courant.com/hc-newintro.artsep29,0,3249073.story?page=1>). Second, Connecticut merchants made huge fortunes in the slave trade—from the direct capture and shipping of slaves to the plantations in the South and the Caribbean, to the textile mills using slave-produced cotton and the manufacture of cheap rum used in the slave trade. This immense wealth was a key source of investments that helped Connecticut develop its industrial base, which provides jobs to many of today’s residents (<http://www.slavenorth.com/profits.htm> ). See also Tom Dewolf’s *Inheriting the Trade* for more illustrations of benefits to the descendants of slave traders. Finally, slavery has left a cultural burden on both the exploited and exploiters that still permeates our society.

This last aspect shows up in many ways from simple prejudice and discrimination in interpersonal relationships, such as racial profiling by police officers, to the structural racism created by inferior schools in black communities (as recognized by the Sheff vs O’Neil lawsuit), red-lining of neighborhoods by real estate agents, excessive mortgage rates for blacks by financial institutions, more severe sentencing for blacks, and reduced rates of promotion in businesses. All of these processes are still at work today and make it harder for blacks to achieve their potential in our society. Despite the odds against success, some Blacks have achieved great success, e.g., being President of the U.S., but these successes cannot be used to argue that the past is no longer relevant. Such successes are due to complex mixtures of upbringing, family resources, and opportunities, but it is the average traits of Blacks that show the overall effects of structural racism.

Many people will argue that the lower average performance of Blacks reflects their own lack of effort, poor parenting, drug abuse, and/or welfare dependency. This view fits with the American ideology of individualism, but that is exactly what it is: an ideology that is used to justify advantages created by structural processes. Even if objective measurements might document that Blacks make less effort, are poorer parents, use drugs more, or are more welfare dependent than whites, my feeling is that most of this should be attributed to a long history of exploitation and structural racism. It seems plausible to me that initiative is inhibited among those who have grandparents hung for being “uppity” or, more recently, read about blacks dragged behind trucks to their death or shot by police without provocation. Being a good parent takes time and money, which is difficult if you must work two jobs to rise above the poverty line. Add in the difficulty of finding a stable job with decent pay and drug use and welfare dependency might look good to me in these conditions. I cannot say as I have never experienced them, but I do know that my bad and good parenting behaviors reflect those I got from my parents, so I know cultural patterns are hard to change. I can only read about what it is like to be black, such as the classic *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin or the more recent *Code of the Street* by Elijah Anderson. Both books make it clear that slavery still has a powerful legacy in the social institution of society and in our minds.

This resolution is just “feel good” legislation if it does not do more than just issue an apology for slavery. It must also stimulate more discussion about how to reduce the structural racism in our society and to recognize the powerful cultural legacy of slavery in the minds of whites and blacks. I hope this resolution will help further these difficult discussions.

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