

**Wyoming Tribune Eagle of September 8, 2016: "Discrimination not liberals' fault."  
Casper Star Trib, September 10: "Misjudgments have deep roots."**

On January 3, 2016, the Casper Star-Tribune published my commentary on Ta-Nehesi Coates, which the editor titled, "Anguish has not come to an end." (The column ran in the WTE on December 31, 2015.) One reader responded: "When I was in high school I read 'Manchild in the Promised Land' by Claude Brown. It made me aware of how narrow my Cheyenne, Wyoming, experiences were, how equally narrow my world view . . . The Coates memoir had the same impact 50 years later."

Comes now Laura Hollis, whose CST column of August 21 proposes that social issues are economic issues. No argument there. However, her subsequent claim bears correction. It states that Democratic policies that addressed poverty have failed African Americans. These policies, she writes, "decimated" black families, neighborhoods, and schools. I urge attention to Elizabeth Hinton's 2016 "From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime."

Ms. Hinton, like Ms. Hollis, critiques the welfare program that began with Lyndon Johnson. Today it puts recipients at below poverty, leaving recipients demoralized. But Ms. Hinton goes further: she shows that the rise of mass incarceration, which keeps former inmates unable to earn a living, began with that same Johnson concept of the Great Society.

Regrettably, the Johnson initiatives were rooted in widely-shared assumptions about African Americans' role in urban disorder. At inception of the War on Poverty, Congress enacted the 1965 Law Enforcement Assistance Act, which empowered the federal government to help militarize local police. Federal anti-crime funding prompted social-service providers to collaborate with police departments, courts, and prisons.

Ms. Hinton examines the genesis of our biased criminal justice system. Today, one in eleven African American men is under some form of penal control.

With the flow of federal money, abuses became rampant. Young black males were targeted as future criminals. Agents began posing as drug dealers, entrapping young blacks. When President Nixon entered the White House, he ordered huge expansions of the prison system. Anticipating future crime, policymakers prevailed on states to build prisons as well. Law enforcement measures were introduced into urban schools and public housing, turning neighborhoods into targets of police surveillance. It didn't take long to fill the prisons with young males of color. Under Richard Nixon and his successors, funding for welfare programs was curtailed; policing and punishment was funded instead. Ms. Hinton locates the baselines for our mass incarceration strategies in these national disgraces: slavery, poverty and, most glaringly, "a sustained inequality of power distribution."

The reason for fatherless families—what Ms. Hollis describes as lack of "intact family structure and the ability of black children to succeed academically and economically"—has to do, not with her claim of "the decline in cultural mores" or the "entertainment industry and academia"; it's to do with the world's largest prison system in the "land of the free."

The 1996 “When Work Disappears,” authored by John Kassarda, explains how low-skill jobs in the city disappeared; in their stead arose high-tech and office-service employment for which inner-city blacks lacked the education (and, hence, incentive to compete). Mitchell Duneier’s 2016 “Ghetto” quotes, among other things, research that focuses on “spatial mismatch.” Housing discrimination, supported by state and national policies and real-estate sellers, made it impossible for poor blacks to leave inner-city neighborhoods. The author describes the resulting spatial mismatch as posing “even more challenges for women than for men.” Single mothers with child-care responsibilities must avoid long commutes and work-shifts that require traversing unsafe neighborhoods.

Michelle Alexander’s 2013 “The New Jim Crow” demonstrates the current system of social control via the War on Drugs. Legal racial segregation has been replaced by mass incarceration. “More African Americans are under correctional control today . . . than were enslaved in 1850.” Worse, former inmates are “discriminated against, legally, for the rest of their lives, denied employment, housing, education, and public benefits.” Despite the election of Barack Obama, a racial caste system continues to lock up African Americans, particularly young males. This drug “war” is primarily about lack of constraints on law enforcement.

The astrophysicist Neil Tyson was accosted by police for stargazing from his rooftop. The scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., was arrested for entering his own home. In each instance, a white neighbor called police to report “suspicious” activities. Would a white man opening his door or mounting a telescope on his rooftop become a thievery suspect? The default thinking of too many whites, that the black male is up to no good, perpetuates New Jim Crow.

Instead of mocking academics, Ms. Hollis would do well to consider the research cited in these books; it’ll make her think twice about blaming “liberals” for conditions that have been fostered by American misjudgments, Republican and Democrat alike. It wouldn’t hurt to acquaint herself with the Coates memoir as well, which is New Jim Crow experienced by “The Other.”