

WALL STREET JOURNAL EDITORIAL  
BOARD MEMBER JASON L. RILEY'S

# PLEASE STOP HELPING US

How Liberals Make It Harder for Blacks to Succeed



**“A FEW DOSES OF THE TRUTH CAN WORK WONDERS.”**

THOMAS SOWELL

**AS WE APPROACH** the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, *Wall Street Journal* editorial board member Jason L. Riley surveys half a century of liberal efforts to lift the black underclass—and reveals how well-intentioned social welfare programs are in fact holding black Americans back.

From affirmative action and policies that limit school choice to minimum wage laws and welfare programs, Riley exposes how serial liberal altruism has only created new barriers to black success.

Why would anyone study hard in school if they are held to lower standards? Why change antisocial behaviors when they are accommodated by law and even celebrated in popular culture? *Please Stop Helping Us* examines how bad public policy has undermined the work ethic, interfered with black self-development, and kept poor blacks poor.

Most worrying of all, *Please Stop Helping Us* reveals how, long after the civil rights battles were fought and won, liberalism remains much

more committed to making excuses for black underachievement than in reevaluating efforts to help.

**CONSIDER:**

Minimum-wage laws may lift earnings for people who are already employed, but they price a disproportionate number of blacks out of the labor force.

Many believe that the use of criminal background checks to screen workers is hurtful to blacks. However, empirical studies show that employers who check criminal backgrounds are more likely to hire blacks, and black men in particular.

Soft-on-crime laws actually make black neighborhoods far more dangerous.

Racial preferences in higher education have resulted in fewer black college graduates, particularly in the fields of math and science. Black graduation rates actually increased after California terminated racial preferences in college admissions.

In elementary education, many liberals are against school voucher programs and charter schools, but study after study has shown that school choice is correlated with higher test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance among blacks.

Each of these efforts was intended to help the poor—and poor minorities in particular. But in practice they've become intractable barriers to moving forward. *Please Stop Helping Us* will open doors to spirited debate and much-needed review of progress in the black community.

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 **69%**

Black boys without a father are **69%** more likely to be incarcerated than those with a father.

From 1890 to 1940, the black marriage rate **EXCEEDED** the white rate.

Today, only **16%** of black households are married couples with children.

**10,000** minority males are alive today who would have been killed had NYC's homicide rate remained at its early 90s levels.

In states facing minimum wage increases from 2007–2010, more young blacks **LOST THEIR JOBS** due to the minimum wage mandates than from the recession.

Among 16-to 24-year-old black men not enrolled in school, **LESS THAN HALF** have jobs.

... and **ONE THIRD** are in prison or jail, or on probation or parole.

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 **50%**

Between 2007–2010, employment losses for blacks aged 16–24 would have been **50%** less without minimum wage increases.

**6 IN 10** black high school dropouts will spend time behind bars.

**11** empirical studies have examined academic outcomes for school choice find that choice improves student outcomes. No empirical study has found a negative impact.

**7** empirical studies find that school choice moves students from more segregated schools into less segregated schools. No empirical study has found that choice increases racial segregation.

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 **56%**

In 2009, D.C. voucher recipients had graduation rates of 91 percent, versus **56 PERCENT** for D.C. public schools.

A 1993 study found that of blacks and whites with the same twelfth grade test scores, blacks are **MORE LIKELY** than whites to complete college.

After California abolished affirmative action, the number of blacks earning degrees in UC schools rose **10%**.

...and the number of black and Hispanic freshmen who went on to graduate rose **55%**.

As far back as the early 1980s, black couples who were both college educated **EARNED MORE** than their white peers.

*To schedule an interview with Jason L. Riley contact Lauren Miklos at 212.871.6310 or [lmiklos@encounterbooks.com](mailto:lmiklos@encounterbooks.com).*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# JASON L. RILEY



**JASON RILEY** is an editorial board member at the *Wall Street Journal*, where he has worked since 1994 writing opinion pieces on politics, economics, education and race, among other subjects. He's also a commentator for Fox News, where he has appeared for more than a decade and been an official contributor since 2012. In 2008 he published *Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders*, which argues for a more free-market oriented U.S. immigration policy. He is based in New York.

PRAISE FOR

## LET THEM IN: THE CASE FOR OPEN BORDERS

**“A clear-headed and painstaking demolition of the major myths used to scare the population into believing immigrants are working powerfully against their interests.”**

EZRA KLEIN

**“*Let Them In* is as exhaustively researched as it is eminently readable.”**

REASON MAGAZINE

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**PRAISE FOR**  
**PLEASE STOP HELPING US: HOW LIBERALS  
MAKE IT HARDER FOR BLACKS TO SUCCEED**

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**“A much-needed fundamental education on the facts about race in America... I cannot think of any book that has said so much in so few pages since Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom* back in 1962.”**

THOMAS SOWELL

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**“This thoughtful, lucid and often restrained account of the wreckage produced by racial politics marks Jason Riley as one of the nation’s rising political writers.”**

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

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**“Boom! A combative, conservative shot to the jaw of liberal dogma about black America. Riley is brash in calling out the phony leaders, the false prophets.”**

JUAN WILLIAMS

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JASON L. RILEY

# AUTHOR Q&A

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## **What's wrong with liberals working to correct the historical wrongs done to African Americans?**

**RILEY:** Good intentions alone don't solve problems. The question is whether the proposed solutions are helping or hurting the intended beneficiaries. And the evidence shows that, to the extent that a government program retards the self-development that proved necessary for other groups in America to climb the socioeconomic ladder, it does more harm than good.

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## **What government interventions on behalf of blacks have been good and necessary? And where did we cross the line from helping to hurting?**

**RILEY:** The civil rights gains of the 1960s—specifically the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—were tremendously helpful to blacks because they leveled the playing field and made racial discrimination illegal. We got into trouble when the left started demanding equal outcomes, which is different from equal opportunity.

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## **Isn't the rise of black political leadership, not the least of which is the election of the first black president for two terms, a sign of progress?**

**RILEY:** It's a sign that anti-black attitudes in America are not what they used to be. In 2008, Obama did better among white voters in places like Georgia, the Carolinas and Texas than John Kerry had in 2004 or Al Gore had in 2000. That is progress. But it also shows that black political gains are not the panacea that the black left has claimed they would be. When you look at income, unemployment, poverty, incarceration rates and other metrics, wide black-white disparities persist notwithstanding the ever-growing number of black elected officials. The reality is that a black man in the home is much more important to black progress than a black man in the White House.

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## **What do you think civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. would think of the racial policies instituted in the last fifty years?**

**RILEY:** One big difference between King and his successors is that King took rampant racism as a given and believed blacks must succeed notwithstanding white attitudes of black inferiority. Today's civil rights leaders use racism as an all-purpose excuse for black pathology. As long as someone, somewhere, is still using the N-word or waving a confederate flag, the Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson-types claim blacks can't be held responsible for their behavior. That wasn't King's attitude.

**Is there a disconnect between black leadership and the black underclass?**

**RILEY:** There is a huge disconnect between black elites and the people they claim to represent. The NAACP supports minimum wage laws, which fuel black unemployment among younger and less-experienced job-seekers. It blocks Walmart from opening stores in depressed neighborhoods that need the jobs. It opposes school vouchers that would give poor families access to better schools. The list is long.

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**Sen. Rand Paul says the Republican position on Voter ID laws is offensive to minorities and damages the right's standing with blacks. Do you agree?**

**RILEY:** Does Rand Paul think it's offensive that blacks need to present ID to get a library card, or board a plane, or purchase cold medicine at the drug store. I'm all for Republican minority outreach, but the GOP won't win over blacks by infantilizing them in the same ways that liberals do.

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**What about disproportionate sentencing for crack cocaine vs. powder cocaine possession—isn't the Fair Sentencing Act a good thing?**

**RILEY:** If you want to eliminate the disparity, why not make the punishment for powder cocaine offenses harsher?

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**Democrats and the Teacher's Unions are typically opposed to charter schools—which blacks support 4 to 1. Is this an area where conservatives can win over blacks?**

**RILEY:** It's one area, sure. But I'll know Republicans are serious about courting black voters when they start showing up in black neighborhoods and introducing themselves. A speech at an NAACP convention is not serious black outreach.

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**Of the bad policies outlined in *Please Stop Helping Us*, which has been the most damaging to blacks?**

**RILEY:** It's a tie between minimum wage laws that price blacks out of the labor force and education policies that keep poor kids trapped in failing schools.

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**You cite Frederick Douglass who, when asked what should be done to help freed blacks responded, "do nothing with us!" Is doing nothing really the best policy going forward?**

**RILEY:** Douglass understood the limits of government benevolence. At the end of the day, blacks must help themselves by developing the attitudes, behaviors and skills conducive to thriving in a free-market capitalist society. Given the poor track-record of government efforts to help blacks over the past half-century, it's hard to see how we'd be any worse off with a "do nothing" approach.

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A HISTORY OF

# HELPING — OR HURTING?



**IT HAS BEEN NEARLY A HALF-CENTURY** since President Lyndon Johnson's 1965 commencement address at Howard University, the historically black college in Washington, D.C. He had signed the Civil Rights Act a year earlier and would sign the Voting Rights Act just two months later.

But Johnson's speech wasn't a victory lap, as some anticipated. Instead, it was about what government should do next on behalf of blacks. This was merely the "end of the beginning," he said, quoting Winston Churchill.

"That beginning is freedom; and the barriers to that freedom are tumbling down. Freedom is the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society—to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school," said Johnson. "But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: 'Now you are free to go where you want and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please.'"

Johnson said that the "next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights" was "not just freedom but opportunity" and "not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result."

At the time, the country was more focused on the war in Vietnam, but Johnson had launched another war at home. His Great Society programs marked the start of a war on poverty and racial inequality that initiated numbers-based racial remedies and would lead to the redistribution of tens of billions of dollars to the lower income classes.

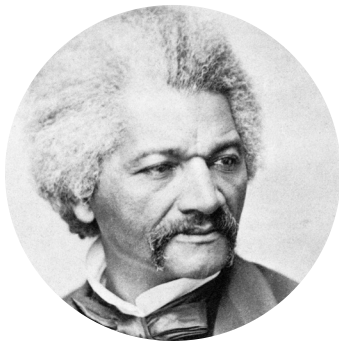
But what if Johnson was mistaken? What if there are limits to what government can do

beyond removing barriers to freedom? What if public policy makers are only creating new barriers to progress in their search for “equality”? What if efforts to boost black socio-economic advancement have slowed the self-development that proved necessary for other minorities to succeed?

When does helping start hurting?

In April 1865, one hundred years before Johnson addressed Howard University, the abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke at a Boston gathering of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society on a similar theme. “Everybody has asked the question, and they learned to ask it early of the abolitionists, ‘What should we do with the Negro?’” said Douglass.

“I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, if they are worm-eaten at the core, if they are early ripe and disposed to fall, let them fall.



FREDERICK DOUGLASS



BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

... And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs!”

Douglass was stressing the primacy of group self-development, a not uncommon sentiment among black elites in the decades following the Civil War. Booker T. Washington, who like Douglass was born a slave, said that “It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercise of these privileges.”

Douglass and Washington didn’t downplay the need for the government to secure equal rights for blacks, and both were optimistic that it would happen eventually. But both men also understood the limits of government benevolence. Blacks would have to ready themselves to meet the far bigger challenge of being in a position to take advantage of opportunities once equal rights had been secured.

The history of 1960s liberal social policies is a history of ignoring this wisdom.