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Make Them Work -- Citizens as "The Help"

Conservatives seem to think of America's citizens as "the help."

"Everyone knows Americans are lazy, shiftless, always looking for a way to shirk their responsibilities. People don't want to work so we have to *make* them work. And good dose of humiliation is good for the soul. If you let them have any dignity they might get uppity." That is what conservatives sound like when they talk about the long-term unemployed -- who, by the way, are out of work because of conservative policies.

For example, from Tuesday's *Washington Post*, No extension of unemployment benefits in sight for the long-term jobless,

"Workers are less likely to look for work, or accept less-than-ideal jobs, as long as they are protected from the full consequences of being unemployed," said Michael D. Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. "That is not to say that anyone is getting rich off unemployment, or that unemployed people are lazy. But it is simple human nature that people are a little less motivated as long as a check is coming in."

That's right, you have to *make* them work, or they'll just sit around and wont be "productive." They wont face up to the "consequences" of unemployment. These parasites will just suck the blood out of the producers. You hear language like this all the time from conservatives. The unemployed are "lazy," or "on drugs" etc. They are not "productive." They are mooching off the rest of us.

This is all in sharp contrast to the noble rich, who are an entirely different species biologically and spiritually. They are the "wealth producers" who we must treat with kid gloves and certainly not ask them to pay for their use of infrastructure or government

services lest they decide to stop working. They just want to keep working, and what they do is so important, so pure, so necessary to the sustenance of the rest of us that they must be coddled at all times lest we lose their golden-egg magic touch!

Maybe this kind of attitude towards their fellow citizens comes from the slaveholder roots of conservatism. According to Robin L. Einhorn, author of *American Taxation, American Slavery*,

...Americans are right to think that our antitax and antigovernment attitudes have deep historical roots. Our mistake is to dig for them in Boston. We should be digging in Virginia and South Carolina rather than in Massachusetts or Pennsylvania, because the origins of **these attitudes have more to do with the history of American slavery than the history of American freedom.** They have more to do with protections for entrenched wealth than with promises of opportunity, and more to do with the demands of privileged elites than with the strivings of the common man. Instead of reflecting a heritage that valued liberty over all other concerns, they are part of the poisonous legacy we have inherited from the slaveholders who forged much of our political tradition. [emphasis added]

As for this idea of low taxes, smaller government that we hear about so often, (and please read this, it is so important)

It might seem strange to trace our antitax and antigovernment ideas to slavery instead of to liberty and democracy. Isn't it obvious that a democratic society where "the people" make the basic political decisions will choose lower taxes and smaller governments? The short answer is no. In this democratic society, the people might decide to pool their resources to buy good roads, excellent schools, convenient courthouses, and an effective military establishment. But slaveholders had different priorities than other people--and special reasons to be afraid of taxes. Slaveholders had little need for transportation improvements (since their land was often already on good transportation links such as rivers) and hardly any interest in an educated workforce (it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write because slaveholders thought education would help African Americans seize their freedom). Slaveholders wanted the military, not least to promote the westward expansion of slavery, and they also wanted local police forces ("slave patrols") to protect them against rebellious slaves. They wanted all manner of government action to protect slavery, while they tended to dismiss everything else as wasteful government spending.

Compromises with the slave states became entrenched in our political system with consequences to this day,

Majorities voluntarily renounced the right to regulate their society by majority rule. Giving up the essence of democratic self-government, they celebrated the outcome as democracy. The consequences would outlive the slaveholders who played such a large role in establishing this attitude toward government and taxation. Long after slavery was gone, a regime forged around preferential treatment for the slaveholding elite came to favor very different elites--commercial and industrial elites who shared little with their slaveholding

predecessors except a demand that majorities renounce their right to govern what ostensibly was a democratic society.

. . . Today, this brand of politics looks eerily familiar. We have experience with political parties that attack "elites" in order to rally voters behind policies that benefit elites. This is what the slaveholders did in early American history, and they did it very well. Expansions of slavery became expansions of "liberty," constitutional limitations on democratic self-government became defenses of "equal rights," and the power of slaveholding elites became the power of the "common man." In the topsy-turvy political world we have inherited from the age of slavery, the power of the majority to decide how to tax became the power of an alien "government" to oppress "the people."

Please go read it all.

It is time to take a fresh look at what it means to be a citizen in a country where We, the People are supposed to be in charge. This idea that we should force people into demeaning jobs with no minimum wage and make them work seems antithetical to democracy. A government of We, the People should be about taking care of each other, protecting and empowering each other and respecting each other. *You* are supposed to be the boss of you here. And *we* are supposed to be in charge.

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This post originally appeared at Campaign for America's Future (CAF) at their Blog for OurFuture. I am a Fellow with CAF.

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