



BlackEconomics.org®

“Gaslighting: The Depth of Deceit Concerning ‘Welfare Queens and Kings’”

The all-seeing and all-knowing gods of today’s world will tell you that an important term in the global discourse concerning reasons for global conditions is “gaslighting.” Those who have suffered, and are suffering, gaslighting’s adverse effects exclaim to those attempting to operationalize the term against them: “Stop gaslighting us!” “Gaslighting” derives from playwright Patrick Hamilton’s 1938 work, “Gas Lighting,” and a related cinematic adaptation of his play. The imposition of the pernicious subtleties of gaslighting is an unusually cruel form of deserved or undeserved punishment. But at least for the case to be discussed below, Black America can say: What was meant for evil, has been transformed for our good. As Maulana Ron Karenga said nearly 50 years ago about then Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover’s efforts to impose his personal paranoia on him, he said that he was strengthened by Hoover’s evil and was motivated to employ the literary arts to render Hoover’s evil words as ashes in his mouth. We turn now to how a similar outcome is materializing today.

We begin by acknowledging that knowers of even small shreds of US History must confess that it is fraught with lies and deceptions that were designed to destroy the lives of Black American males in particular and, thereby, the entire Black American socioeconomic system.

Although we could not claim WOKENESS in 1980 when soon to become Pres. Ronald Reagan employed a pernicious and subtle idea as dog whistle rhetoric to recast the Black American reality and convince White and Black Americans alike that he would be justified in cutting “wasteful” US Government social benefit (“Welfare,” which is constrained here to mean “Income Security”) spending because it was producing “Welfare Queens and Kings.”

We do not know whether Pres. Reagan harbored this view about his “fellow Americans” in his heart of hearts. What matters is that he projected a new and adverse sentiment about Black women, men, and children that remains real for many White and Black Americans today.

Relatedly, we undertook self-enquiry recently concerning the meaningfulness and veracity of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s (MLK’s) famous saying about inevitable justice, which he gathered from a 19th century preacher and abolitionist, Theodore Parker. You know it as: “The moral ark of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” In our contemplation, we juxtaposed the following questions: “Are there adverse implications for the righteous who exact justice?” against “Was MLK just spewing another White Supremacist Christian mis-directive to keep Black Americans passive and awaiting some phantom force of justice that might arrive—if ever—so tardy as to be irrelevant?”

Last week, we suddenly realized that powerful and indisputable evidence concerning our questions had arrived on January 20, 2025, in the form of Pres. Donald Trump and his righthand man billionaire Elon Musk. Their decision to place Federal agency after agency on the trimming block produced a crystal-clear response to our questions concerning Pres. Reagan's gaslighting. Recognized or not, on that day a powerful ray of truth illuminated the hearts and minds of every Black man and woman in America. Having been called "everything but a . . .," and specifically "Welfare Queens and Kings," our hearts and minds should have jumped for joy when White "Welfare Queens and Kings" were sent packing from the Federal Government trough in the name of economic efficiency.

Why do we label certain unemployed Federal workers "Welfare Queens and Kings"? Given our studies near the end of the last century, it is transparent that certain types of employment in the Federal Government is "gamed."ⁱ Specifically, it may be politically incorrect to speak it, but it is well known within government circles that there are cases where particular ethnic, religious, or other social group make every effort to capture and "colonize" Federal agencies. Then those groups "innovate" (create out of thin air) opportunities to perform "work" that is not always fully beneficial, if at all, for the average voters-taxpayers-citizens. If there is an intent to create a new job (position), if the duties of that job can be "justified" logically and made to appear legitimate, and if a well-crafted paper trail can be developed and maintained, then proposed budget increases for the new position can find approval at the highest levels.

But it goes beyond that. While some Americans focus on the Federal Government as a provider of mainly administrative and regulatory services, they may forget that a reality of the political economy is that politicians use their spending power to enable job creation to help reduce unemployment, produce favorable public opinion, and preserve their seats in the nation's capital.

But it is even worse than that. On the one hand, congressional representatives in Washington, DC hasten to proclaim the benefits they garner for their constituents citing their ability to "punch well above their weight" (their predetermined share of Federal funds as required by law) in drawing additional Federal dollars into their states and districts. What these representatives often fail to remind voters-taxpayers-citizens is that some of the funds secured from the Federal Government serve as compensation for certain workers who produce little that is of benefit.

Consideration of *Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2025* reveals that the value of Federal "Grants" (outlays of funds with no repayment obligations—"free money") to state and local governments in 2023 was \$1.1 trillion (the latest available "actual" estimated annual value).ⁱⁱ As you know, Federal Grants are for numerous purposes: Educational, Health, Cultural, Artistic, Environmental, Community and Regional Developmental, etc. Importantly, for the same reasons that economists contend that governmental (bureaucratic) operations are often economically inefficient when compared with comparable operations in competitive markets and classify the former as "nonmarket" operations, it is logical to conclude that the goods and services produced using grant funds are likely to be produced in an economically inefficient manner.

Pres. Reagan's entire "Welfare Queen and King" argument pivoted on an economic inefficiency argument, which he contended could be resolved by cutting support for wasteful social benefit (Welfare (Income Security)) programs. What we know today is that one cannot have it both ways.

If Welfare spending was economically inefficient and produced “Welfare Queens and Kings,” then certain Federal Grant funded jobs that are economically inefficient and force us to label recipients of grant-funded compensation as “Welfare or Grant Queens and Kings.”

The 45 years since Pres. Reagan’s dog whistling rhetoric and gaslighting of Black Americans in 1980 have been transformative in many ways. Statistically, real (inflation adjusted) per capita Federal Government spending for social benefits that are characterized as Welfare or Income Security programs (in the form of housing and food and nutrition assistance) versus Grant spending that does not include Income Security Grants has changed from \$222 and \$822 per capita in 1980 to \$591 and \$2, 256 per capita in 2023, respectively.ⁱⁱⁱ

We can all consider Jesse Jackson’s wise admonition offered decades back to spend more resources on the nation’s “least of these” on the front side of their lives and avoid even higher levels of spending on the back side of their lives. Obviously, the nation has ignored Jackson’s wise counsel. Instead, the nation’s leaders told the world that Black American social benefit recipients were not deserving of assistance, while at the same time providing some of the nation’s most privileged persons a very easy path in life as they moved freely from one Federally funded grant program to another at the expense of rising taxes for voters-taxpayers-citizens.

To be honest, fair, and just, a decision to label social benefit recipients as “Welfare Queens and Kings” must be matched by labeling grant recipients as “Grant Kings and Queens.” There is no doubt that Black Americans’ presence among the former is much smaller, which is associated with very low levels of per capita spending (as discussed above), than our presence among the latter which is associated with much higher (2.8 times higher in 2023) levels of per capita spending.

Many truths are coming to light these days, and they have forced us to return to our self-enquiry and reconsider MLK’s wisdom. After about 45 years, the moral arc of the universe cast a bright light on the duplicity and deceit of the nation. Is this justice? We invite you to answer that question. However, in reconsidering MLK’s saying, we recognize that it does not claim that the moral arc of the universe will produce justice, just that it will bend toward justice. From our perspective, when the moral arc bends and shines its light, then the knowledge revealed by that light should be sufficient for Black Americans to clearly see the deceit and injustice perpetrated against us. It should certainly cause us to exclaim: “Stop gaslighting us!” But it should also motivate us to become earnest and urgent about seeing our opposers for who they really are and recognizing the essentiality of working to become increasingly self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-determined, and liberated. The simple reality is that we have every reason and right to exclude our opposers from environments that we own and control; a place and condition where opportunities to “gaslight” us can be prevented altogether.

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ⁱ Brooks Robinson (1998). *Bureaucratic Inefficiency: Failure to Capture the Efficiencies of Outsourcing*. A doctoral dissertation prepared at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA. UMI Dissertation Service. This work

provides a well-rounded analysis of economic efficiencies that are thought to be inherent in bureaus and provides an extensive list of scholarly references on the topic that were available when the dissertation was prepared.

ⁱⁱ Office of Management and Budget (2025). *Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2025*. Historical Tables: 3.2 Outlays by Function and Subfunction; and 12.2 Total Outlays for Grants to State and Local Governments by Function and Fund Group. <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/budget/2025/BUDGET-2025-TAB> (Ret. 040925).

ⁱⁱⁱ The estimates of real (inflation adjusted) per capita Federal Government spending for selected social benefits and on grants were prepared for 1980 and 2023 by deflating annual estimates from the tables cited in Endnote ii, and then dividing the resultant real estimates using annual estimates of the US population to produce per capita estimates. The deflators and population estimates were from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis's (BEA's) National Income and Product Account (NIPA) Interactive Tables (<https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/?reqid=19&step=2&isuri=1&categories=survey>) Specifically, the deflator was the Personal Consumption Deflator from NIPA Table 2.3.4; and the population estimates were taken from NIPA Table 2.1.