

Chapter 11: Inheritance

- I. The chapter begins with the tragic story of Elmore Bolling, an enterprising Black man in Jim Crow Alabama who was murdered, apparently for beginning to sell gasoline.
 - A. Elmore Bolling broke an unwritten rule in the South and elsewhere that he was too successful to be Black.
- II. Reconstruction
 - A. The Freedman's Bureau established a savings bank to launch formerly enslaved people and families began to gather personal wealth
 - B. During the Civil War large tracts of farmland were seized by Union Armies.
 1. Thaddeus Stevens thought that seized land should have been given to the formerly enslaved
 2. President Johnson reversed any land redistribution
 3. About 40K Black families settled on Sherman-liberated farmland in the south. Most of these were evicted by federal troops. Two thousand Black landowners held on to the land they'd been given after the war. But the majority stayed on land they no longer owned and worked as sharecroppers.
 4. The savings bank started by the Freedman's bureau had about 3 million dollars of savings by formerly enslaved people. But the assets were squandered by White bank officers and the bank failed in 1872.
 - C. The Compromise of 1877 was another betrayal of Blacks to get a Republican in the White House and federal troops out of the South, allowing it to freely embrace Jim Crow.
- III. Jim Crow
 - A. The Redemption period appears to be the effort in the south to reestablish White rule and launch a war of terror and suppression over the formerly enslaved.
 1. Behaviors that drew violence from Whites were consensual sex or marriage between White and Black people, demands for fair wages, political progress and voting, and insufficient social deference towards Whites
 2. But Black people's financial success often seemed to provoke the harshest response, especially from white people who felt threatened by a real or perceived rise in African American prosperity.
 3. Black families have long been forced to struggle mightily to make a living. Educating their children was difficult.
 - B. Massacres
 1. 1898, Wilmington, North Carolina, White supremacists attacked the successful multiracial Fusion political party killing dozens of Blacks and forcing hundreds to leave
 2. 1921, Tulsa OK White mob attacked successful 300 Blacks killed, thousands homeless, 35 blocks burned.
 3. Peonage murders in Georgia. Enslaved Blacks were murdered by their creditor. Gov. Dorsey decried the extent of peonage throughout Georgia. (p. 299)
 4. Dorsey's story of prosperous Black farmer whose neighbor reported for trespassing. The Black family was terrorized, jailed, and run out of town.
 - C. Today's racial wealth gap

1. The legacy of economic oppression of American blacks has left today's Blacks at a great disadvantage where they receive inherited wealth half as often as Whites and then only 1/3 the amount.
 2. Receiving an inheritance boosts the median wealth of white families by \$104,000, but for Black families it's just \$4,000.
- D. Elmore Boling's family: the balance of this chapter charts the downward mobility of both Elmore's children and grandchildren
1. After Elmore's death, creditors etc. stripped the family of its wealth and his descendants went from prosperity to poverty.
 - a. This kind of plunder is often aided by laws or the community's unwillingness to enforce them.

Summary: This readable and emotional chapter is structured around the story of Elmore Boling and his descendants. Elmore and Bertha Mae were enterprising Blacks in 1940's Jim Crow Alabama. Elmore put together a sprawling little business empire and became quite prosperous for a southern black man. His children were slated to inherit the business when Boling was murdered for apparently become too prosperous. The chapter cites three clusters of injustice that accounts for the racial wealth gap in America that has left Blacks with only a small fraction of the net worth that their White counterparts enjoy. The first was the lost promise of Reconstruction. Blacks were never compensated with land and the savings bank established by the Freedman's bureau failed under the leadership of White bank officers. Finally, Reconstruction ended abruptly with the Compromise of 1877, which withdrew federal troops from the South. During Jim Crow, Blacks lived under the constant terror of attracting white violence for any interracial romance, political progress, "uppityness", and surprisingly, for being financial successful. Race-driven massacres during the Jim Crow underscored the depth of White resentment over Black success. In Tulsa and North Carolina whole Black communities were attacked for simply being modestly successful. The chapter ends dramatically by tracing the life paths of Elmore and Birth Mae's children and grandchildren. Elmore's murder clearly halted any upward mobility his descendents may have had. Instead, his children lived lives of grinding work, lack of education, and often marital failure.