

The Unveiling
Our Little known History



Watch:

**Land: Giving Rise to
the Famous Phrase
40 Acres & a Mule**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZleilgHI7A&t=16s>

40 Acres and a Mule:

If you're like us, you learned in U.S. History that when the Civil War ended, freed slaves were given 40 Acres and a Mule to start their new lives. For the most part, sadly, this story is untrue.

There was, in fact, a promise to provide some form of reparation to newly freed slaves--who numbered about 3.9 million. In early 1865, United States officials put the question to a group of Black leaders: What did the Freedman need most? Their answer was resounding: LAND.

They were told they would get it. The U.S. had confiscated huge amounts of private property from Confederate landholders at the end of the war. The plan was to redistribute it to former Black slaves. By June, 1865, "40,000 freedmen (about 1% of freed slaves) had been settled on 400,000 acres of 'Sherman Land.'"

For most of us, the history lesson stops there.

But that's not the complete story. With Abraham Lincoln's assassination that spring, Andrew Johnson became president. Johnson was sympathetic with southerners and soon began to reverse the land reparations. By early 1866, less than a year later, the land had been returned to its former white owners, the freed slaves evicted.

Imagine how profoundly different the history of race relations in the United States would have been had this policy of 40 Acres and a Mule been implemented and enforced; had ALL the former slaves actually had access to ownership of land; if they had had a chance to be self-sufficient economically, to build, accrue, and pass on *wealth*.

Teaching the incomplete story of 40 Acres and a Mule has had the effect of convincing generations of Americans that freed slaves were repaid in some sense and given a chance at autonomy rather than the truth: they were “set free” to hunger and homelessness.