

1-1-1996

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Recommended Citation

Santa Clara Law Review, Other, *Books Received*, 36 SANTA CLARA L. REV. 677 (1996).

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/lawreview/vol36/iss2/19>

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BOOKS RECEIVED

The End of Racism. By Dinesh D'Souza. New York, NY: The Free Press. 1995. Pp. 724. Hardcover. \$30.00.

In *The End of Racism*, Dinesh D'Souza examines the origin and nature of racism in the United States, as well as the state of the current debate over race and racism. Like so many books by conservative authors, *The End of Racism* has been attacked by liberal commentators who have either obviously not read the book, or have chosen to shamelessly misrepresent its claims. What D'Souza has done — what infuriates the multiculturalists, feminists, critical race theorists and other cultural relativists — is speak honestly about race and the current racial debate.

Although it should not matter, a word on D'Souza himself is in order. He is Catholic, born in Bombay, India in 1961. He attended high school in Arizona, and college at Dartmouth. He became a United States citizen in 1991, and is married to a white Protestant woman. Why does it matter? Because without mentioning it, there would be some doubt about the validity of D'Souza's "perspective." Yes, he is a "person of color." He feels particularly well qualified, by virtue of his race and background, to address the issues of race and multiculturalism in the United States.

The first few chapters of *The End of Racism* detail the origins of American racism, moving from the birth of European racism, to American slavery, to the civil rights movement and its aftermath. D'Souza is no historian, and he strives merely to point out that racism as we know it has not always existed. According to D'Souza, ancient civilizations were ethnocentric rather than racist. The distinction is a fine one, but it is significant to D'Souza. Virtually all ancient civilizations were convinced of their cultural superiority, but they drew distinctions between civilization and barbarism based on culture and custom rather than on race. As European explorers ventured out between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, they encountered African, Asian and Ameri-

can cultures that were hundreds if not thousands of years behind European civilization. Racism evolved out of the European attempt to explain cultural superiority, which over time came to be equated with racial superiority. D'Souza points to the beginning of racism in an attempt to counter those who believe that racism has always, and will always exist. To D'Souza, the fact that racism has a definite historical origin provides hope that racism may someday come to an end.

From the origins of racism, D'Souza moves to the institution of slavery. After observing that slavery existed in virtually every continent and culture, he accepts the Marxist view that slavery flourished in this country for economic reasons. Because slavery was so obviously at odds with the Founding Fathers' principles of liberty and equality, belief in the inferiority of blacks served as a rationalization for oppression. D'Souza does not suggest that racism or slavery were correct, moral, or excusable. He does claim, however, that racism reveals the moral conscience of the Founders; that without a belief in equality, racism would serve no ideological purpose.

Finally, D'Souza discusses the antislavery movement, the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the ultimate victory of the civil rights movement. He argues that while King correctly championed colorblindness as an appropriate American racial ideal, he failed to vigorously advocate the self-reliance, black solidarity, and economic development preached by Booker T. Washington.

The first part of *The End of Racism* is an unremarkable history of racism in America. D'Souza's history is carefully crafted to support his conclusions, and many of his examples are more provocative than relevant. What could be the possible relevance, for example, of his claim that a small number of American blacks kept slaves of their own? In fairness to D'Souza, the book is not intended as a detailed history of racism and slavery in America and the west. Rather, it is included as a prelude to his more important discussion of the current racial debate. In addition, it serves as an honest antidote to the more outrageous claims of today's multiculturalists who have claimed, among other things, that racism is eternal and unconquerable; that slavery was only practiced in Western countries; that African culture was more advanced than Western culture; that significant scientific and

technological achievements were stolen from Africa and appropriated by Western cultures; and that historical figures such as Jesus Christ and Beethoven were in fact black.

The second part of the book is a survey of the state of race relations in the United States, and a critique of our current racial debate. *The End of Racism* is most effective in its scathing indictment of white liberals and black activists, dubbed "The Race Merchants," who have betrayed Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream in the three decades since his death. The Race Merchants have succeeded, writes D'Souza, in supplanting the original civil rights goal of colorblindness with an agenda of black separatism and entitlement.

It began in the mid to late 1960's when Malcolm X replaced King as the voice of younger blacks. According to Malcolm X's view of black nationalism, integration was not only unattainable, but undesirable. Further, Malcolm X and the Black Panthers championed the image of the "bad Negro," an armed and aggressive black who rejected American culture and its ideals. These teachings legitimized the culture of the angry black underclass, and were fostered by a civil rights leadership that shifted from southern integrationists to northern militants, from religious leaders to lawyers, social workers, and full-time activists.

At the same time, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Johnson administration encouraged an affirmative action policy at odds with the plain language of Title VII. When the colorblindness mandated by the Act failed to achieve instant and miraculous results, government, business and educational entities began to adopt racial quotas or goals. According to D'Souza, government benefits and set-aside programs, along with the Supreme Court decisions of the 60's and 70's are all based on the same general principle; "a rejection of colorblindness and a justification of government power to manipulate race to achieve an allegedly beneficial public goal."

Eventually, D'Souza reaches the 1990's, and the current state of the racial debate in America. It is here that D'Souza is at his controversial best, particularly in his discussion of "rational discrimination." According to D'Souza, "whites view racial discrimination today as a rational response to black group traits, while blacks view it as an immoral assessment

of the individuals who do not conform to group patterns of behavior.”

As an example of rational discrimination, D'Souza uses the behavior of cab drivers who refuse to pick up black males, an occurrence frequently cited by black scholars and activists such as Cornell West as an example of blatant and enduring racism. The scenario discussed is as follows: A black man standing on a corner in a large city tries in vain to hail a cab, growing more and more frustrated watching cabs pass him by in favor of a white man standing on the next block. D'Souza recognizes that the discrimination is flagrant, humiliating, and very real, citing one informal survey in which one third of cabdrivers routinely refused to stop for black customers. D'Souza does not condone the discrimination, but he argues that in most cases it is the result of an instantaneous and *rational* decision by the cabdriver rather than an entrenched hatred or distrust of blacks. In this example, the relevant fact is that young black men commit a disproportionate number of violent crimes in urban areas. Liberal sociological explanations notwithstanding, the man on the street, and particularly the cabdriver, understands that an eighteen-year-old black male is a greater threat than a middle-aged white man or an old woman of any race. The decision to pass on the black fare is therefore not a racial decision, but a simple matter of self-preservation. Interviews with black and African cabdrivers reveal that they engage in the same kind of rational discrimination. As one black cabdriver put it,

I don't have a problem picking up anybody, but I have to be careful. I won't pick up three black men at one time. If I pick up two, I sit one up front. There are some places I simply won't go. Listen, I've had a gun pointed at the back of my head. I have to look after myself, because no one else will.

Interviews with other black drivers reveal the same sentiments. Are they racists? Of course not. They are pragmatists, making rational decisions based on generalizations which are in turn based on empirical reality. The liberals respond that generalizations are inaccurate and dangerous, and they are right. But the intellectual argument against basing individual decisions on generalizations only works in the safe confines of academia; they mean nothing to the woman alone in the inner city at night, who, regardless of

her race, must clutch her purse and cross the street when presented with a group of young black men. Anyone who has ventured into the inner city alone at night understands both the necessity for and the truth of the cabdriver's generalizations. In fact, Jesse Jackson made the same point when he said, "There is nothing more painful for me than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start to think about robbery, and then see it's somebody white and feel relieved." Part of the problem with the current racial debate is that if the wrong person articulates such fears or acknowledges rational discrimination — as D'Souza has done — he will almost certainly be met with charges of racism and bigotry.

For the record, D'Souza neither advocates nor trivializes rational discrimination, admitting that he too would be angry and upset if he were unable to get a taxi. Rather, he points out the unfortunate but inevitable result of rational discrimination: the black man feels dehumanized, blames the discriminatory treatment on actual racism, and links the behavior with the historical mistreatment of his ancestors. Because rational discrimination is indistinguishable in its effects from actual racism, the victim naturally concludes that the perpetrator is an actual racist.

The situation is exacerbated by a civil rights leadership that is constitutionally incapable of self-policing. Indeed, today's multiculturalists display a stunning reluctance to criticize their own. Thus, the militant black nationalism of Malcolm X has grown unchecked, with a wink and a nod from liberal leaders and scholars, into a black culture of unprecedented vulgarity, violence, misogyny, and hatred for America and "white culture." To mention only a few of D'Souza's many examples: rap singer Sister Souljah justifies violence against whites with the comment that, "If black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?;" Andrew Thompson, a professor of African Studies at Northeastern Illinois University condemns "the miserable Asiatic . . . like a parasite, he attacks the African consumer, boring from within;" rap singer Ice T encourages the murder of policemen in his song "Cop Killer;" and rap group 2 Live Crew celebrates rape in language so violent, vulgar, and degrading as to be unprintable.

Never mind the rampant illiteracy, AIDS, black on black crime, and illegitimacy in the black community, filth such as

2 Live Crew and Ice T can be assured of the approval of the multiculturalists. Henry Luis Gates Jr. calls the music of 2 Live Crew "brilliant . . . astonishing and refreshing . . . exuberant hyperbole." Cornell West remarks that rappers offer "a subversive critique of society . . . of the power structure as a whole" as "part of a prophetic tradition." When confronted with the anti-Semitism of Luis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, film maker Spike Lee responds, "I don't agree with everything he says, but I would never say anything in public." Finally, Benjamin Chavis invites gang leaders to a "summit" to "shatter the stereotype that gang members are social deviants. They are some of the best members of society, who just need a chance and some encouragement."

The unwillingness of the multiculturalists to criticize criminals, racists and anti-Semites is coupled with a pathological hatred of black conservatives such as Justice Clarence Thomas, Congressman Gary Franks, and authors Thomas Sowell and Shelby Steele. Thus, Spike Lee calls Michael Williams, a black Bush administration official, an Uncle Tom who deserves to be "dragged into the alley and beaten with a Louisville Slugger," and Clarence Thomas, "a handkerchief-head, chicken and biscuit eating Uncle Tom." Columnist Carl Rowan of the *Washington Post* argues that "if you give Thomas a little flour on his face, you'd think you had David Duke." Summing up the view of the civil rights establishment is Nikki Giovanni, who writes that black conservatives "are trying to justify the gross neglect of the needs of black America. We know that such conservatives have no character. They are in opportunistic service." So the criminal is elevated to the status of prophet and martyr, while the respectable, successful, and articulate black leader, whose only crime is an association with Republican politics and conservative ideas, is pilloried.

What is the basis of such astounding hypocrisy? The answer, touched on only briefly by D'Souza, lies in the logic, or more accurately, illogic, of cultural relativism. Multiculturalism, feminist jurisprudence and Afro-centrism all begin with an adherence to the relativist creed: Absolute truth does not exist and objectivity is an illusion. Reason itself is suspect, a mere construct of white, male, Western civilization. Objectivity, reason, and logic are replaced with "perspective" and "relative values." To the cultural relativists, no

behavior or culture is better or worse than another. To make judgments about right and wrong, good and evil, suggests an objective measure of morality that can be achieved through reason.

The rejection of objectivity and the refusal to reason from the laws of nature free the multiculturalists from the cumbersome burden of truth. Thus, feminists can claim that fathers are unnecessary without being concerned with the fact that virtually every study of the subject indicates that fatherless children are severally disadvantaged compared to children raised in two-parent families. Benjamin Chavis *must* not disapprove of the sociopathic gang member, because to do so would suggest one value is superior to another. Anything is possible and everything permissible in the world of the cultural relativist, where $2+2$ can equal 5 if it is politically expedient.

D'Souza's depiction of the state of race relations in the United States is dismal. Blacks and whites have a hard time discussing racial issues. Whites engage in rational discrimination that blacks inevitably view as evidence of enduring racism. The civil rights leadership is largely corrupt, aggravating and exaggerating racial discord to ensure their continued importance. Actual racism continues, and often manifests itself in tragic ways. Poverty and unemployment continue to ravage the inner city. Nevertheless, D'Souza notes some encouraging signs. The average American is far less racist than he was fifty or even twenty years ago and racist language and behavior is most often met with disapproval if not outright protest. There is a growing black middle class. Black leaders such as Colin Powell, Barbara Jordan, Clarence Thomas, and Vernon Jordan have achieved national prominence, and serve as valuable role models. A number of black politicians have been elected in overwhelmingly white cities and congressional districts.

Obviously, there is more to be done, but in the area of solutions, D'Souza comes up hopelessly short. After five hundred pages of criticizing black leaders for their failure to solve their own problems, D'Souza is able to do no better. He advocates a three prong solution. First, he would require total colorblindness in government hiring and promotion, criminal justice, and the drawing of voting districts. Second, he would repeal the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in an effort to save private

sector affirmative action. All private employers, black and white, would be free to hire whomever they like based on any criteria they might choose. He claims that actual racial discrimination would be costly, and would gradually decrease as the growing black middle class and the vast majority of whites look for opportunities to hire and promote qualified blacks. Finally, the black community must itself begin a program of cultural reconstruction in an effort to rid itself of the negative and destructive elements of black culture.

D'Souza's solutions fail for more than mere lack of explanation. First, he does not address the obvious contradiction between his views on public and private affirmative action. According to D'Souza, government affirmative action programs have failed; why should private affirmative action be any different? Second, both of his "concrete" proposals are impractical. The Civil Rights Act has served as *the* vehicle for achieving racial equality over the course of the last thirty years, and it serves as a crowning achievement and source of pride for many Americans, both black and white; its repeal is unlikely to say the least. It is equally unlikely that Americans would tolerate private discrimination. One can only imagine the public reaction when the first company or country club refused to hire or admit an individual because "we don't like black people." Finally, D'Souza offers no suggestion whatsoever for the millions of Americans who are searching for practical ways to better understand one another in a multiracial society.

The End of Racism is an informative, well-documented, and eminently readable book. D'Souza should be commended for having the courage to state the obvious. He is one of those individuals, so rare today, who discusses difficult and sensitive issues without a moments hesitation about the political consequences. He could, and perhaps would, have been more sensitive in his discussion of some of the issues had he not been so obviously bent on stirring up controversy and creating a name for himself. The multiculturalists hate D'Souza and his book, but they can not honestly claim that he is wrong; they are bound by the irrational mandate of relativism to take D'Souza's views as simply another "*perspective*." As a conservative, I have the luxury of saying that *The End of*

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Racism is honest and intriguing, but, at least in its history and proposals, dead wrong.

Loren L. Barr

