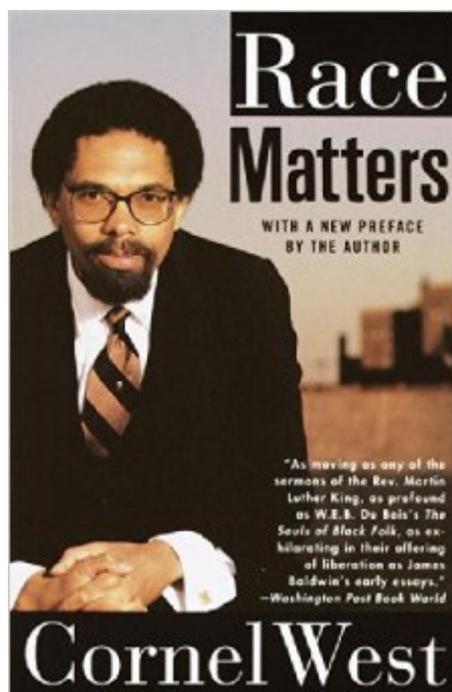


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Race Matters



Synopsis

With a new introduction, the groundbreaking classic *Race Matters* affirms its position as the bestselling, most influential, and most original articulation of the urgent issues in America's ongoing racial debate. Cornel West is at the forefront of thinking about race. In *Race Matters* he addresses a range of issues, from the crisis in black leadership and the myths surrounding black sexuality to affirmative action, the new black conservatism, and the strained relations between Jews and African Americans. He never hesitates to confront the prejudices of all his readers or wavers in his insistence that they share a common destiny. Bold in its thought and written with a redemptive passion grounded in the tradition of the African-American church, *Race Matters* is a book that is at once challenging and deeply healing.

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Customer Reviews

It is somewhat disturbing to read past reviews of Dr. West's work and find no middle ground. The reviews range from exalting to damning, but the issues are out of focus. As a white American male (veteran AND Republican), I am on the receiving end of Dr. West's criticisms...or am I? This (the reader review section) is where one can see evidence of the racial conflict Dr. West writes about. Self-loathing and guilt manifested as hate and distrust in a zero-sum world...and this is the world most of us were brought up in. If Dr. West is correct, and the subjugation of the African-American underclass is caused by Corporate White America, then what is to be done? Taxes and subsidies focused on social equality are out of fashion with a majority of White Americans because the

question, "who benefits?" is rarely addressed in full. Unfortunately, for most, an acceptable answer is lacking in this particular analysis, but it should be obvious to anyone CHOOSING to read RACE MATTERS, that positive externalities exist on both sides of the racial divide. As a white American, reading RACE MATTERS is like asking a stranger to identify all the perceived shortcomings and failures embodied in your character. However, walking away and assuming a defensive posture, without ever asking "What can I do to change your perceptions?", is tantamount to failure in itself. Dr. West's book is an excellent answer to the question most white Americans want answered... "What did I do to you?" And although I may not agree with every solution or angle of criticism proposed by Dr. West, it most certainly initiates the discourse. This is where the benefit of his book is realized... in the discourse... and in the development of a common social ground.

I first read Race Matters in 1995. I just re-read it in anticipation of hearing West speak in person. Out of curiosity, I checked out these reviews to see what others thought of West's book. Several of the reviews confirm much what West says in Race Matters. As I see it, this creates an even more compelling reason to buy and read this short book. According to West, discussions about the plight of African Americans tend to be divided into two camps, the "liberal structuralists" and the "conservative behaviorists". West then adds: "Unfortunately, these two camps have nearly suffocated the debate that should be taking place about the prospects for black America." (p. 18.) Debate certainly seems to be gasping for air in some of the reviews of Race Matters. In chapter 2, West outlines what he calls the pitfalls of "racial reasoning." This chapter alone is worth the price of the book because of its cogent treatment of the underlying racial reasoning on both sides of the Clarence Thomas debate. It is quite obvious that several of the reviews posted on have failed to heed West's call to "replace racial reasoning with moral reasoning." (p. 38.) To my surprise, the ad hominem attacks against West in some of the reviews are reminiscent of the 50s and 60s-Communist, Marxist, get a haircut, rich guy, etc. These are the same emotionally based attacks that appear in the referenced Solon article by David Horowitz. The strong feelings raised by West's discussion seem also to have caused certain reviewers to overlook some of what West actually says. For example, West does mention Hispanics (p. 12, 44), he does criticize both Louis Farrakhan and Malcolm X (p. 42, 60, 68, 109, 114, 146-148), and he makes no "gross error" when discussing the rate of increase in black youth suicides, versus the absolute rate. (p. 24.) In my re-reading of Race Matters I was again struck by West's ability to address issues that are often difficult for some of us "liberals" to address without a considerable level of discomfort. But West makes a good case for the fact that these issues need to be addressed candidly and

compassionately if we are to overcome the hopelessness and lovelessness that has befallen so many Americans. Reading Race Matters the first time helped me regain some hope at a time when I was particularly pessimistic about race relations in America. I thank West for that. And after seeing him on TV, with the always entertaining Stanley Crouch, I'm looking forward to hearing him in person. And finally, I'm glad I read Race Matters again. As both the one star and five star reviews suggest, it is still very relevant. Unfortunately.

I read this book from a non-American perspective. As I don't live in America but in Israel, I can't help but read a book such as this while constantly comparing West's analysis to my own environment. At the beginning of the book, the immediate comparison was to the oppression of the Palestinians. But as I progressed, there was a shift to the situation of the Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. I was amazed at how easily West's words can be applied to the situation of the Ethiopians in Israel. I quoted a few insights from the book to Ethiopian friends, and there was a common feeling as if West wrote the book about them - and not about the American race matters. Of course the difficult chapter dealing with black Antisemitism was interesting as an American phenomena, without direct implications to the Ethiopian situation (here I could go back to the Palestinian issue). In the end, West's book proved to be a bold attack on racism and racist institutions, and did provide some interesting directions for change. I must disagree with those that were disappointed by West's "failure" to bring up coherent solutions. A book such as this should not be expected to provide a detailed solution layout, but instead give food for thought, and point at the directions which have not been taken yet. This the book does. I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the issue of race and politics.

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