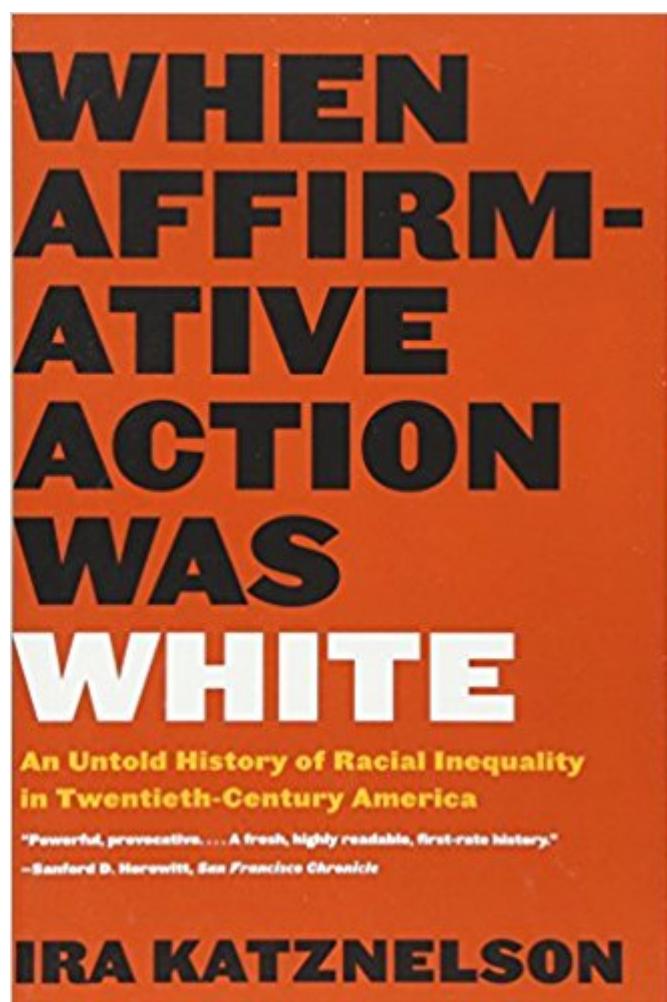


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When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History Of Racial Inequality In Twentieth-Century America



Synopsis

A groundbreaking work that exposes the twisted origins of affirmative action. In this "penetrating new analysis" (New York Times Book Review) Ira Katznelson fundamentally recasts our understanding of twentieth-century American history and demonstrates that all the key programs passed during the New Deal and Fair Deal era of the 1930s and 1940s were created in a deeply discriminatory manner. Through mechanisms designed by Southern Democrats that specifically excluded maids and farm workers, the gap between blacks and whites actually widened despite postwar prosperity. In the words of noted historian Eric Foner, "Katznelson's incisive book should change the terms of debate about affirmative action, and about the last seventy years of American history."

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition (August 17, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393328511

ISBN-13: 978-0393328516

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 72 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #4,620 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in Books > History > Africa #26 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > United States #30 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Race Relations > Discrimination & Racism

Customer Reviews

Rather than seeing affirmative action developing out of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, Katznelson (Desolation and Enlightenment) finds its origins in the New Deal policies of the 1930s and 1940s. And instead of seeing it as a leg up for minorities, Katznelson argues that the prehistory of affirmative action was supported by Southern Democrats who were actually devoted to preserving a strict racial hierarchy, and that the resulting legislation was explicitly designed for the majority: its policies made certain, he argues, that whites received the full benefit of rising prosperity while blacks were deliberately left out. Katznelson supports this startling claim ingeniously, showing, for instance, that while the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act was a great boon for factory workers, it did nothing for maids and agricultural laborersâ "employment sectors dominated by blacks at the

timeâ "at the behest of Southern politicians. Similarly, Katzenbach makes a strong case that the GI Bill, an ostensibly color-blind initiative, unfairly privileged white veterans by turning benefits administration over to local governments, thereby ensuring that Southern blacks would find it nearly impossible to participate. This intriguing study closes with suggestions for rectifying racial inequality, but its strongest merit is its subtle recalibration of a crucial piece of American history. (Aug.)

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Katzenbach places into contemporary context the cause of racial inequity that is directly related to government policies, which are widely believed to benefit blacks but which have actually benefited whites. He eschews the more generalist focus on slavery and white supremacy as the causes of racial inequality and focuses on government policies of the New Deal and post-World War II distribution of veteran benefits. He identifies in a practical sense government policies, most of which appear neutral on their face, that were designed to restrict blacks and, in fact, impeded them from progressing commensurate with white America. The war economy and labor needs expanded opportunities for blacks and substantially reduced economic disparities. But postwar policies to promote home ownership and labor laws regarding minimum wages deliberately excluded blacks. Other policies providing the engine that produced today's middle class, including the GI benefits that financed college education, reinforced the discriminatory patterns. By connecting the dots, Katzenbach provides the foundational basis that justified affirmative action for blacks, as the disparities are an outgrowth of government policies and practices. Vernon Ford

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While the writing style is a bit difficult, it is a very eye-opening book. He definitely sets the record straight on Affirmative Action.

The stuff they never taught you in school can be found here. America was and probably will never be fair or equal.

Excellent book!

an eye opener and very surreal

excellent

A must read for EVERYONE!!!

I found out a lot of new things about the New Deal.

Great

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