



A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America

By Shelby Steele

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From the author of the award-winning bestseller *The Content of Our Character* comes a new essay collection that tells the untold story behind the polarized racial politics in America today. In *A Dream Deferred* Shelby Steele argues that a second betrayal of black freedom in the United States--the first one being segregation--emerged from the civil rights era when the country was overtaken by a powerful impulse to redeem itself from racial shame. According to Steele, 1960s liberalism had as its first and all-consuming goal the expiation of America's guilt rather than the careful development of true equality between the races. This "culture of preference" betrayed America's best principles in order to give whites and America's institutions an iconography of racial virtue they could use against the stigma of racial shame. In four densely argued essays, Steele takes on the familiar questions of affirmative action, multiculturalism, diversity, Afro-centrism, group preferences, victimization--and what he deems to be the atavistic powers of race, ethnicity, and gender, the original causes of oppression. *A Dream Deferred* is an honest, courageous look at the perplexing dilemma of race and democracy in the United States--and what we might do to resolve it.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Shelby Steele's first book, *The Content of Our Character*, sparked outrage over its indictment of liberal American policies and attitudes towards race. *A Dream Deferred* expands Steele's critique, comparing government interventions (like affirmative action) to the most damaging practices of slavery and segregation, Soviet Communism, and Nazi Germany.

While Steele zealously praises civil rights victories, terming the movement that effected them "the greatest nonviolent revolution in American history (one of the greatest in all history)," he concludes that a simultaneous outcome--the stigmatization of whiteness--has led to disaster. Shamed whites try to prove their innocence through redemptive acts, according to Steele, and he has always disdained the "moral self-preoccupation" of post-'60s white liberals, which "made them dangerous to blacks--ready to give them over to an 'otherness' in which nothing is expected of them."

Steele, a self-described black conservative, complains, "The great ingenuity of interventions like affirmative action has not been that they give Americans a way to identify with the struggle of blacks, but that they give them a way to identify with racial virtuousness *quite apart* from blacks." He contends that victimization is the greatest hindrance for black Americans: while white liberals see blacks as victims to assuage guilty consciences, blacks parlay their status as victims into a currency that turns out to have no long-term buying power. Steele's conclusion: the only way for blacks to stop buying into this zero-sum game is to adopt a culture of excellence and achievement untrammelled by set-asides and entitlements. --*Lise Funderburg*

From Publishers Weekly

In these essays, self-described black conservative Steele (*The Content of Our Character*) denounces what he calls unsuccessful liberal intervention to promote equal opportunity for African Americans. The author, a fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, argues that blacks have been twice betrayed: first by being oppressed by slavery and segregation, second by government-mandated group preferences that rob blacks of their self-esteem. Such programs he sees as rooted more in white guilt than in a desire to help blacks become more competitive in our society. He points out that blacks relying on their own initiative have managed to excel in music, sports and literature. On the other hand, he sees programs of affirmative action, set-asides, group preferences or welfare payments as the product of white assumptions of black inferiority. Steele's solution to problems such as inner-city joblessness, teenage pregnancy and high crime rates is devotion among blacks to principles of personal accountability, hard work, delayed gratification and other forms of individual effort, though he doesn't spell out how to implement these goals. His analysis tends to be repetitious or based on sweeping generalities without research data; however, he then charges that contradictory evidence is the result of bias among academics. This is a contentious work that is likely to reignite old arguments, but then Steele should be used to that by now. U.K. first serial and translation rights, HarperCollins; dramatic and audio rights, Carol Mann; author tour. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Steele (senior fellow, Hoover Institution) has taken on a tough role: that of African American conservative. Here he argues that "white acceptance of affirmative action and the promotion of afrocentric ideology are rooted in a need to expiate the shame felt by a culture that historically mistreated black Americans, rather than an effort to create a society based on racial equality."

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