

# End Games

By John Hood

**The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society**, by Dinesh D'Souza, New York: The Free Press, 724 pages, \$30.00

**A**CCORDING TO MANY BLACK SCHOLARS and activists, I can be a racist but my next-door neighbors cannot. I am white. My neighbors are black. "Black people can't be racist," explained Spike Lee. Harry Allen of the rap group Public Enemy made a similar point when accused of racism against whites and Jews. "It's impossible," he said. "Only white people can be racist, and I am not white."

Should I be angry about this double-standard? Not if I understand that the "blacks can't be racists" thesis is strictly a matter of definition. Many scholars define racism as not simply bigotry against other races but the actual practice of discriminatory treatment against the races you don't like. The commonly stated formula for racism, therefore, is prejudice (which anyone can have against another race), plus power—and most of the power in our society, the argument goes, remains in the hands of whites.

For all practical purposes, of course, racism and prejudice are synonymous, at least in the way most of us use the terms in everyday discourse. Even if I can't call Harry Allen a racist, I can still call him a disgusting bigot. Similarly, Dinesh D'Souza spends a great deal of time in his controversial new book *The End of Racism* constructing an elaborate distinction between ethnocentrism and racism that, in practical terms, is meaningless.

"While racism refers to the hierarchal rankings of human beings based on biological characteristics, tribalism and ethnocentrism are nothing more than an intense preference for one's own group over strangers," D'Souza writes. Ethnocentrism, he argues, has existed in some form in all human societies since the beginning of time. It might be based on skin color or

shared heritage, but not necessarily; it could, instead, be based on nationality, religion, shared traditions, or geographic proximity. Racism, however, arose only among Europeans of the Enlightenment as a systematic, even rational, attempt to explain racial differences in terms of genetics. "While racism is necessarily rooted in biology, ethnocentrism is typically rooted in culture," he said.

This is shockingly poor history, for starters. D'Souza attempts to explain away the often-stated, biology-based prejudices of groups as wide-ranging as Chinese, Arabs, Zulus, and Aztecs as merely ethnocentrism based on culture, religion, or language. But Chinese of the Han dynasty period, for example, described darker-skinned Asians to the South as "greatly [resembling] the monkeys from whom they are descended." To D'Souza, this isn't evidence of racism because the Chinese hated everyone except their own kind, including Koreans and Japanese. Arabic prejudice toward both white-skinned Slavs and black-skinned Africans was, according to D'Souza, based on climate rather than heredity. Arab fetuses, according to one 10th-century Islamic writer he quotes, got the right amount of sun and warmth in the womb, yielding an appropriate "pale brown color," while Slavic babies got too little and African babies were "overdone in the womb until they are burned."

D'Souza's argument is weak, to say the least. The Chinese could, of course, have been both racist and ethnocentric—as many Americans, including some Southerners of my acquaintance, have been in modern times—disliking Turks and Burmese for their strange color and hair, and disliking Koreans and Japanese for other reasons. The notion that most



**Dinesh D'Souza:** His intemperate arguments aren't likely to help bring an end to racism.

medieval Arabs shared a wacky climatological explanation for racial differences is even sillier. From their own experience, they knew that white or black slaves taken to Iraq produced white or black children respectively, not brown ones. To argue that climate originally influenced the biological development of differing skin tones and behaviors among human beings (hardly a controversial position today) is obviously not to argue that the resulting differences are purely cultural.

Interestingly, D'Souza points out that ancient Greek mythology explains the existence of white, brown, and black people with the story of Phaeton, son of the sun god Helios, who took a joyride in his father's fiery chariot and, careening wildly, gave proto-humans in the North too little sun and in the South too much. I suspect that educated Arabs of the 10th century, like educated Greeks in classical times, understood this sort of explanation to be more metaphorical than literal.

Furthermore, to fashion a careful distinction between tribalism on the one hand and racism on the other is to lend far too much credence to today's racial categories. "Asian" and "Hispanic" are impossibly broad categories, as D'Souza surely agrees. If Arabs think Koreans are funny-looking and call them monkeys, surely they are being racists in the way most people use the term. Black tribes in Africa might not have differed much in skin tone, but their stature, facial features, and

other physical characteristics certainly did differ—a biological fact that the tribes often took notice of and to which they attributed behavioral characteristics.

In sum, D'Souza fails to construct a believable contrast between universal ethnocentrism and European racism, and does so in a relatively brief section of a 724-page book that, ultimately, relies on his careful definitions in order to foresee the end of racism. He describes the racist sentiments of Enlightenment thinkers in some detail, and in a strangely optimistic way. "Painful though we may find it to read what people in earlier centuries had to say about others," D'Souza writes, "it remains profoundly consoling to know that racism had a beginning, because then it becomes possible to envision its end."

**I** DON'T FAULT D'SOUZA FOR SEEKING consolation about racism's origins. Much of *The End of Racism* is troubling and depressing. Crime, poverty, and illegitimacy continue to plague African Americans disproportionately. Faddish multiculturalism is sweeping American academia and public education. Politicians and civil rights leaders are cynically manipulating public debate about these issues and obscuring real solutions.

These familiar themes are presented thoroughly and convincingly by D'Souza, but I don't think *The End of Racism* will become the canonical work on race relations its promoters envision—not only because it is based on poor history but also for the simple reason that D'Souza has chosen the very worst rhetorical style one can imagine for the subject. One word for it might be inelegant. Another is offensive.

His critics, including leading black conservatives Robert Woodson and Glenn Loury, have zeroed in on a number of excerpts (some, to be fair to D'Souza, taken out of context) to identify his insensitivity. I'll add a few more, with context. Discussing high illegitimacy rates among black children, he writes that, "with some discomfort," one can reach the conclusion that there is "some truth to the historical stereotype of the black male stud." Is that

the most parsimonious conclusion from the data—or is it that most blacks today aren't getting married before, or at least after, they have kids the way their parents and grandparents did?

In another passage, he discusses what he calls "the distinctive lingo of Black English," about which he says that "if African American students wish to succeed in American society, they cannot do it with Black English." Then, he makes the claim that "scholars estimate that around 80 percent of African Americans use some form of black dialect," the inference apparently being that most blacks cannot succeed in American society because of their diction and grammar. This is a deeply offensive statement, though I'm sure D'Souza didn't mean it that way. Talking like a hillbilly is also a major impediment to success in the larger American society, but having a Southern accent and speaking in Southern idioms (such as the extremely useful plural second person *y'all*) is hardly the same thing as talking like a hillbilly. Neither can the dialect of most American blacks be equated with the "ghetto idiom" D'Souza criticizes.

And in a chapter on what he calls "rational discrimination," D'Souza explains the seemingly racist behavior of taxi drivers who won't pick up black males, white women who cross the street rather than walk past a black youth, and employers who won't hire blacks for entry-level jobs as understandable decisions by "amateur statisticians acting on impressionistic but not unreasonable generalizations." Of course, to say that blacks commit crimes at relatively higher rates than whites of the same age is not to say that the average black teenager poses a significant threat to a cab driver, sidewalk passerby, or employer.

Nor do studies demonstrating that a quarter or more of young black males have some kind of criminal record prove a violent black disposition, since many of the offenses are for substance abuse and other nonviolent or even victimless crimes, while many of the violent crimes perpetrated by blacks are the work of a core group of recidivists who account for

# THE END OF EXCUSES

"With its unsparing exploration of racial group differences, *The End of Racism* runs the risk of becoming this year's Most Dangerous Book."

THE END OF RACISM



DINESH D'SOUZA  
*Author of Racial Education*

—The Wall Street Journal

Published at \$30.00

**Our Price Only \$21.95**  
postpaid

**Call toll free**  
**1-800-326-0996**

or mail your order to

**LAISSEZ FAIRE BOOKS**

938 Howard St., Dept. RK5  
San Francisco, CA 94103

## Complete 2-Year Set of SHORTEST U.S. DOLLAR SERIES SINCE 1795!



The only Dollar series with a shorter life than the Susan B. Anthony Dollar was the 1794-95 Flowing Hair—America's 1st Dollar!

The Anthony Dollar was released into general circulation for only two years—1979 & '80. (In 1981 they were available only in Mint Sets.)

With this special offer you get all 6 regular issue Susan B. Anthony Dollars for only \$10! One mint Uncirculated coin from each of the 3 Mints (Philadelphia, San Francisco, Denver)

which struck them in both years (1979 & '80)—an \$18.95 regular retail value!

Ridiculed by the public as the "Carter Quarter" the mini dollar is fast becoming a prized collectible. Hard to put together now, a Complete 2-Year Set will get even harder. You'll also receive our fully illustrated catalog, plus other fascinating selections from our Free Examination Coins-on-Approval service, from which you may purchase any or none—return balance in 15 days—with option to cancel at any time. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back. DON'T DELAY!

To order, call **1-800-645-3122**  
Or send \$10 for each set (Limit 4 sets.)  
plus \$1 shipping and handling to:

**Littleton Coin Company,**  
Dept. KH0142, Littleton, NH 03561  
Celebrating Over 50 Years of Friendly Service to Collectors

**Full 45-Day Money Back  
Guarantee of Satisfaction**

a disproportionately large share of the offenses. Why let "amateur statisticians" off the hook so lightly, when they really seem to be indulging in old-fashioned, ill-informed prejudice?

**M**ANY OF D'SOUZA'S POINTS ARE BASED on disproportionality, which isn't the same thing as propensity. In arguing that the black middle class owes a large part of its existence to government, D'Souza reports that 24 percent of blacks work for the government, compared with 14 percent for whites. Furthermore, he writes, "state and local agencies which service a poor and predominantly black clientele, such as housing and welfare, employ substantial proportions of African Americans: 38 and 23 percent respectively."

This last point is advanced to prove that employed blacks have a vested interest in the continuation of government bureaucracy and the welfare state in a way that employed whites do not. But D'Souza's own data show that three-fourths of black workers are employed in the private rather than the public sector, and that most welfare bureaucrats are whites. Blacks do need to make more progress in private-sector employment and entrepreneurship, as D'Souza subsequently argues, but why exaggerate the point?

Sensitivity has become unpopular among conservatives today, especially among *agents provocateurs* on college campuses who, like the student activists of the 1960s, delight in challenging orthodoxy and "political correctness." But grace and manners have practical utility. They oil social interactions among human beings that would otherwise be full of scraping pistons and dangerous sparks.

D'Souza's greatest failure in *The End of Racism* is that he has chosen a style of argument, even a set of chapter titles (e.g. "Uncle Tom's Dilemma: Pathologies of Black Culture"), that provokes rather than persuades. Call me politically correct, but I don't think there's anything wrong with sensitivity and prudence on matters of race. The issues are so complex, with so many raw nerves and historical grievances

involved, that one cannot debate race matters in the same wonkish or clever way one might discuss capital gains taxes or medical savings accounts.

D'Souza has written a comprehensive and often entertaining literature survey about race in America today, but its breadth disguises a lack of depth. He knows who's who on the various sides of scholarly race debates, but exhibits little personal experience with blacks who aren't "pathological" or with honest-to-goodness white racists, who remain depressingly numerous, in my experience.

**To say that blacks commit crimes at relatively higher rates than whites of the same age is not to say that the average black teenager poses a significant threat to a cab driver, sidewalk passerby, or employer.**

This past October, I attended a four-day seminar on human relations and leadership in which one participant, a talented and personable black dentist from nearby Fayetteville, North Carolina, broke down in tears recounting her academic experiences. She was always expected to perform worse than her white classmates, she said. Many of her black friends didn't understand or support her academic success

or her decision to enroll in upper-level courses that were almost all-white. And some of her white co-workers and fellow students didn't take her many accomplishments seriously, attributing them to affirmative action rather than to her own efforts.

To this woman, struggling to deal with a set of complicated and heart-rending emotions, D'Souza has something to say in *The End of Racism*: You probably *are* where you are because of affirmative action. Your accomplishments do not, in fact, deserve to be taken seriously.

He describes a great deal of economic and social progress by blacks over the past three decades as essentially the result of quotas in education and employment. "Many middle-class blacks seem to realize very well that the reason they are in the middle or upper-middle class is because they are black," he writes. Few middle-class blacks, therefore, will agree to end racial preferences "when they know that it is race that helps to pay the mortgage." Even though D'Souza has important things to say about race and public policy, my black dentist friend, and others like her, aren't likely to listen because of his tendency to exaggerate and provoke. This is unfortunate, and hardly hastens the end of racism. ❖

*Contributing Editor John Hood is president of the John Locke Foundation, a nonprofit think tank based in Raleigh. His book The Heroic Enterprise: Business and the Common Good will be published this summer by The Free Press.*

## Losing Argument

By James K. Glassman

**The Winner-Take-All Society, by Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook, New York: Free Press, 272 pp., \$25.00**

**E**XCEPT FOR A SHALLOW RECESSION four years ago, the U.S. economy has been humming along very nicely since Ronald Reagan was elected president. But we have to worry about

something, don't we? So lately economists, sociologists, and politicians have been worrying about the disparity between the richest Americans and everyone else.