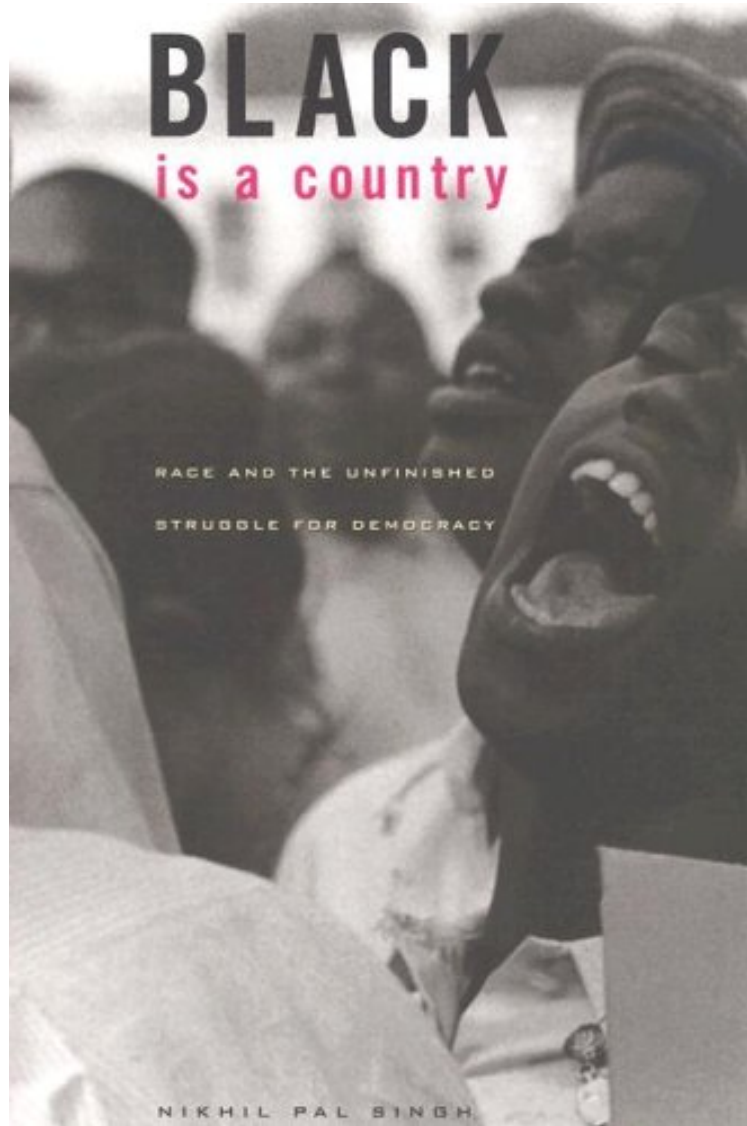


(Pdf free) Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy

Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy

Nikhil Pal Singh

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Nikhil Pal Singh : Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. If You Love FreedomBy ChimmyBlack Is a Country by Nikhil Pal Singh is a no-nonsense history of black social thought in the twentieth century. Singh writes with both passion and

rigor. "Struggles to claim universality for black people," Singh argues, "have challenged not only particularism masquerading as a universalism, but a universalism distorted by its long monopolization against blacks" (45). Among the topics this book revisits with fresh insight are: the hard-hitting work of W.E.B. Du Bois, the various paths of black activism between the World Wars, the ambivalent project of Gunnar Myrdal at mid-century, and the connection as well as the divergence between the civil rights movement in the United States and decolonization struggles elsewhere. Seeking to undo "the mystifying imprecision of the word" (132), this book meditates on freedom. It offers a sobering reminder that today (and not just in developing countries) the access to the means for making oneself truly human continue to be narrow, or selective at best. The problems of inequity in African America are linked to the fate of other peoples for whom freedom continues to be scarce, due to race and class lines. Echoing Du Bois, Singh suggests that democracy remains in need of "wholesale reconstruction" (96). Here is another sentence to underline in Singh's book: "The specific danger is that many of the valuable insights derived from the ethics and politics of living and overcoming Jim Crow are now being squandered. More worrisome, the steady denial of the deep legacies of historical racism now contributes to the idea of an America restored to an identity with itself and with the destiny of all humanity" (57). In a certain way then, this book is also an affirmation. It is a record of the culture and practices that African Americans have cultivated, exercising the freedom to act ethically and to build a world. As Singh guides us through black social thought, we realize that the struggle against racism is relevant to anyone concerned with distributing not just the human image but also the material forms of access to the universal, among as many persons as possible (in their own terms) in as many time zones across our planet. Buy this book and read it more than once---along with *Seeing Through Race* by W.J.T. Mitchell. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is a really great book to learn an extensive amount on black history. By drawingstars This is a really great book to learn an extensive amount on black history. A majority of the stuff in the book was completely new to me and dealt with black history at a very high level. Definitely worth buying and keeping in your collection!!! 30 of 36 people found the following review helpful. A Work of Great Relevance and Urgency... By A Customer In its simplest rendition, *Black Is a Country* is a work of hope that holds the potential to guide us out of our current state of racial dilemmas. Nikhil Singh points to the futility of relying on U.S. nationalist traditions in dismantling racism by illuminating the dialectic of race and nation, two concepts that have always been ineluctably intertwined, yet have largely remained fixed at opposite ends of the spectrum. Black intellectuals throughout the "long civil rights era" had articulated a vision of democracy that stretches beyond the parameters of American nationalism, and by doing so, they pointed to the failures of American universalism by shining light on the contradictions between American claims of universal democracy and the realities of systemic racial oppression. Recalling these bold visions and radical conceptions of democracy from the past, Singh ultimately suggests, will potentially lead us once again to "an effective antiracism" (14). In framing his argument, Singh re-envision a "long civil rights era" that defies the "King-centric" and universalist version that remains engraved in the annals of American history. This new framework accomplishes four things. First, it suggests that civil rights made up only one part of a much broader and expansive struggle. As Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized toward the end of his life, "justice for black people will not flow into society merely from court decisions nor from the fountains of political oratory" (13). Second, rather than emphasizing the March on Washington or the passage of the Civil Rights Act--two landmark occurrences that reinscribed the notion of American universalism--as the apex of the movement, it centers the formation and expansion of the black public sphere as the movement's most phenomenal achievement. Third, as had already been implied, the long civil rights era embraced a host of intellectuals and artists who experimented with a range of politics with the ultimate vision of forging an independent black radicalism. Far from recognizing American nationalism as the suitable arena to achieving democracy, these black leaders (who have tragically become overshadowed by the figure of an idolized Martin Luther King, Jr.) looked beyond national borders and tapped the wells of their radical imaginations to locate an independent and transformative conception of democracy. Finally, it illuminates a long, unbroken line of black radicalism that stretched from old intellectual sages like W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James to young black nationalists like Stokely Carmichael and Amiri Baraka. This black radical tradition, although distracted by the repressive nature of McCarthyism and despite taking on different political guises, remained at heart one continuous struggle. Simply put, *Black Is a Country* is a work of great urgency that forces us to seriously rethink the dialectic of race and nation, a concept that had for the most part been taken for granted by historians. It is a book that should be widely read and reread.

Despite black gains in modern America, the end of racism is not yet in sight. Nikhil Pal Singh asks what happened to the worldly and radical visions of equality that animated black intellectual activists from W. E. B. Du Bois in the 1930s to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s. In so doing, he constructs an alternative history of civil rights in the twentieth century, a long civil rights era, in which radical hopes and global dreams are recognized as central to the history of black struggle. It is through the words and thought of key black intellectuals, like Du Bois, Ralph Bunche, C. L. R. James, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and others, as well as movement activists like Malcolm X and Black Panthers, that vital new ideas emerged and circulated. Their most important achievement was to create and sustain a vibrant, black public sphere broadly critical of U.S. social, political, and civic inequality. Finding racism

hidden within the universalizing tones of reform-minded liberalism at home and global democratic imperatives abroad, race radicals alienated many who saw them as dangerous and separatist. Few wanted to hear their message then, or even now, and yet, as Singh argues, their passionate skepticism about the limits of U.S. democracy remains as indispensable to a meaningful reconstruction of racial equality and universal political ideals today as it ever was.

From Publishers Weekly In this passionate, conscientiously documented and scholarly work, University of Washington historian Singh reaches beyond the "short civil rights era" (roughly 1954 to the mid-60s) to recover "the more complex and contentious racial history of the long civil rights era," reaching from the New Deal to the Great Society. As Singh pithily observes, "Freeing the slaves also freed racism as a constituent element of national popular politics," an element that was as crucial to the failure of the New Deal as it was to the prosecution of the Cold War, where anticommunism "provided cover" for racist policy and speech. For Singh, politics is thought and action; thus W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James dominate, and Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* casts a heavy shadow. Richard Wright, Paul Robeson, Ralph Ellison, E. Franklin Frazier, Bayard Rustin, Harold Cruse, the Black Panthers and many others less well known come into focus via linked but noncontiguous sections, with the author making use not only of their published works but of others' memoirs as well. (A previously unpublished correspondence, "the wartime dialogues" of Ellison and Wright, is a find.) As a historical manifesto, this significant contribution to black intellectual history leads directly to the conclusion that current demand for color-blind policy "is a product of the steady erasure of the legacy of the unfinished struggles against white supremacy." The overlay of detail, useful to the scholar, sometimes dulls, and there is occasional repetition, possibly associated with the periodical publication of some sections. But the analysis of political philosophy for the period makes a first-rate contribution to African-American intellectual history. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. *Black is a Country* is a work of great urgency; it is one of those books you carry with you, read over and over again, and quote often. Nikhil Singh puts to rest our national founding myth that America was always a source of "justice for all." Instead, he finds within the black radical critique of U.S. racial capitalism a more inclusive, global, and universalist vision which has the potential of renewing democracy and dismantling racism once and for all. (Robin D. G. Kelley, Columbia University and author of *Freedom Dreams*) *Black is a Country* is a beautifully written, elegantly argued, and exhaustively researched study of the links between African American social movements and new ways of knowing. From his skilled exegesis of 1930s writings by W.E.B. Du Bois through provocative arguments about the prominence of the Black Panther Party during the 1960s to his sophisticated understanding of the limits of both multiculturalism and 'color blind' interchangeability, Singh presents challenging, original, and persuasive interpretations of topics that are much discussed but little understood. This is a splendid book, one that will be widely read, frequently taught, and often cited. (George Lipsitz, University of California, Santa Cruz) *Black Is a Country* is a rare work that succeeds both as theory and as history. Reading and researching widely in movement history, political economy and above all in the writings, speeches and styles of Black intellectuals and activists in the 20th century, Singh shows how African American thinkers and organizers literally made history from the edges. His book should be read by all those who care about how U.S. freedom movements fit into worlds of race. (David R. Roediger, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) *Black is a Country* is an elegant account of the paradoxical relationship between race as a resource of hope and racism as an enduring curse at the core of this country's cultural and political imagination. In lucid and often lyrical prose, Nikhil Singh argues that race functions as a highly durable and oppressive technology yet race simultaneously provided a political space for 20th century intellectuals and activists to enlarge upon the public meaning of words like freedom and democracy. *Black is a Country* deserves to be widely read; it is the work of a gifted young scholar that promises to provoke a rethinking of classic liberal accounts of race, class and democracy. (Lani Guinier, Harvard Law School and coauthor of *The Miner's Canary*) In this passionate, conscientiously documented and scholarly work, University of Washington historian Singh reaches beyond the 'short civil rights era' (roughly 1954 to the mid-'60s) to recover 'the more complex and contentious racial history of the long civil rights era,' reaching from the New Deal to the Great Society...As a historical manifesto, this significant contribution to black intellectual history leads directly to the conclusion that current demand for color-blind policy 'is a product of the steady erasure of the legacy of the unfinished struggles against white supremacy.'...The analysis of political philosophy for the period makes a first-rate contribution to African-American intellectual history. (Publishers Weekly 2004-03-29) Singh argues persuasively that the black struggle for social justice has been for universal rights that benefit the nation as a whole and can represent a model of democracy. His historiography and analysis are important and represent a new generation of historians examining the Civil Rights Movement and race in America from fresh perspectives. (Sherri L. Barnes Library Journal 2004-06-01) Reflecting several new trends in current scholarship, Singh provides a provocative contribution to civil rights literature. He focuses on a 'Long Civil Rights Movement,' which for him covers the New Deal through the Great Society and into the 1970s. The roles of Communism, anti-Communism, and the Cold War loom large as impediments to a radical social change that might have led to an alternate form of black empowerment...As an intellectual history of the long Civil Rights era and exploration of paths not taken as much as those that were, this book stands out. This important contribution places the idea of race as a political idea at the

forefront, and will challenge and provoke scholars and students alike. (D. C. Catsam Choice 2005-02-01) *Black is a Country* is a work of great urgency; it is one of those books you carry with you, read over and over again, and quote often. Nikhil Singh puts to rest our national founding myth that America was always a source of "justice for all." Instead, he finds within the black radical critique of U.S. racial capitalism a more inclusive, global, and universalist vision which has the potential of renewing democracy and dismantling racism once and for all. (Robin D. G. Kelley, Columbia University and author of *Freedom Dreams*)