

Race matter essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Cornel West, *Race Matters, 1920-1930*, (Vintage Books 1994), 159pp. The main idea in Cornel West's *Race Matters* was the crisis in America which some call racism. He touches a abundance of problems concerning African Americans in America, the 1992 LA riots, the 1991 racial turmoil in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, the 1991 Senate confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas are all subject that West touches on during this book. It should also be noted that the book was written in the context of the end of the Cold War, the Persian Gulf War, and the beginning of the Clinton Administration. The events that produce the LA Riots serve as an explanation of several social trends for West. Some of those trends included of nihilism in African American neighborhoods, the increasing void of strong black leadership, political attacks against affirmative action, and the connection of the special relationship between the African-American and Jewish communities.

West had some very interesting thoughts on the threat of nihilism in the black community during the late 1980s and early 1990s, where the crack-cocaine drug wave was at an all time high; "The major enemy of black survival in America has been and is neither oppression nor exploitation but rather the nihilistic threat – that is, loss of hope and absence of meaning." Several tendencies develop over time which led to a widespread of strong community depression. Some of these actions became almost repetitive in black community. Almost decisively you saw a breakdown of traditional family structures, the rise in chemical dependency, a short-term decline in life expectancy, the surge in black incarceration rates, the exploding homicide rates among youth, and increases in suicide rates.

Further along in the book, West decides to key on what he determines as a crisis in black leadership in the black community. He contends that vast majority of contemporary political leaders in the community are limited to being race-effacing managers (i. e., mainstream business leaders or politicians) or race-identity protestors (or, grassroots protest organizers). He claims that both styles were big headed and selfish. West felt most were looking for the own personally gain and were sometimes reaching for attention with the black community. West felt that there was a more productive style and which he called “ race-transcending prophetic leaders” This leaders (according to West) would have to be a mix breed and consistent “ personal integrity and political savvy, moral vision and prudential judgment, courageous defiance and organizational patience.”

During the time of the book publishing West was very concerned current group of leaders in the black community. He felt none of them had positive qualities and really didn't appeal to certain communities. “ The present generation has yet to produce such a figure. We have neither an Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., nor a Ronald Dellums. This void sits like a festering sore at the center of black leadership – and the predicament of the disadvantaged in the United States and abroad worsens.” But West only points on Chicago's would then been Mayor Harold Washington and Rev. Jesse Jackson 1988 Presidential Campaign as what West would call race-transcending leaders. West was also vocal with his thoughts the rise of black conservatives in the mainstream media. West states that he does not agree with most of their idea but it was a start for some more voices in the community. He felt that

the more voice involved could lead to “ a more principled and passionate political discourse” within the black community.

“ The few valuable insights of the new black conservatives can be incorporated into a broader progressive perspective that utterly rejects their unwarranted conclusions and repugnant policies.” West calls for continued public support for affirmative action efforts, proposes aggressive efforts within the black community to “ transcend” anti-Semitic and xenophobic impulses, and urges increased candor within the community to address stereotypes regarding black sexuality and aesthetics. West provides a picture for younger blacks to give details about whom and what Malcolm X was to blacks 1980s and early 1990s. Ironically, the renewed interest in Malcolm X at the time probably also fueled the growing popularity of Minister Lewis Farrakhan. However, West fails to fully hit home in his observations regarding the renewal of Malcolm X’s image.

While Malcolm X’s charisma, the searing impact of his personal conversions, and the timeliness of his political stances all partially explain his re-emergence, West does not cite the black leadership vacuum as a compelling factor. The re-celebration of Malcolm X was probably the most powerful testament of the lack of inspiring leadership in the community, and the need of younger blacks to fill the void with the image of a powerful man who was killed a quarter-century earlier. In light of the events that have happened since the early 1990s – the Million Man March, the reported drop in crime and violence in African-American communities, the economic growth of the late 1990s, the controversial Presidential Election of 2000, and the September 11 terrorist attacks – Race Matters still effectively illustrates

contemporary trends that continue to affect the African-American community.