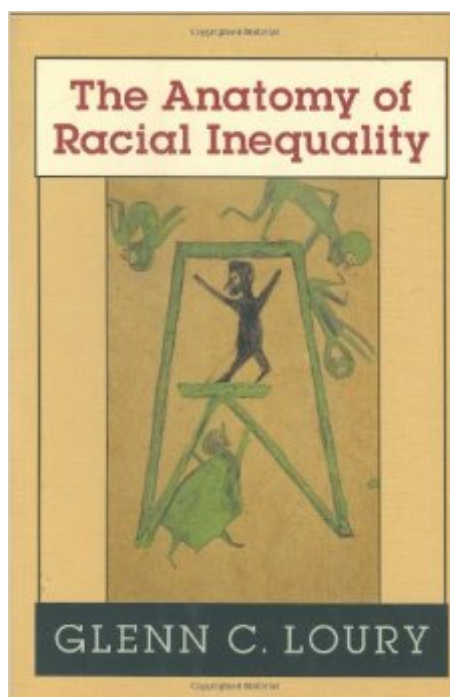


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The Anatomy Of Racial Inequality (W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures)



Synopsis

Speaking wisely and provocatively about the political economy of race, Glenn Loury has become one of our most prominent black intellectuals--and, because of his challenges to the orthodoxies of both left and right, one of the most controversial. A major statement of a position developed over the past decade, this book both epitomizes and explains Loury's understanding of the depressed conditions of so much of black society today--and the origins, consequences, and implications for the future of these conditions. Using an economist's approach, Loury describes a vicious cycle of tainted social information that has resulted in a self-replicating pattern of racial stereotypes that rationalize and sustain discrimination. His analysis shows how the restrictions placed on black development by stereotypical and stigmatizing racial thinking deny a whole segment of the population the possibility of self-actualization that American society reveres--something that many contend would be undermined by remedies such as affirmative action. On the contrary, this book persuasively argues that the promise of fairness and individual freedom and dignity will remain unfulfilled without some forms of intervention based on race. Brilliant in its account of how racial classifications are created and perpetuated, and how they resonate through the social, psychological, spiritual, and economic life of the nation, this compelling and passionate book gives us a new way of seeing--and, perhaps, seeing beyond--the damning categorization of race in America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Glen is an accomplished economist, and you can tell in the style of his writing: He is organized and sets up axioms and bullet points to clarify his arguments. I had the opportunity to hear him speak in 2002, and he is quite persuasive. In this book, Loury makes a case against liberal individualism, the popular assumption that liberalized, free market, "race-blind" policies will naturally dissolve unjust inequalities over time. In this discussion, Loury avoids the topic of overt "racial discrimination", which is easier to spot and has more obvious effects, and focuses instead on the strong, persistent, and self-replicating patterns caused by more subtle forces, which he terms "racial stigma". Stigma refers to bodily markings that are automatically cognitively perceived in all social interaction and which have strong social associations that affect perception and behavior of observers. This stigma, and the associations and stereotypes that are cognitively linked with it, acts to rationalize and sustain systematic racial inequality, perpetuating factors that drive formation of stigma. I believe that these arguments appear more compelling if the reader has previous knowledge of theories in cognitive psychology suggesting that mental associational categorization based on observed statistical tendencies applied to readily observable stimuli may form the basis of all thought and learning. Glen's arguments are not airtight, and he relies primarily on philosophical thought experiments for illustration; however, his explorations are useful, and a perspective of racial inequality that did not consider and respond to these perspectives would be naive and incomplete.[...]

I had the chance to take a class called the "Economics and Politics of Race and Inequality" with Professor Loury at Boston University. He had recently released this book, and of course, it was required reading. Loury presents many interesting ideas in this book, including the difference between racial discrimination (treating people differently because of their race) and racial stigma (the image that a person gives off because of their race). Loury argues that racial discrimination, which today is mostly 'discrimination in contact' (between two private people) and not 'discrimination in contract' (in a legal matter), is not what should be viewed as the end game. Of course, he thinks that ending racial discrimination would be great, but the more important thing to do, he says, is to work to end the stigma that black Americans have. Loury, when he used to be a conservative, was considered as a "conservative intellectual", a term that many would find contradictory. Even though his politics may have changed (he now considers himself more liberal, even supporting the 20 point plan in the recent Univ. of Michigan affirmative action case), his status as an intellectual hasn't changed. I had difficulty understanding this book and I had him there to explain it to me! Of course, I got it after a while, but Loury often talks on a level much higher than those not entrenched with the

subject will understand. This book, which is a recap of a series of lectures and speeches he gave, is for an intellectual by an intellectual. It's not a casual read on a summer afternoon. But if you're really interested in race relations and racial equality, pick it up. He lays out his arguments well, and even though I don't agree with him on most of his ideas, he's a fascinating guy.

I found in this book a refreshingly different take on the current issue of racial inequality in the US. I had heard Lounsbury say on the radio something to the effect of that if you accept the premise that there is no fundamental difference between the races, then how can you not be outraged by the percentage of blacks in jail versus the number of whites (or outraged about many other very telling statistics included in the book). The reason we are not outraged, is that somehow it has become 'reasonable' for this outcome to occur, and we don't see it as out of the ordinary. He describes the mechanism for this as a racial stigma associated with blacks. The book describes how this is different than the more commonly discussed discrimination, and how it is a systematic / cultural mindset bias more than just a behavioral one. He develops this thesis of a racial stigma well, in a readable and convincing fashion.

The current issue of the Journal of Economic Literature (December 2002) has a review of Lounsbury's book by Steven Raphael (Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California at Berkeley) on pages 1202 - 1214. The JEL is a peer reviewed journal; the article is very thoughtful and well written. Raphael's article ends with the following sentences: "While many may take issue with Lounsbury's analysis of racial inequality in the United States, a careful study of this book is sure to challenge one's assumptions and to force the reader to think more deeply about the stubbornly and profoundly persistent and profound social disadvantage of African-American. On this basis alone, the book is a must-read." (page 1213) The JEL arrived this morning and I ordered a copy today.

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