

## Foreword

To a microbiologist, skin color is trivial—a minuscule genetic variation that determines the shade of frosting on the physiological cake. We in the human family share not only a common biological heritage—cut us and we bleed—but also common behavioral tendencies. We are the slightly varied leaves of one tree. We sense the world, develop language, and feel hunger through identical mechanisms. Coming from opposite sides of the globe, we know how to read one another's smiles and frowns. Whether we live in the Arctic or in the tropics, we prefer sweet tastes to sour, we divide the color spectrum into similar colors, and we feel drawn to behaviors that produce and protect offspring. As members of one species, we affiliate, conform, reciprocate favors, punish offenses, organize hierarchies of status and grieve a child's death. A visitor from outer space could drop in anywhere and find humans playing sports and games, dancing and feasting, singing and worshipping, laughing and crying, living in families, and forming groups. To be human is to be more alike than different.

But what a difference the frosting makes, as this book convincingly explains. Although racial groupings have little biological reality—nature does not cluster humans into neat, nonoverlapping categories—race assuredly has social reality. Much as we organize what is actually a color continuum into what we perceive as distinct colors, so we cannot resist categorizing people into groups, and then associating ourselves with “us,” and contrasting ourselves with “them.” We label people of widely varying ancestry as “black” or “white,” as if such categories were black-and-white.

Is the potency of race in America nevertheless waning? Increasing numbers of us do not fit neatly into established racial or ethnic catego-

ries. Witness Tiger Woods calling himself "Cablinasian," describing his Caucasian, black, Indian, and Asian ancestry. And compare Tiger's reception into the previously white-dominated sport of golf—accompanied by multimillion-dollar endorsements and hordes of adoring fans—with Jackie Robinson's epithet-laden reception into the previously white-dominated sport of baseball. If you or I were to repeat *Black Like Me* author John Howard Griffin's experiment in changing skin color, we would surely experience a kinder, gentler America. Much less often would we sit without service at a lunch counter. Rarely would we be called "nigger." Never would we see separate drinking fountains for "colored" and "white."

As recently as 1942, most Americans agreed that "there should be separate sections for Negroes on streetcars and buses." Today, the question would seem bizarre. In 1942, fewer than a third of all whites (only 1 in 50 in the South) supported school integration; by 1980, support for it was 90 percent. Considering what a thin slice of history is covered by the years since 1942, or even since slavery was practiced, the changes are dramatic. Old-fashioned racism is now gauche.

Yet beneath this nicer veneer, notes social psychologist James Waller in this well-argued book, racism—"modern racism"—lurks. It is subtler, yet, like arsenic in wine, still potent. Those of us in the economically dominant majority can perhaps identify the phenomenon from times that someone has been superficially nice to us, while forcing an appropriate smile, before snubbing us or taking offense over a slight. Now that blatant bigotry is boorish, we treat one another with greater civility. And yet ...

- In one survey of students at 390 colleges and universities, 53 percent of African-American students felt excluded from social activities.
- When white students indicate racial attitudes while hooked up to a supposed lie detector, they admit to prejudice that they deny when answering standard surveys.
- A videotaped shove that looks "playful" to most white people when done by a white man much more often looks "violent" when done by a black man.
- Although we condemn racial bias, we often prefer what is familiar, similar, and comfortable.

- When "primed" with briefly flashed images associated with African-Americans, people who espouse little or no prejudice often react with increased hostility to an experimenter's annoying request. Such is the knee-jerk "prejudice habit" that often hijacks our emotions.

And such is the changing state of racism across America that Waller and his students encounter face to face on their cross-country travels as they seek out African-American urban pastors and residents, Hispanic-Americans, Native Americans, and Asian immigrants. With deep empathy, Waller gives voice to their experiences of 1990s-style racism.

Yet to those who say, "Show me the data!," Waller, the social scientist, offers more than true stories. He also offers the truth of new experiments, of Census facts, and of sensitive national surveys. His bottom-line message is that we have hardly reached the end of racism. Rather, as one of his students summarized, "life still sucks for minorities and racism is a supervirus that persists by mutating." But Waller does not leave us despairing. With his "seven principles for racial reconciliation" he points the way to "finding unity in diversity."

The appearance of this book just months after President Clinton beckoned Americans to a "great and unprecedented conversation about race" could hardly be more timely. As racial diversity continues to increase in the decades to come—the Census Bureau projects that non-Hispanic whites will decline from 69 to 62 percent of the population between 1995 and 2025—the need for such a conversation will not diminish. Kudos to James Waller for this fresh, passionate, and informed analysis of America's new racism, and how to combat it.

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