

Tillman, J.A., Jr. with Tillman, M. Why America Needs Racism and Poverty: An Examination of the Group Exclusivity Compulsion in America as the Natural Enemy of Rational Social Change in Race and Poverty Relations. Bristol, MA: Four Winds Press.

OVERVIEW

The authors suggest that

The conflict between America's avowed policy of equality of opportunity and her institutionalization of arbitrary group exclusivity motifs which are designed to build a closed, not open, society is at the bottom of what has been called the perennial American dilemma in intergroup relations.

James Tillman, a social scientist and the director of several anti-poverty programs, disavows membership in either liberal or conservative approaches to racism and poverty. Neither is he an equalitarian, but he believes that social stratification can be just. He sees himself as an American pragmatist.

What is unique about this work among books on racism is that it begins with an anthropology that is theological in nature. The heart of racism is seen as the tendency of human nature to secure its identity by endowing its social group with an exclusivity denying entrance and implying inferiority to negative reference groups.

Liberalism's dogma of man's perfectibility is rejected. "The rhetoric of optimistic liberalism is dangerously deceptive...man is manageable, but not perfectible." The "self-defeating optimism and naïveté of contemporary liberalism" must be replaced with "social realism." (pp.iii, xi)

The conservative's belief in the righteousness of the system leads to the use of force and suppression to maintain order. Those "have nots" who rebel should be "viewed and treated as negative tokens." (pp.6-7).

The liberal works to help the "have nots" in a way that may "tinker with the system" but will not threaten the privileged status of liberals themselves. Liberalism's help ensures that the poor will not become rebels while the means encourages their remaining marginal members of society needing

continuing aid.

What the Tillmans believe (James Tillman is now deceased) is that racism is only extinguished when individuals find that their identity is a higher reality than social comparison. The social class in America that is most oppressive and that needs most to change its mind is the middle class.

This particular book is primarily about neighborhood action. It argues for power at the grass roots. "To both the blacks and the poor, the central message of this book is direct, simple and clear: organize yourselves and take power if you must" (p. 255). This is the American way, as the authors see it. Only a coalition of interests in the lower class, with good will where it can be found among the middle and upper classes, can bring about effective change.

"America has a few years...to rid herself of the idolatries of racism and economic exclusivity..." Otherwise "she is doomed to an early and certain death as a democracy" (p. 260). It is the authors' belief, however, that

Black community viability—initiated and controlled by blacks and...ASSISTED by America's white remnant—will improve, extend and consolidate the American experiment....Blacks who are produced by such contemporary peoplehood may often be called ambitious, clannish, arrogant and pushy. Only such people, however, can make and keep whites sane and honest. Interaction between such blacks and America's whites can only produce a stronger and more vital and more vigorous America! (pp.266-67)

IMPLICATIONS

- The Tillmans argue for the impoverishment of both American conservatism and liberalism, challenging all to examine the basis of one's identity, security, and social philosophy.
- The authors, in other works and workshops, argue for the need of a theological understanding of human nature and institutions. Society cannot destroy racism without dealing with the ultimate nature of human beings.
- The authors challenge theologians to examine the relevance and contextualization of their theology.
- This book offers a theoretical means for dealing with individual and

corporate racism and for teaching cooperation on more than a superficial level.

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