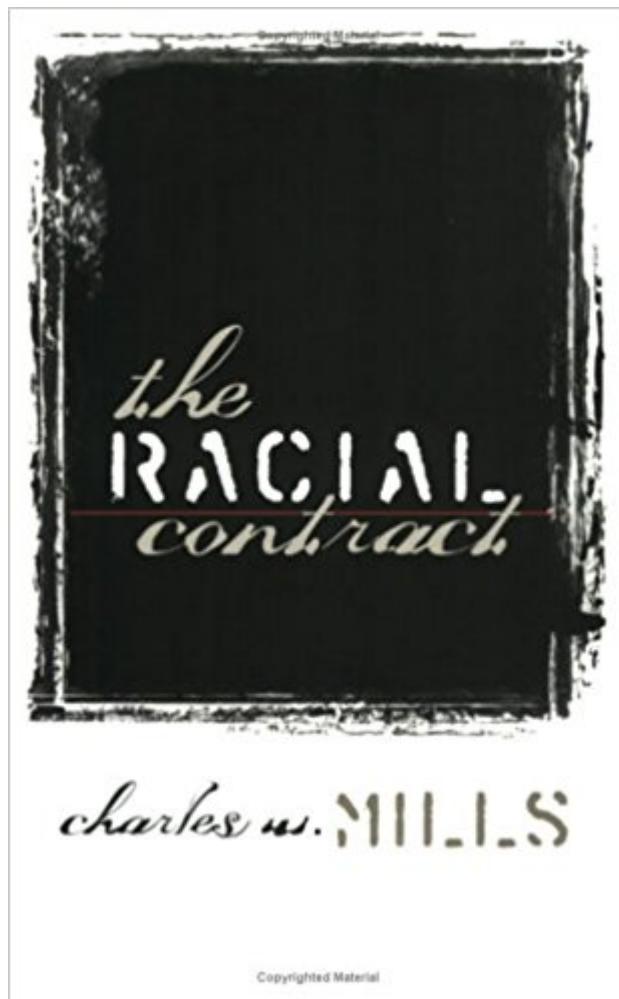


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The Racial Contract



Synopsis

The Racial Contract puts classic Western social contract theory, deadpan, to extraordinary radical use. With a sweeping look at the European expansionism and racism of the last five hundred years, Charles W. Mills demonstrates how this peculiar and unacknowledged "contract" has shaped a system of global European domination: how it brings into existence "whites" and "non-whites," full persons and sub-persons, how it influences white moral theory and moral psychology; and how this system is imposed on non-whites through ideological conditioning and violence. The Racial Contract argues that the society we live in is a continuing white supremacist state. Holding up a mirror to mainstream philosophy, this provocative book explains the evolving outline of the racial contract from the time of the New World conquest and subsequent colonialism to the written slavery contract, to the "separate but equal" system of segregation in the twentieth-century United States. According to Mills, the contract has provided the theoretical architecture justifying an entire history of European atrocity against non-whites, from David Hume's and Immanuel Kant's claims that blacks had inferior cognitive power, to the Holocaust, to the kind of imperialism in Asia that was demonstrated by the Vietnam War. Mills suggests that the ghettoization of philosophical work on race is no accident. This work challenges the assumption that mainstream theory is itself raceless. Just as feminist theory has revealed orthodox political philosophy's invisible white male bias, Mills's explication of the racial contract exposes its racial underpinnings.

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Customer Reviews

"Mills uses the idea of the social contract to argue that racially structured discrimination is a norm, rather than a deviation from the ideal. . . . Framed by a lucid discussion of the modern global exploitation of nonwhites is Mills's appeal to standpoint epistemology to maintain that the racial contract is a naturalized version of social contract theory."⁴ •Choice "An ambitious book. . . . Mill's racial contract thesis is so convincing that one wonders why it hasn't been explored until now in the precincts of mainstream political philosophy. But that's his point. The racial contract's effectiveness lies in its very invisibility."⁵ •In These Times "This compelling and even explosive book argues that white racism is itself a political system with its own levels of rights, duties, benefits, burdens, etc. . . . Sure to provoke a heated debate far beyond the field of political philosophy, this bold and wide-ranging study makes a clear and convincing case for the view that systematic racial oppression was not an anomaly sullyng otherwise universalistic assumptions about individual rights, but the context in which theorizing about such rights occurred."⁶ •The Front Table "An important work of philosophy that is at the same time short and accessible. . . . Mills succeeds admirably in arguing his case for the existence of a racial contract. That he can do this in a way that is rigorous, passionate, and accessible is an important achievement."⁷ •Philosophy in Review "The Racial Contract is an excellent book. . . . It is a testament to Mills's expertise as a philosopher, a scholar, and a downright intelligent writer that he has managed to pull off so comprehensive, informative, and persuasive a work in an elegant 133 pages (excluding notes). . . . He achieves this explanation through some of the clearest prose I have encountered in recent philosophical literature."⁸ •Lewis Gordon, Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism "A very important book. . . . The Racial Contract has the potential to radically challenge many of us to reevaluate how we think about social contract theory. As well, to take the arguments that Mills makes is to be prepared to rethink about the concept of race and the structure of our political systems. This is a very important book indeed, and should be a welcome addition to the ongoing discussions surrounding social contract theory."⁹ •Teaching Philosophy "This is a significant and compelling work. . . . Mills turns our attention to the racial domination and exploitation that have been equally pervasive features of the history of liberalism. . . . A major contribution."¹⁰ •Ethics "Offers a bold conceptualization of the racial order and a critique of the way it has been (mis)represented within the domain of scholarship. . . . Mills cuts through the shibboleths and the mystifications that pervade both popular and academic discourse on race. . . . The Racial Contract offers a theoretical framework that ought to serve as the starting point for any serious study of race in American society. . . . At a time when 'the epistemology of ignorance' is ascendant, we can be grateful for a book that speaks the unpalatable truth."¹¹ •American Journal of Sociology "Courageously creative"¹² •Social Theory and Practice "I

recommend this book as an important and timely reminder of the ways in which a philosophy which ignores race is bound up with the privileging of whiteness. This is a lesson that is still to be learnt, even within the context of feminist philosophy." •Women's Philosophy Review "Mills's work on the Racial Contract is a major contribution to modern critical social and political thought, and will become an important, widely discussed work. It exposes, to devastating effect, the unacknowledged racial presuppositions of the entire social contract tradition, which is to say, all of liberal political theory for the past four centuries." •Robert Paul Wolff, University of Massachusetts, Amherst "Fish don't see water, men don't see patriarchy, and white philosophers don't see white supremacy. We can do little about fish. Carole Pateman and others have made the sexual contract visible for those who care to look. Now Charles Mills has made it equally clear how whites dominate people of color, even (or especially) when they have no such intention. He asks whites not to feel guilty, but rather to do something much more difficult •understand and take responsibility for a structure which they did not create but still benefit from." •Jennifer Hochschild, Princeton University "Like Melville's Benito Cereno, this short, explosive book unflinchingly explores the centrality of race•both in its utterly open brutality and in its remarkable ability to remain hidden•to the history of the Western nation-state. Sure to provoke a heated debate far beyond the field of political philosophy, this bold and wide-ranging study makes a clear and convincing case for the view that systemic racial oppression was not an anomaly sullying otherwise universalistic assumptions about individual rights, but the context in which theorizing about such rights occurred." •David Roediger, University of Minnesota "This is a significant and compelling work. In the modest compass of an extended essay, Mills succeeds in altering our view of a central strand of modern political thought, the social contract tradition. Inspired by the historical success of socialist critics in placing class and socioeconomic inequality on the political-theoretical agenda and by the ongoing success of feminist critics in doing the same for gender and patriarchy, Mills turns our attention to the racial domination and exploitation that have been equally pervasive features of the history of liberalism." •Thomas McCarthy, Northwestern University

I'm a big fan of a few authors whose great work involves making sense of the massive stockpile of collected historical data by spotlighting the logic thread that connects chunks of it into potent influential viewpoints. The Racial Contract by Charles Mills is the one that rules them all, with the author revealing the foundational support structure upon which all Western philosophy and formal moral ethics theory is based. Pointedly, Mills reminds us that Immanuel Kant thought I was a subhuman, and he is the most important moral theorist in all of western thought. If you can imagine

the movie The Matrix, this book functions like a “what the Matrix is, how it functions the way it does, and how we can free ourselves from it” bible. It’s intended to be the long missing component of Western Philosophy, a topic which can never be fully understood without seeing it properly through the lens of ‘whites-exploiting-nonwhites’ that it was created from in the first place. The world is the way it is today directly because of the global domination of the Europeans conquering, colonializing, and enslavement of non-Europeans under a White Supremacist banner (originally Christian, but it quickly morphed away from that, since the exploited could always just convert their way out of exploitation, losing the conqueror potential revenue, and we can’t have THAT). This “White Peril” savagely plagued every nation on earth and took two forms: 1) the initial physical assault of the European war machine designed to break, “season, and smash the nonwhites into a submissive state ripe for exploitation” 2) the ideological indoctrination of that submissive state on the mental level. For the former, Mills was kind enough to coldly, clinically, chillingly, remind us of certain devastating examples, and even pull others from the deep dark of centuries past. In the latter “the era we are currently in” he deftly points out the many, many examples of how the breaking has become fully part of our cultural identity, as the conqueror so wished. But the effects of chattel enslavement, jim crow, and institutional disenfranchisement upon the exploited classes are well known to students of Western history from that distressed viewpoint. What was far more interesting to me was how these diabolical practices affected the oppressor himself. One of the perks of being the signatory of the Racial Contract is a deliberately imposed veil of ignorance, enabling one to pretend that the vast atrocities that make up the skeletal structure of Western Civilization never happened, with the gross societal imbalances being natural or genetic in origin as the official stance supported by all influential Eurocentric institutions. This personally went a LONG way towards understanding certain behaviors, like why they get mad whenever their historical wrongs are brought up and act as if it is somehow unfair, why they think the weird term “playing the race card” is a legitimate tool of argument, why they get instantly defensive whenever they hear members of the exploited classes celebrating and affirming their own skills, talents & worth, and even why they feel that the current state of a broken exploited people is the way they’ve always been. Most of all, The Racial Contract showed how we will never finally overcome racism while the proposed solution from the conqueror class is for the exploited to simply shut up talking about it and accept the state its members find themselves in, as lesser persons requiring the conqueror’s merciful, legitimizing gaze to allow them into the “club” of favor. Of course to continue in this state is unacceptable, but the only way it can be reversed is for that side to willingly set aside its

ill-gotten artificial privileges and, as J.A. Rogers would say, transform ÂçÂ œfrom superman to man.ÂçÂ • In order to do this he must confront himself, recognize who he is, what he has done, and want to self-correct. He will have to go through pain to purge himself of the mantle of ÂçÂ œWhiteness,ÂçÂ • the political ideology of White Supremacy that he built this Eurocentric Society upon. And realistically why would he do that? He's oft demonstrated that he would much rather create a fantasylandÂ WhitopiaÂ and live there, reinforcing his supremacist self indoctrination with like minds, than deal with the truth of the reality he created. MillsÂçÂ ™ book shows us how truly difficult curing our society of its Greatest Disease will truly be.

This is a landmark publication, and one which will be best appreciated in retrospect, after the people of the United States have accepted the subversive power of an inverted epistemology. This may be a book well-appreciated in certain academic settings, but it deserves a much more far-reaching readership that will allow people unaware of their own complicity in our current system of privilege to admit that simply being passive is unacceptable in the context of oppression. This would require, first and foremost, exactly what Mills demands: admission of the fact that an insidious system of privilege exists that ultimately favors one group of people (white)--in myriad ways--relative to others (black/brown). By doing so, it shows that a system of dominance which may bend in the direction of fascism still exists, and that resistance to this admission is very much akin to complicity. It is succinct and to the point, and it seems that Mills has cut out any words which aren't integral to making his point(s). Particularly instructive are statements such as "white imagination" vis a vis the "real life alarm" which brown/black has in the face of this oppression. This admission encourages the reader to see that white perception--commonly perceived, whether consciously or not, as the "right" perception--may actually be the one which is distorted. It also asserts a fact which may be more evident to people of color--that when we talk about equality, especially in the context of the Constitution, we are talking about white equality, since everybody else is assumed to have been excluded. This clearly illustrates the presumption of inferiority; if the Constitution had been concerned with equality for all, why has it required amendment? By doing so, he shows that our system's discrimination is deeply embedded in our society, making it easier for white people to be complicit in the dominance without taking accountability for that attitude (hence, the importance of the inverted epistemology, ie the necessity to maintain ignorance.) This book has the most value for (consciously) well-meaning white people who simply cannot see that racism is not over, and that brown/black peoples--and in the US, in particular African-Americans--are still oppressed in myriad ways which remain invisible (to some white people.) This book will have little value to the overt

racist or white supremacist who eschews any authentic consideration of progress towards equality, since ironically they perceive the inequality and simply agree that it should be perpetuated. Not for the faint of heart color-blind racist: there may be more truth here than you can handle. Strongly recommended, not just for academic centers and philosophy classes, but for anyone embedded in this society who wishes forward movement. The first step to progress is the acknowledgement of the problem, and this book does it succinctly, honestly, and with a view towards movement towards equality. This should be required reading in a general undergraduate curriculum, and possibly even in our high schools.

As a white guy formerly unaware/in denial of the structural racism that's still going strong in society, this book really helped me to understand both this and the other inequalities of society. Other reviewers have definitely done the book justice, but I will also recommend that one reads after this Racism without Racists by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, because as much as Mills does an excellent job of communicating the gist of white supremacy and racist ideology, one might still subscribe to elements of the racial ideology if they are not aware of what it constitutes. Racism without Racists fills in the blanks that this book necessarily leaves in order to achieve its "punchy" nature and widespread reading.

This book should be read by all inhabitants of the planet earth! Excellent book. We all need our consciousnesses raised about the race problem in this world.....one that goes back hundreds of years to when Europeans basically established that all who were not of their background were "savages" of no importance. So much loss. The Spanish for example wiped out tens of millions in Central America, burned the Aztec library to the ground, all in the name of "civilization"....the might Pope and his Catholic Church. The only country in the world not colonized was Japan which itself became a colonizer with its own genocide. This is a very short book, but one with a context and message going back for centuries. As I mentioned, required reading for anyone who wants to stoke their conscience, get out of their comfort zone. I've been clueless for much of my life...

totally inspiring -- this book changed my life. thank you Mills!!!!

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