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# Justice Denied

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**THE BLACK MAN IN WHITE AMERICA**

**Edited by**

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**and**

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## Preface

The history of the Negro in America is the history of America written in vivid and bloody terms. . . . It is the history of men who tried to adjust themselves to a world whose laws, customs, and instruments of force were leveled against them. The Negro is America's metaphor.

—Richard Wright

Racial conflict may be discussed more widely today than ever before, but it can hardly be considered a creation of the sixties. Although each new generation sees it in a slightly different perspective, the "Negro Problem," as black novelist Richard Wright recognized so clearly, has been an enduring feature of life in America. From the first painful encounter between the man ripped from African soil and the man determined to make him a slave, racism has been a part of our institutions and laws, our culture and ourselves.

The encounter between black and white has increased in complexity with each decade. Often it has erupted in sudden, terrifying violence; but it has also produced a more subtle kind of violence: that seen in the bitterness and frustration of the generations of black people who, instead of taking up weapons, have sought to "adjust themselves," as Wright says, to a land and a people who wanted no part of them. Ever since they were brought to the New World in chains, black people have wanted only to become citizens with all the liberties others enjoy as a birthright. But America has been hostile to this aspiration, and in its hostility, it has made the black man a symbol of its own limitations.

No single book could hope to describe fully the clash between black man and white America, and this one does not pretend to. Rather, this anthology attempts to clarify certain aspects of the confrontation by

describing the price black people have been forced to pay for attempted "adjustment" to the heavy burden of prejudice, and by considering some of the strategies they have used to fight racism. It begins with a discussion of the damage done to West African societies during the worst years of the slave trade and concludes with the program of the Black Panther Party. In other words, it moves from the nightmare of slavery to the militant demands for self-determination of the black liberation movement.

But the book is neither an historical survey nor a thorough-going sociological investigation. It is a series of essays which reveal the black man's reaction to the powerful and intransigent forces arrayed against him; the results of the ordeal of being black in the United States; and some of the moments of greatest agony and success.

There are voices from the past. In the first section, for example, "Jenny Proctor's Story" conveys a sense of slavery as a day-to-day reality for a woman who, for a large part of her life, was considered someone's chattel. One may turn to a selection from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* to gain an intimate and vivid sense of the strength of the slaves' desire for freedom. Or one may consider W. E. B. DuBois' study of how the Black Codes of Reconstruction brought slavery back to the South immediately after the conclusion of "The War to End Slavery."

There are also contemporary voices. St. Clair Drake's long essay gives a lucid picture of what it means—economically, educationally, medically—to be a black man after 350 years in America. Eldridge Cleaver discusses the connection between the war in Vietnam and the war raging in the ghettos of this nation. And Malcolm X's speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet," is offered as an eloquent appraisal of the decision which black people face each day: whether to accept the gradual approach to social equality and content themselves with small gains, or to commit violence against a land in which democracy has, for them, never really functioned.

The question at the heart of Malcolm X's speech is the focus of the anthology. As many historians have noted, the conflict between working for gains within the established conventions of American society and the possibility of taking a radical stance outside those conventions is a conflict deep within the black experience. It was present in the decision of some slaves to acquiesce and in the decision of others to rebel; in the debate between moderate and aggressive black abolitionists; in the friction between those who would set up a separate black state and those who would trust in America as they found it. It operates today in the conflict between nonviolence and militancy, between "cultural nation-

ism" and a revolutionary political posture, between "black capitalism" and the Black Panthers.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this conflict and of the changes it undergoes with each new era is the controversy between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois at the beginning of this century. In his own time Washington was important enough to become an advisor to Presidents. In our time, however, he has become known as an advocate of compromise and accommodation. On the other hand, DuBois, shunned by many in his own day, is now appreciated as a man who resisted compromise and whose stern response to Washington contains a sentence which stands as the most prophetic insight into what lay ahead. "The problem of the twentieth century," DuBois wrote, "is the problem of the color-line,—the relationship of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."

Filled with racial antagonism and bitterness, our century has been closer in spirit to DuBois' prophecy than to Washington's counsels of accommodation. The flight of blacks to Northern cities has, more often than not, only intensified patterns of rejection and racism. The small-town lynchings have virtually disappeared, only to be replaced by the police-suppressed insurrection in the slum-infested metropolis. The chronic hunger of black people in the rural South persists alongside the chronic hunger of black people in the urban ghetto. In one of the most incisive judgments made upon the quality of racial existence in this country of immense wealth and yet grinding misery is that of Ralph Ellison, who saw that to be black in America was to be "invisible." To be black—despite promises from politicians, the best advice of liberal well-wishers, and tardy, half-hearted acts of Congress—was either not to be seen at all, or only to be seen as an object of concern or of anxiety, as something eliciting either sympathy or hatred.

*Justice Denied* does not try to make the black American "visible." That would be more than presumptuous; given the nature of American society, it would be impossible. Instead, it tries to indicate the kind of forces that have produced this invisibility as well as those that have resisted it. And it tries to show why, because of the wide variety of forces bearing down upon the black man, the twentieth century belongs, so to speak, to DuBois and those who shared his pessimism about what it held for black people.

William M. Chace  
Peter Collier

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