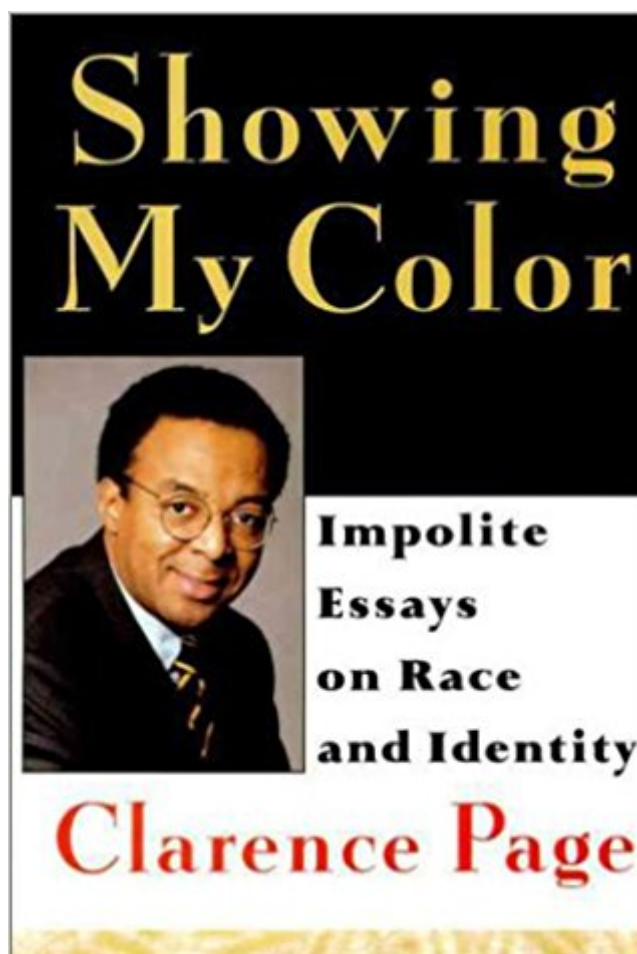


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Showing My Color: Impolite Essays On Race In America



Synopsis

The Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist explores key issues of race, gender, and ethnic identity that have arisen since the civil rights reforms of the 1960s, with essays on the pervasive nature of racism, the politics of race, and more. 40,000 first printing. \$75,000 ad/promo. Tour.

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Customer Reviews

Despite the title, this book contains far more about race than gender, and Page, a syndicated columnist based at the Chicago Tribune, is not so much impolite as pragmatic, a skeptical liberal whose views are shaped by experience. Thus, while he recognizes the value of blacks-only organizations and warns that many who call for integration really want assimilation, he also fears that a wholesale retreat into blackness harms black folk. He observes trenchantly that Nation of Islam minister Louis Farrakhan succeeds by wrapping middle-class values "in the trappings of the racial outlaw." Though he'd hardly say that racism and black rage have dissipated, Page also argues that the worst problem facing black Americans is the "failure . . . to take advantage of opportunities that already have opened up." He also analyzes pressures facing middle-class blacks, touches on the relations between blacks and Jews, defends affirmative action and muses on the prospects of a miscegenated America. The book is billed as original essays, but it sometimes reads like blenderized columns, lucid but less compelling than it could be. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

All-new essays on racial politics from the black commentator you've read in the Chicago Tribune, heard on National Public Radio's Sunday Morning Edition, or seen on the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Not one of these "Essays on Race and Identity" could be considered even slightly impolite. Quite to the contrary, they're all very reasoned and thoughtful. Mr. Page fearlessly addresses various aspects of racial politics and racial identity - both through his own experiences and through the eyes of contemporary figures - and it's definitely well worth reading. We have to keep in mind that Clarence Page was born in 1947. It's hard to imagine how de-facto segregated America was back then. In most areas of the country he wouldn't have been allowed to go to my school, live in my neighborhood, or even sit near me on a public bus. And yet, despite the many societal barriers, he managed to become a Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist for the Chicago Tribune. Most of America's legal barriers had fallen by the time Page was graduating from college at age 22 - Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, Rosa Parks' famous bus ride in 1955, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act - but it probably didn't feel that way to an aspiring black journalist. Even at age 49 when his book was published, neither he nor anybody else could have imagined this country could possibly elect a black president a mere 12 years later. So it goes without saying that a person like Clarence Page, who managed to become successful in the face of such obstacles, would be writing from a different perspective than a white person born around the same time. Despite the author's good intentions, there's a significant misstatement in the book. It's based on flawed assumptions both about people's duty to intermix and about the statistics of racial intermixing. Noting that people were more apt to question seeing clusters of black students than when seeing clusters of white students, on page 63 the author writes, "A study by the School of Education at the University of Michigan documented this paradox. After surveying 6,000 students at 390 colleges in 1987 and 1991, it found white students were more guilty of failing to integrate with other students than nonwhite students were." There follows a list of "integration percentages" by race. First, no student in a free country should be considered "guilty of failing to integrate" with other races or ethnicities, regardless of how he or she chooses to recruit new friends. One would hope Mr. Page's wording was merely "inartful," because the alternative could only be that he imagines today's students should be called to task for their failure to recruit a sufficiently diverse group of friends. Second, Mr. Page's guilt ratio (white people "more guilty" of failing to integrate) is a mathematical artifact that's driven not by racial proclivities but by the disparate sizes of the groups. To see this, imagine 100 men and 10 women are placed on an island, with every person having exactly 10 friends. The maximum integration would be for

each woman to choose only male friends (100% female integration). However, because of the scarcity of women, it still means that only 10 of the men can have even one female friend, leaving 90 men with no female friends (10% male integration). Simply put, we have to conclude that these men are "guilty of failing to integrate" with women at a "guilt ratio" of 10-to-1. The above example illustrates an improbable extreme of maximum integration, but note that Mr. Page's guilt ratio would not change in the case of moderate or even minimal integration. For example, instead of assuming each woman chooses all male friends, let's assume that just 2 women choose one male friend each (20% female integration) which means only 2 out of 100 men can have a female friend (2% male integration). Clearly, the integration percentages are significantly lower but, significantly, the guilt ratio continues to be 10-to-1. It's easy to understand why Mr. Page would fall into this trap. After all, when observing any form of clustering (whites not appearing to intermix with blacks or men not appearing to intermix with women) we perceive it through the filter of human proclivities. Knowing that the proclivities often exist, we can't help assuming the numbers must somehow reflect them. The moral here is not that the issue doesn't exist but that simplistic sound-bite statistics simply can't measure it when the groups are different sizes. Perhaps the ultimate test would be whether the clustering Mr. Page was describing would appear even if the trait being measured were not detectable. Fortunately, there is a trait that easily lends itself to this thought experiment: We know, for example, that roughly 86% of the American population has blood type A or O, with 14% having blood type B or AB. Nobody imagines that people pick their friends by blood type, but a mathematical analysis would reveal that the B/AB group is about 6 times more likely to have friends from the A/O group as the other way around. Question: Is one blood group more guilty of "failing to integrate" than the other? Answer: No. In summary, "Showing My Color" is a valuable contribution to the literature on being black in white America. Except for the flawed conclusions about the measurability of racial clustering, it's an excellent book. John Holmes P.S. As a point of interest, when I first read the book in 1996, I wrote to Clarence Page explaining what I've described here. Disappointingly, he wrote back with something along the lines of, "You do the math your way, and I'll do it my way."

Educational and a great insight of the black and white relationship in America. Read this book and you'll learn something, no matter who you are.

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