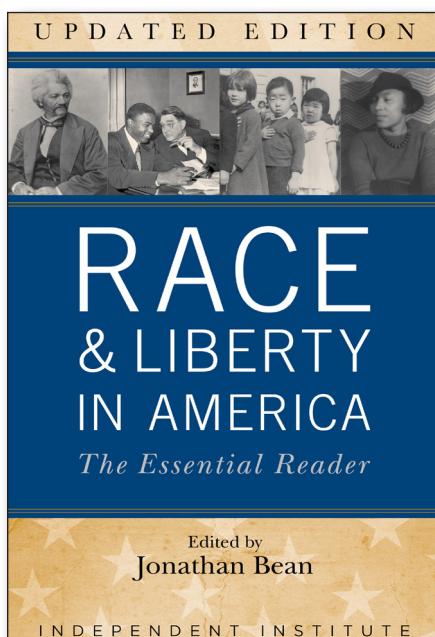


Race and Liberty in America

The Essential Reader | Updated Edition

EDITED BY JONATHAN BEAN



Book Highlights

- **In the fight for freedom and justice, consistent moral arguments are crucial for long-term success.** Although Thomas Jefferson was a slaveholder, that fact did not undermine the natural rights theory set forth in the Declaration of Independence. In fact, James Forten, a free black who fought in the Revolutionary War, borrowed Jefferson's phrases when he petitioned against a state bill that would have deprived blacks of rights in Pennsylvania. Frederick Douglass, who was born a slave, criticized Americans for failing to live up to the ideals of the Declaration and the Constitution.
- **The Left and Right were "wrong on race." Classical liberals were the only consistent opponents of state-sponsored racial discrimination in the United States.** Conservatives advocated the "state right" to discriminate in favor of native-born whites. On the left, the progressive credo might read: government was sometimes the problem but always the solution. Both groups favored the collective over the individual.
- **Classical liberals saw government as the problem, not the solution to racial discrimination.** Government laws not only upheld slavery and segregation, of course, but they also restricted the right of businesses to hire racial minorities and immigrants. Left and Right opposed "open borders," whereas classical liberals staunchly defended immigration: whether Chinese or Czech, immigrants had a "natural right" to migrate, they argued. Fearing further state-sponsored racism, classical liberals from Louis Marshall (1910s) to the NAACP (1960s) and Ward Connerly (2000s) sought to rid government classification of race entirely.
- **Religion was a dominant motive for many leaders of the antislavery movement.** Frederick Douglass, an ordained minister, used references to God in rebuking—and inspiring—his fellow Christians. Lewis Tappan used his church ties to create a network of antislavery activists. Senator Joseph Hawley opposed the Chinese Exclusion Act partly because of his missionary work. Louis Marshall's devout Judaism impelled him to fight for free immigration and against Jim Crow laws. Branch Rickey explained his recruitment of baseball legend Jackie Robinson as "a call from God." And Martin Luther King, Jr., in his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech, demanded justice for "all of God's children."
- **The Constitution was central to the classical liberal struggle for individual freedom.** When government denied people their civil rights, classical liberals took to the courts, using arguments based on the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Justice John Marshall Harlan captured the classical liberal

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view of the law when, as the lone dissenter in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), he wrote, “Our Constitution is color-blind.” President Calvin Coolidge publicly rebuked a white racist who objected to a black Republican running for Congress: “Our Constitution guarantees equal rights to all our citizens, without discrimination on account of race or color.”

- **Capitalism punishes racial discrimination in the marketplace.** Left-wing radicals argue that capitalism is inherently racist. Classical liberals turn this view upside down: Capitalism undermines racism by penalizing those who act on their “taste for discrimination.” Firms willing to recruit workers and market their goods and services without regard to color or national origin have a competitive advantage. Streetcar companies, to take but one example, fought segregated seating because it added to their cost of doing business.
- **The new wave of “equity” policies—the “E” in “DEI” (“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”)—has replaced “affirmative action” as the shibboleth of choice for those implementing racial preferences.** Classical liberals—America’s most principled anti-racist standard-bearers—have their work cut out for them, especially with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and bestselling books like *How to Be an Antiracist* (Ibram Kendi), *Between the World and Me* (Ta-Nehisi Coates), and *White Fragility* (Robin DiAngelo). Fortunately, the work of a new generation of public intellectuals challenges the simplistic assumptions animating the ideas of “equity” activists.

Synopsis

In this long-awaited updated edition of *Race & Liberty in America: The Essential Reader*, editor Jonathan Bean draws on timeless and urgent insights from America’s most principled anti-racist standard-bearers—and they could not be more relevant for our troubled and polarized time. In 2009, when *Race &*

Liberty in America: The Essential Reader was originally published, there was a spirit of optimism surrounding race relations. Fifteen years later, a far different spirit prevails: one fraught with tensions, many regrettably familiar and some new. Which raises the question: *What happened?* And more importantly: *How can we set things right?*

With new contributions from Thomas Sowell, Coleman Hughes, Thomas Chatterton Williams, Kenny Xu, David Bernstein, Wilfred Reilly, and Ilya Somin—as well as a plethora of primary source evidence from recent landmark US Supreme Court decisions—Bean champions the values of *colorblindness*, *freedom*, and *equal constitutional protection* for *all* individuals—regardless of race.

If you’re ready to trade the tired and failed left-versus-right politics for timeless principles that actually work and uplift societies, read *Race & Liberty in America*.

Antislavery (1776–1853)

Chapter 1 examines the early antislavery movement. Classical liberal voices drew upon the Constitution, Christianity, and

a belief in the right to self-ownership. The Declaration of Independence was a touchstone quoted and discussed by Frederick Douglass, James Forten, David Walker, and Lysander Spooner. William Leggett defended the right of a free press to criticize slavery. Throughout this period, classical liberal Christians found themselves fighting the proslavery interpretations of Christianity advanced by southerners. Evangelical abolitionists Beriah Green and Lewis Tappan, among others, invoked the concept that “all men are . . . endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, [and] that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Influential British abolitionist William Wilberforce, in his antislavery campaign, appealed to Christian notions of moral dignity.

The Republican Era (1854–1876)

With the electoral success of the Republican Party, many classical liberals joined because of its opposition to slavery. Republicans, including Abraham Lincoln, declared slavery to be immoral yet confined the political issue to whether slaves ought to exist in the terri-

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tories of the United States. This expediency disillusioned classical liberals, who hoped for a firmer stance against slavery. Frederick Douglass and Lysander Spooner also criticized Lincoln for not embracing emancipation at the outset of the Civil War. After the war, with North and South still divided over race, Republicans faced off against southern Democrats. The Republican Party was the party of civil rights, as seen in many of the documents. Frederick Douglass summed up the political position of African Americans: “For colored men the Republican Party is the deck—all outside is the sea.” Chapter 2 concludes with documents and testimony regarding the Ku Klux Klan’s campaign of violence and intimidation against blacks for voting against the Democratic Party during Reconstruction.

Colorblindness in a Color-Conscious Era (1877–1920)

After federal troops left the South, the Democratic Party disfranchised blacks through the use of poll taxes, literacy tests, election fraud, and voter intimidation. Southern states passed laws forcing the separation of races. White mobs repeatedly lynched blacks, thus sending a harrowing message: “Stay in your place.” Meanwhile, American shores received record numbers of immigrants from southeastern Europe and Asia. Progressives and nativist conservatives advocated immigration restriction. Classical liberals found themselves on the defensive: battling immigration restrictions, fighting white racism in the South, defending nonwhites in overseas territories, and offering individual property rights as a solution to the “Indian problem.”

Republicans and Race (1921–1932)

The Roaring Twenties were an ugly period in race relations. The Ku Klux Klan revived in new form, attacking not only blacks but also Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. By the mid-1920s, the KKK had millions of members before disintegrating in the midst of scandal and counterattacks by opponents. This was an era of paradox and pragmatism. House Republicans passed an anti-lynching bill, but a Democratic filibuster blocked its passage in the Senate. President Warren Harding spoke courageously against racism, but Democratic victories in Congress limited his power to do more. President Calvin Coolidge signed the Quota Act, which shut down immigration for decades to come. Yet, Coolidge challenged the KKK and other nativist forces by espousing a classical liberal philosophy of civil rights in “controversial” venues, such as Howard University, the leading historically black college. As secretary of commerce, Herbert Hoover desegregated his agency’s workforce and, as late as 1932, when Hoover ran for reelection, most black voters supported his GOP ticket.

The Roosevelt Years (1933–1945)

With southern Democrats critical to his New Deal agenda, Roosevelt remained silent on race and refused to back anti-lynching bills or other nondiscrimination measures. Despite FDR’s silence, most African Americans voted for the Democratic Party because it offered jobs to desperate people. However, classical liberals were far more critical of Roosevelt’s record. The documents in chapter 5 highlight their critique of state-sponsored discrimination, including

Japanese internment. Those featured in this chapter include Oscar De Priest (R-Ill.), the first black elected to Congress in the 20th century; Hamilton Fish III (R-NY), arguably one of the most important civil rights advocates in Congress from the 1920s to the 1940s; noted columnists Rose Wilder Lane and H. L. Mencken; and newspaper publisher R. C. Hoiles.

Classical Liberals in the Civil Rights Era (1946–1964)

Events moved swiftly in the postwar era. Federal courts ruled segregation unconstitutional. A Republican Senate refused to seat a notorious racist, and Congress passed voting rights laws. President Dwight D. Eisenhower played an instrumental role in the desegregation of Washington, D.C. (1953), and the *Brown v. Board* decision (1954). Eisenhower antagonized southern Democrats with his judicial appointments and his use of troops to enforce a federal court order desegregating public schools. Later, as the influence of Martin Luther King Jr. spread, President Lyndon B. Johnson moved with the times to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a bill passed by a bipartisan congressional coalition over the opposition of southern Democrats.

The struggle for racial freedom played out in sports. Branch Rickey, an anti-New Deal Republican, integrated baseball by signing Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey’s speech explaining why he signed Robinson is an inspiring exposition of the classical liberal creed. In another document, H.L. Mencken used his newspaper column to savage the “relics of Ku Kluxry” that prohibited blacks and

whites from playing tennis together on public courts.

Individualists in an Age of Group Discrimination (1965–2008)

Classical liberals confronted a dilemma with the Civil Rights Act of 1964: They accepted provisions striking down state-sponsored discrimination. However, two sections prohibited discrimination in private business. This infringed upon the freedom of association that classical liberals also valued. They also feared that these sections would allow the government to discriminate in favor of preferred minorities. To allay such fears, sponsors added explicit “colorblind” language to emphasize individual, not group, rights. The move toward “group rights” began under Democratic president Lyndon Johnson, but solidified under Republican Richard M. Nixon. The Democratic Party soon saw the political benefits of supporting preferences for Democratic constituencies (blacks, Hispanics, and others). The GOP establishment condoned race pref-

erences and abandoned its classical liberal followers more often than not. Nevertheless, by taking their case to the public, classical liberals made the case for nondiscrimination.

A new generation of writers argued that individuals, not groups, need a “hand up,” and better they get it from civil society (family, church, professional associations) than from a government that views them as symbols of group stereotypes. This theme resonates in the writing of Stephen L. Carter, Stanley Crouch, Shelby Steele, Clarence Thomas, Ben Wattenberg, Wilfred Reilly, and others.

Against the Tide (2009–Present)

The election of Barack Obama promised to change race relations in America forever. African Americans rallied around the first black president; white Americans viewed him as a person transcending race. But despite the chants of “Change!” from his campaign, Obama defended affirmative action “as we know it.” Today, Americans have soured on

the question of race relations, with colorblindness (one of the core elements of the classical liberal tradition) now reviled by many as a value rooted in white supremacy and “do-nothingism.” The question of immigration has also become a complicated matter for classical liberals. Classical liberals have historically asserted a natural right to emigrate. But with the election of Donald Trump in 2016—a victory largely owed to tough immigration restrictions and chants of “Build the Wall!”—and the perception that immigrants are not assimilating, many classical liberal arguments fall on deaf ears. How can one remain colorblind in a political arena as heated as our own?

Fortunately, a new generation of public intellectuals is speaking out against these trends. The writings of Thomas Sowell, Coleman Hughes, Thomas Chatterton Williams, Kenny Xu, David Bernstein, and Ilya Somin found in this book stand up for traditional classical liberal values and place their timeless urgency in modern context.

About the Author



Jonathan Bean is a Research Fellow at the Independent Institute and a Professor of History at Southern Illinois University. He received his Ph.D. in History from the Ohio State University in 1994. The first edition of *Race and Liberty in America: The Essential Reader* (2009) received praise from *Choice* (American Library Association) and *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* (formerly *Black Issues in Higher Education*). Bean is also the author of several books, and his scholarly publications have appeared in such journals as *The Independent Review*, *Journal of Policy History*, and *Enterprise and Society*. Bean has testified before the U.S. Senate on corruption in government contracting, consulted for the Japanese government, and served as an expert in court cases involving corporate litigation and a successful civil rights challenge to discrimination by the Small Business Administration.

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