



Erasing Racism: The Survival of the American Nation

Molefi Kete Asante

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Did the election of Barack Obama to be President of the United States signal real progress in bridging America's longstanding racial divide? In this profound study of systemic racism, Molefi Kete Asante, one of our leading scholars of African American history and culture, discusses the greatest source of frustration and anger among African Americans in recent decades: what he calls "the wall of ignorance" that attempts to hide the long history of racial injustice from public consciousness. This is most evident in each race's differing perspectives on racial matters. Though most whites view racism as a thing of the past, a social problem largely solved by the civil rights movement, blacks continue to experience racism in many areas of social life: encounters with the police; the practice of red lining in housing; difficulties in getting bank loans, mortgages, and insurance policies; and glaring disparities in health care, educational opportunities, unemployment levels, and incarceration rates. Though such problems are not expressions of the overt racism of legal segregation and lynch mobs—what most whites probably think of when they hear the word "racism"—their negative effect on black Americans is almost as pernicious. Such daily experiences create a lingering feeling of resentment that percolates in a slow boil till some event triggers an outburst of rage. Asante argues that America cannot long continue as a cohesive society under these conditions. As we embark upon new leadership under America's first African American president, he urges more public focus on redressing the wrongs of the past and their continuing legacy. Above all, he thinks that Americans must seriously consider some system of reparations to deal with both past and present injustices, an apology, and our own truth-and-reconciliation committee that addresses both the history of slavery and present-day racism. Only in this way, he feels, can we ever hope to heal the racial divide that never seems to be erased. This is a powerful, deeply perceptive analysis of a crucial social problem by one of America's leading thinkers on race.

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