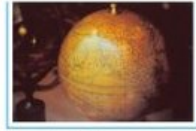


RACE A N D CULTURE



A World
View

THOMAS SOWELL

Race And Culture: A World View

Thomas Sowell

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Encompassing more than a decade of research around the globe, this book shows that cultural capital has far more impact than politics, prejudice, or genetics on the social and economic fates of minorities, nations, and civilization.

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Thomas Achord says

This is why I read Sowell:

"Classic examples of double standards and selective indignation can be found in a vast literature on the history of slavery - a literature devoted almost exclusively to slavery in the Western world, with only a relative handful of writings on the larger number of slaves in the Islamic world. Thus the institution of slavery, existing on every continent and going back thousands of years, is often discussed as if it were peculiar to Western civilization when, in fact, even the African slave trade was carried on by Arabs for centuries before Europeans took part, and continued for at least another century after the European slave trade to the Western Hemisphere ended. A scholarly - or at least academic study of slavery - has claimed that 'legal barriers against manumission' were among the 'distinctive characteristics' of 'slavery in North America,' when in fact legal barriers to manumission existed in Southeast Asia, ancient Greece, the French Antilles, Surinam, and Curaçao. Reports of how mild slavery was in Islamic countries, and how happy and contented the slaves were there, have been uncritically repeated by writers who would never accept such statements at face value when coming from the white slave society of the Antebellum South in the United States.

"Neither the enormous mortality rates of the trans-Saharan slave routes, nor the virtual absence of an African diaspora in Islamic countries which took more slaves from Africa than the West did, seems to arouse skepticism about the Middle Eastern version of the story of happy and contented slaves.

"The biggest story about slavery - how this ancient Institution, older than either Islam or Christianity, was wiped out over vast regions of the earth - remains a story seldom told. At the heart of that story was the West's ending of slavery in its own domains within a century and maintaining pressure on other nations for even longer to stamp out this practice. Instead, the West has been singled out as peculiarly culpable for a worldwide evil in which it participated, when in fact its only real uniqueness was in ultimately opposing and destroying this evil. Yet intellectuals have engaged in desperate attempts to discredit or downgrade the West's long moral crusade which ultimately destroyed slavery. These attempts have ranged from crude dogmatism about Western 'economic interest' behind the abolition of slavery to elusive insinuations along the same lines.

"A vast literature exists in which this same general idea logical pattern is pervasive, whether the issue of slavery, racism, sexism, or other evils. In this literature, the sins and shortcomings of the human race are depicted as evils as peculiar to the Western world, even when such evils have been demonstrably more prevalent or demonstrably worse in regions of the world ignored during outburst of selective moral indignation. The reasons for such ideological patterns are a large and complex question. What is relevant here is that such ideologies are themselves a political force to be reckoned with. How successful these ideologies will prove to be in undermining the legitimacy of Western Civilization, or in polarizing its races, is a question which only the future can answer."

— Thomas Sowell, *Race and Cultures*, pg. 149-150

In short, nothing is new under the sun.

Bryan says

Another good book by Thomas Sowell. Just as the title would indicate he explores the topics of Race and Culture. This book will be popular among conservatives and libertarian minded thinkers. It is well researched and he makes convincing arguments, whether or not you agree with his conclusions.

Dr.J.G. says

Prior to the horrors exposed post wwii that were committed in the name of of a superior race and culture, it was not only assumed that the two were inextricably joined at the pale colours level but widely so practiced by the said pale colour populace in the world. Post the exposure of the logically correct (but horror at a humanitarian level of concerns of course) extreme of this practice in the camps run by nazis, this theory of race and culture superiority fell into a ditch of disrepute, where it was taboo to speak of this but only acceptable to attack a practice of this in the world when the practitioners were not actually of the races assumed superior due to the said pale set of colours.

A double standard emerged where a European ancestry was silently assumed to be superior in any case and was given a better treatment of every sort and at every level in the world, but the rest of the world was lumped together and admonished, wherever possible, about such assumptions and practices. Since the phrase "wherever possible" is of key importance here, a hierarchy emerged silently, with pale colours European ancestry at the top; Oriental (Chinese, Japanese chiefly) and Mid-oriental (Mediterranean, west Asian, Central Asian - mainly Islamic) but also others (southeast Europe was low in world hierarchy, west and north being above) at the undefined middle, Africa excluding Egypt and other north African parts undoubtedly at the lowest rung, regions such as southeast Asia or Pacific islands or Caribbeans or natives of Americas and most Latin Americans either forgotten or used and forgotten - and India of course at the receiving end of an ever battering ram of accusations of inequality in various names, chiefly due a strong resistance to conversion without accompanying violence of the sort that would erupt if a conversionist faith attempts such practices and escalations of conversion in a land where another conversionist faith is the rule with options really not allowed.

During the era that this was happening, much of other parallel theory and practices came up, such as lack of rigour in education in name of liberal freedom with values scrapped in name of ideals of individual but really no real progress for individual student, resulting inevitably in low levels of literacy and accomplishments in public schools through US and a low regard for teachers, which in turn resulted in an exodus of intelligent and well read, well educated men and women from teaching profession unless they could quickly get a tenure in a university - well, who in their right minds would like to be at the receiving end of a battering ram of accusations and disrespect and occasional violence after giving a life to caring for young of other people unless they lacked any opportunity elsewhere!

All this did nothing to improve a racial equality, while the lowering of requirements in schools merely resulted in a bullies rule until it came to job market. Culture became a dubious word best limited to ballet, opera, classical music et al, playground of rich and hobby of intelligentsia, while masses stayed away happily and watched sports on television (tickets were easier for corporates and other rich) while drinking beer and eating chips and ordering more food from the kitchen as wives fumed silently - they were not allowed to join

the male buddies on the couch as often as not, since loosening of discipline made a buddy goggling a wife possible without reprimand for him and sometimes a bad end for the wife.

Naturally, obesity followed resulting in a good thing for economy what with dieting industry, pills and so forth, surgery, gyms and spas to make up for the travails, a higher end for the well to do and other facilities for those that could afford that much. Walking to the market to shop has been not merely unfashionable but physically nearly impossible in US and increasingly elsewhere too last half a century or so. Some places have a pharmacy one can walk to, others not even that, so emergencies require driving as well. Unless one is ok with far more expensive alternatives.

While all this proliferated with the world generally aping cultures of races and nations of European ancestry, the politically correct stance was to give a mouthing to environment being all theory of culture and progress and opportunity, while in reality most downtrodden people of whatever race had little access to these vehicles of rising above poverty and other ills of the sort - and no possibility was envisioned where culture, education, hygiene, knowledge et al were not necessarily associated to an abundance of all latest toys sold for profit, although it was right before everyone's eyes blinkered shut tightly.

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Truth is, the two factors of genome and environment do not battle necessarily, they co-operate as well, and affect one another in striving for evolution. Thus children of intelligent parents do inherit intelligence to varying degrees - since genome is complex and a guarantee would require a high level of intelligence in all relatives of ancestors of the baby - but an intelligent and educated mother enhances the level of intelligence of the child of an intelligent and educated father. This inheritance is true of many traits that can be learned in environment as well, such as hygiene practices or aspiration to knowledge.

But a confusion is made when race and culture or other facets of human achievement are linked in that it is assumed that such a link is necessarily racist, and this is due to the fact that an assumption of superiority of pale colouring races persists as much as one of superiority of European ancestry. This assumption is due to the simple fact of everyone being able to see a set of colouring inherited - blue or green eyes, red or yellow hair, pink or sallow or pale cheeks - while a perceived intelligence arouses animosity of the most vicious sort unless accompanied by the right set of colours and gender, preferably accompanied by European ancestry as well.

As a community interacts they swap and share genes, traits, habits, food, hygiene, information, likes and dislikes, knowledge, and more - forming a race simultaneously with an interlinked set of intangibles we name culture, and the two are interlinked. What is not seem immediately is that a visible similarity of two people does not immediately make for a similar level of intelligence or culture, since other factors affect everything as well, and there are different communities within every given race, sometimes stratified by money-defined class as in US, sometimes by social stratification by caste as in Europe (royalty, aristocracy, landed gentry, traders, professionals ...), and sometimes by a multitude of complex factors including a differently defined caste (based on ancestral set of professions and work, rather than monarch bestowed titles and lands as in Europe). And within a community which is usually a part of a race and not whole of it, culture and intelligence and other traits are as similar as they might be within a set of relatives gathered at a wedding.

Yes, there is a link - and yes, it is all affected by environment and vice versa as well, and genome is as affected by learning as vice versa - and it is not about pale colours up, monochrome down, sepia in between, with almond eyes an exotic over the next hill level. It is far more complex than that.

And this is true of gap across gender as well. Mothers affect children positively and daughters specially, and infant daughters of educated mother and an aspiring grandmother are known to be far more attached to books and learning and capable of dealing with electric wires than daughters of conventional mothers, while an ease about gender roles in environment and ancestry (the two are interlinked in a family of course) is known to have produced much beloved sons who are far more interested in playing with dolls than their sisters with storytelling of high complexity, going on to not literature for a career necessarily but to electrical engineering and finance.

Give the children all you can, let them have all you can of the good things others around can provide by example and teaching, and you help cultural evolution of humanity within your own little circle of race, community, family. It is only a little different from money - those that have money may lose it fast but culture slowly, and those that aspire to have either or both can, with generations doing better than ancestors. That is evolution.

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And while we are at it, poverty has as little to do with lack of culture, hygiene or learning and knowledge, let alone intelligence, as pale colourings do. Millennia of unwed priests has made Europe forget that learning need not be associated with riches, since poor had to toil for living and church personnel was given the leisure and almost monopoly over knowledge (inquisition being very useful in weeding out any counterexamples effectively for present and future by burning and fear respectively) while rich alone could indulge in bathing, clean clothes, and other time consuming activities that needed assurance of not needing to make a living. But then with Anglican church emerged a class that was both poor and educated, namely the Vicar's family, including daughters, who had to be exemplary in every way - hygiene, learning, clean clothes - and cultured as well. This however did not stop from the phrases like "unwashed poor" being exported to colonies, where observed facts might have contradicted the phrase (Brahman are and were always poor - until the opening of migration and subsequent IT revolution that included everybody who could - but nevertheless bound to set examples in learning and knowledge and hygiene by very definition of their status, and others are bound equally to follow within the boundaries of their work needs), if only the need to look down on the ruled never mind how superior they were in any field did not make blinding a need for the rulers.

Poverty is as unrelated to intelligence, culture, learning, hygiene and knowledge as are gender and colour of any body parts. Community one grows up within, including family and neighbourhood and school and relatives and nation, do form an essential part of contributing factors. Then it is up to oneself.

Rob Price says

Thomas Sowell is a skilled writer with a powerful ability to combine historical, social science and free-market perspectives. He cuts through the noise and doesn't mince his words on the sensitive topics of race and culture.

In *Race and Culture* Sowell argues against two common social science doctrines: 1) that all races are equal and 2) that races are purely an outcome of their environment. Environment is admittedly important but there

are also skills, habits and characteristics that make certain cultures successful at something for a period of time. That success must imply a degree of inequality.

An example of cultural inequality is Arabic numerals, which are indisputably superior to Roman numerals and used across the world as a result. The fact that paper is used across the world today implies that the Chinese race and culture was superior relative to others in the sphere of paper technology. This doesn't imply that China was a superior race but it highlights that local superiority can exist. Examples, where cultures are able to adapt foreign technologies quickly, advance these and move forward must surely also indicate a level of relative progress or superiority. Cultural relativists deny inequality but sometimes differences or inferiority are the starting point for subsequent achievements and define that culture thereafter. The Meiji reformers in Japan, for example. Admission of inequalities can be a critical step towards overcoming them.

I particularly loved how Sowell described a group of people he calls "middlemen minorities". Jews, Lebanese, Chinese, Indians, etc, at various points in history, in various locations displayed very similar characteristics. These groups emigrated in relatively small groups, had very few possessions when they arrived, held very close family bonds and maintained culturally conservative values. Generally, these groups were very frugal, prioritising saving to buy small businesses as soon as possible after arrival. They would differentiate themselves from the local population by working uncomfortably long hours, made possible by living in their business premises, employing all members of the family to secure the business and ensure that all the meagre profits were ploughed back into the business. Parents kept close watch over their children's value system and could even become negative about the less conservative values within the majority population. Over time businesses would scale and the middlemen minorities would often expand into the lending business, charging more appropriate interest rates because they knew the local community and risk profiles better than the banks. Sometimes these middlemen were highly respected in the community for the differentiated services they provided but they could also be stigmatised. Both the minorities and majorities could become fearful/jealous/condescending towards cultures different to their own, particularly during times of economic stress.

The extensive chapter on slavery was also enlightening. Sowell comments that the most distinguishing feature of western slavery was not that it existed, slavery existed in numerous countries both before and after western slavery, but that the Western nations brought global slavery to an end in such a short period of time. Sowell's free market application to the economics of slavery is fascinating. He logically shows how economic progress was a major factor that brought slavery to its knees. Slave owners had strong incentive to relax typical slave laws to uncover the talents of slaves that were covered by the initial occupation of slave labour. Child rearing, education, art, etc were all skills that required slave owners to grant greater liberties and frequently offer freedom in order to generate the desired productivity outcomes. As soon as some owners began to relax these rules the knowledge transfer between slaves increased, leading to amplified agitation and provided weight for the movement towards freedom.

While a vehement critic of relativism, Sowell also explains why environment matters. For example, thousands of years ago humans could not properly sustain life in the cold and early human life centred on the tropics and humans were concentrated in the tropics as a result. As clothing and shelter technology advanced people could move into colder territories and take advantage of the change in landscape. One the advantages of a colder climate was fewer tropical diseases, which still plague African countries today. Africa also has few navigable rivers, which is seen as a defining feature of human development over the years (The Nile is one of the rare navigable rivers and it fostered the development of Egypt). It can be dramatically cheaper to transport goods and people over water than land and most of the world's major cities are situated on waterways as a result. In Roman times the Empire in Southern Europe flourished because it was close to the

differentiated cultural influence of the Middle East, had easy transport over the calm Mediterranean and the relatively warm weather supported bigger more concentrated populations. In Northern European societies were initially much smaller than Southern but eventually learnt to take advantage of longer winters and greater time indoors. The rough Atlantic Ocean held back seafaring development in North Western Europe at first but the experience in these waters later allowed the British, Dutch, French, Spanish and Portuguese to capitalise on their superior skills by expanding empires across the globe whereas Italy and Greece were left behind. This brief story shows how environment can matter but it can also have different influences in different time periods depending on the technologies available and preeminent goals of society.

Education provides another pertinent observation. Educational is universally accepted as a good social outcome but there are underappreciated differences in what is perceived as good/bad education. For example, developing countries persistently over-invest in liberal arts and underinvest in science, maths and engineering despite the high returns from these professions. Government employment often becomes the goal for social scientists further perpetuating economic problems in developing nations as society becomes ideologically dependent on government for employment, welfare and strategic direction rather than the individual. Sowell also notes that formal education creates a sense of entitlement and can sow the seeds of social instability and thereby reduce productivity by creating expectation divergences.

Omar Alshaker says

An utterly mind-blowing, shocking and informative goldmine of revelatory insights.

This is one of the books which leave you wondering how you made it this far without reading them. How you ever formed a socioeconomic opinion without learning what this book has to offer.

It's written without any noticeable regard for human emotions, including the author's. He never hesitates to state a fact no matter how uncomfortable it might get. He uses outrageous terms, he never says "luckily", "fortunately", or "unfortunately" after the most devastating or wholesome facts. He tries his very best to hand you the facts with the maximum absence of his stance on them.

Throughout the book, you'll feel that the author is holding a sledgehammer and destroying what you thought was the reality. He makes every point with numbers, evidence and logical reasoning with a clear effort not to make political points out of it.

The book is decorated with around 60 pages (out of 352) of references and citations. Every data point mentioned is well-referenced and supported.

I really wish every one of my friends reads this book, especially left-leaning ones.

An easy 5 stars.

Jon Webber says

Very non-PC, international, historical and well researched book. It made me think differently about several topics including the history of slavery and cultural differences and values. I would definitely recommend it.

Ted Heitz says

Why the hell couldn't we get Sowell as the first black president 15 years ago? He gets it, without having to mince words or speak with ambiguity as to not offend anyone...if everyone understood world issues this way, we would be far better off. He describes how simple economic history has developed world diversity as we know it. great great work.

Nick Gibson says

Another cannonade of empiric mythbusting. The first in a trilogy. Sowell's writing is not flowery or romantic, but it is thorough. He's concerned, here as elsewhere, with exploding revisionism, propaganda, and political narratives. Sowell attacks with the empiric method: determine what outcomes are predicted by two competing theories, then digest the existential reality to see which theory was vindicated.

Rod says

Another broad and deep work from America's most important living author. Shows that when we talk about race we really should be discussing culture.

Josiah says

This was amazing. Truly a five-star book and worth the long read.

Jordan says

"If nothing else, history can help dissolve the provincialism of time and place, and the hypocrisy of *selective* moral indignation." - Thomas Sowell

Much of today's revisionist history is ideologically driven in support of this very selective moral indignation, and primary against Western culture. All cultures have some good and bad, but all are not equal in the immense number of ways cultures can be deconstructed and analyzed. Too many people believe the sins of the West are unique when they are not, but studying world history for global context does not promote agenda-driven people who seek to cherry-pick history to create their own narratives.

This book does a terrific job of analyzing race and culture among a variety of key cross sections, including migration, conquest, economics, politics, intelligence, slavery, and history. If you wish to gain a balanced perspective and a better way to review the triumphs, tragedies, similarities, and differences of cultures, there is no better book than this to serve as the foundation for further understanding.

Son Tung says

Bits and pieces of historical knowledge i picked up from others book related to conquests, clash of civilizations and cultures certainly help me going through this one without much effort. However, what Thomas Sowell said about the importance of "History" really put my scattered thoughts into order. High rating for this one because of its importance as i wish it was the one to be read as an introductory book to the topic of today's identity crises among different nations and ethics.

"History is not destiny. Much of it consists of mistakes need which not be repeated and crimes which not be tolerated. History of mankind is painfully purchased experiences. Now available free, fore merely the price of attention and reflection.

History shows patterns, even though its not providing formulas. Its facts are especially needed when dealing with racial beliefs and issues where powerful emotions reign, and where prejudices and biases often have been the norm.

History can not solve immediate problems but it offers understanding. It can expose fallacies which make matter worse or make resolutions harder to achieve or see. History provides understanding, not psychological but clear psychic view of reality, its limitations and its possibilities. "

Todd Benschneider says

Life changing perspective, a must read for all. Read this book back in 1999, the author logically and successfully ties behavioral tendencies to genetics. This book inspired a future interest in Hofstede Cultural Values Analysis and Evolutionary Psychology. If you currently believe in nurture over nature, Sowell's research will cause you to rethink your perspective. Nearly 20 years after reading "Race and Culture" my perspective on the interactions of teams of people is still influenced by Sowell's belief that behavior is influenced by genetics, if you combine Hofstede's view on cultural influence with Sowell's view on genetic influence. You can draw some predictable conclusions of organizational behavior, using examples that Sowell provides where we tend to recreate our source culture even seen in children who were adopted into other cultures as infants, the concept will give you a revolutionary but logical perspective on human organizational psychology. Must read for everyone in education, government and management. Some readers will surely be turned off by the concept of behavior being so heavily influenced by DNA, based on the fears that the belief will result in stereotypes, racism ect... but; it would benefit everyone to understand why some individuals struggle to adapt to cultural influences outside of their genetic predisposition.

Laine says

But of course this is exceptional. Satisfying in every way. I must say (although Sowell would not approve) there is nothing more seductive than critical analysis that finds the truth.

David says

This is an excellent book, very well researched and intensely practical as a worldview. The only fault is that is often dry and technical due to the voluminous research reported within it. Sowell uses a wide array of evidence from around the globe and across the human timeline to ensure his observations are transcendent over contemporary hot-button issues, yet simultaneously applicable to them.

The final pages, where Sowell, bears down on the judgments and implications of his work, are piercing with their insight. Perhaps the most salient message to 21st century social justice types is, "The same approach which treats sins common to the human race as peculiarities of "our society" often also makes the fatal error of confusing victimhood with virtue, by lining up on the side of the victim, instead of lining up on the side of a moral principle." (Sowell, 250). The book backs up this statement with facts from world history.

It is particularly important for today's compassion peddlers to recognize the larger realities of our contemporary issues. We will perpetuate the dysfunctions by pandering to them. Western civilization is under siege from members of its own who have proven Sowell's claim, and made the correlated mistakes of assuming 'our society' is to blame for basic human flaws and preferring victim politics to principled policies in the public square. Everyone who shares an interest or concern about racial issues needs to read this book in order to set our thinking on productive tracks toward overcoming racial and cultural tensions that commonly exist among different people groups.
