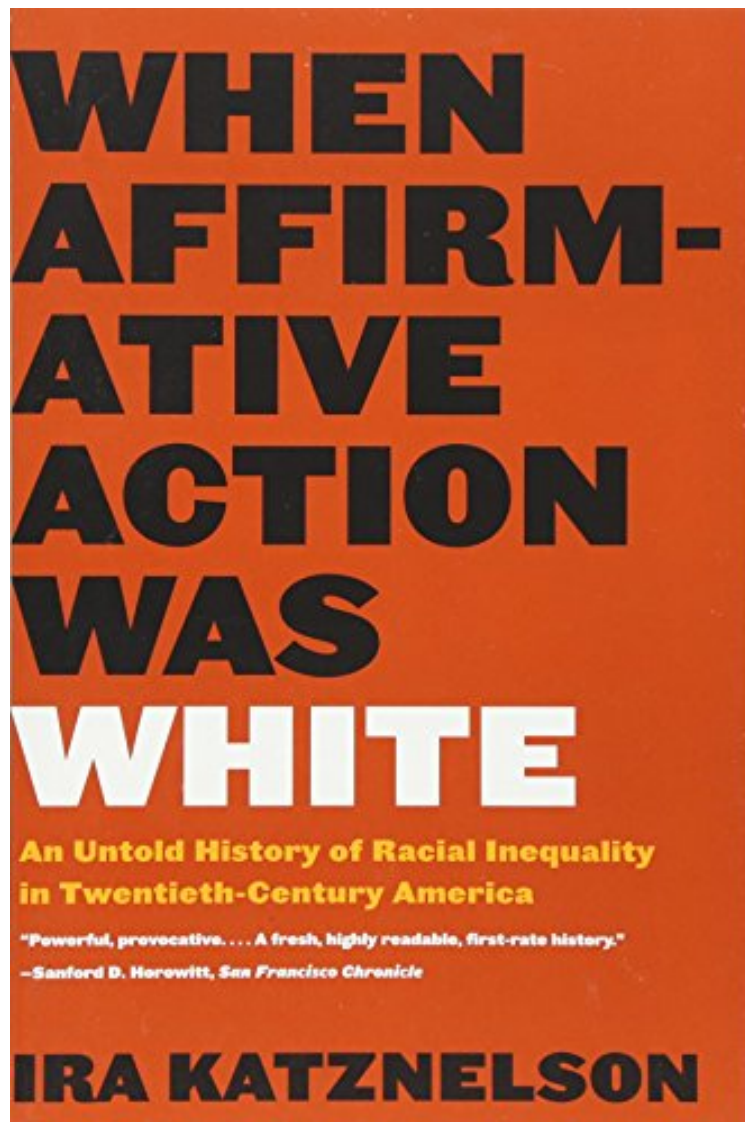


(Download) When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America

## When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America

*Ira Katznelson*

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**Ira Katznelson : When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America:

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A groundbreaking work that exposes the twisted origins of affirmative action. In this "penetrating new analysis" (New York Times Book Review) Ira Katznelson fundamentally recasts our understanding of twentieth-century American history and demonstrates that all the key programs passed during the New Deal and Fair Deal era of the 1930s and 1940s were created in a deeply discriminatory manner. Through mechanisms designed by Southern Democrats that specifically excluded maids and farm workers, the gap between blacks and whites actually widened despite postwar prosperity. In the words of noted historian Eric Foner, "Katznelson's incisive book should change the terms of debate about affirmative action, and about the last seventy years of American history."

From Publishers WeeklyRather than seeing affirmative action developing out of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, Katznelson (Desolation and Enlightenment) finds its origins in the New Deal policies of the 1930s and 1940s. And instead of seeing it as a leg up for minorities, Katznelson argues that the prehistory of affirmative action was supported by Southern Democrats who were actually devoted to preserving a strict racial hierarchy, and that the resulting legislation was explicitly designed for the majority: its policies made certain, he argues, that whites received the full benefit of rising prosperity while blacks were deliberately left out. Katznelson supports this startling claim ingeniously, showing, for instance, that while the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act was a great boon for factory workers, it did nothing for maids and agricultural laboreremployment sectors dominated by blacks at the timeat the behest of Southern politicians. Similarly, Katznelson makes a strong case that the GI Bill, an ostensibly color-blind initiative, unfairly privileged white veterans by turning benefits administration over to local governments, thereby ensuring that Southern blacks would find it nearly impossible to participate. This intriguing study closes with suggestions for rectifying racial inequality, but its strongest merit is its subtle recalibration of a crucial piece of American history. (Aug.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.  
From BooklistKatznelson places into contemporary context the cause of racial inequity that is directly related to government policies, which are widely believed to benefit blacks but which have actually benefited whites. He eschews the more generalist focus on slavery and white supremacy as the causes of racial inequality and focuses on government policies of the New Deal and post-World War II distribution of veteran benefits. He identifies in a practical sense government policies, most of which appear neutral on their face, that were designed to restrict blacks and, in fact, impeded them from progressing commensurate with white America. The war economy and labor needs expanded opportunities for blacks and substantially reduced economic disparities. But postwar policies to promote home ownership and labor laws regarding minimum wages deliberately excluded blacks. Other policies providing the engine that produced today's middle class, including the GI benefits that financed college education, reinforced the discriminatory patterns. By connecting the dots, Katznelson provides the foundational basis that justified affirmative action for blacks, as the disparities are an outgrowth of government policies and practices. Vernon FordCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved  
A fresh, highly readable, first-rate history. - Sanford D Horowitz, San Francisco Chronicle  
A penetrating new analysis. - Nick Kotz, New York Times Book  
Ira Katznelson has made a major contribution to the affirmative action debate.... [His] book makes as strong a case as I have ever seen for vigorous action to bring about equal opportunities for African-Americans. - George M. Frederickson, New York of Books  
A gem of a book. - David Oshinsky, The Nation