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Riley's "False black power?" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Riley, J. L. (2017). *False black power?* West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press. 122 pp. \$11.00. ISBN 9781599475189

Why is racial equality still an issue in the twenty-first century for African Americans, even after eight years under the first African American President of the United States, Barack Obama, and decades past the Civil Rights movement? Riley attempts to answer this question. First, he notes that other ethnicities, even those with little or no political representation, surpass African Americans in racial integration and economic success. Secondly, Riley turns to history to show that prior to the Civil Rights movement, African Americans were making great strides, despite racism, in upward mobility but that progress slowed after this great political event.

Riley argues that political power alone produces power in name only and, therefore, it produces a “false” power. True empowerment is found when political power is accompanied by what he terms “human capital” (p. 29) or values and behaviors perpetuated within an ethnic group. For Riley, the focus on political gain over personal development for African Americans has bankrupted their human capital, sabotaging their progress toward racial equality. Riley concludes by pointing out that African American political leaders as well as social leaders, such as Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, have promoted this “false” power to the detriment of their own race.

Critical essays in response to Riley’s argument are presented by Glenn C. Loury, Professor of Social Sciences at Brown University, and John McWhorter, Associate Professor of English at Columbia University. Written in an easily readable style which nearly all can understand, and supported with extensive research, this book addresses a crucial issue for America while exploring the interplay of political power and sociocultural dynamics over a distinct historical period. This volume is recommended in general but especially for institutions with programs in the social and political sciences.

Reviewer

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