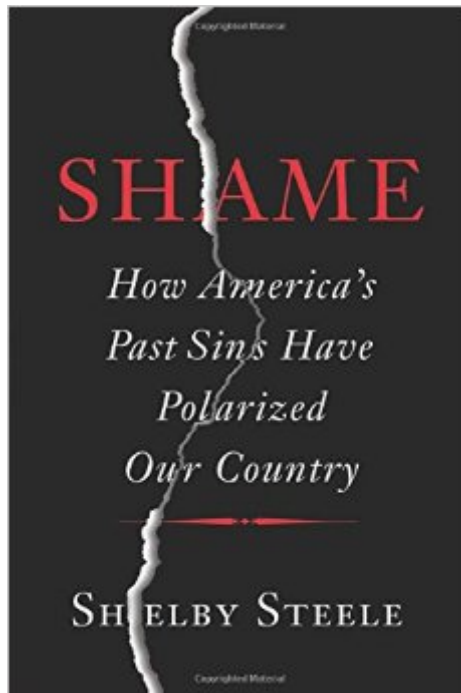


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Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country



Synopsis

The United States today is hopelessly polarized; the political Right and Left have hardened into rigid and deeply antagonistic camps, preventing any sort of progress. Amid the bickering and inertia, the promise of the 1960s—when we came together as a nation to fight for equality and universal justice—remains unfulfilled. As Shelby Steele reveals in *Shame*, the roots of this impasse can be traced back to that decade of protest, when in the act of uncovering and dismantling our national hypocrisies—racism, sexism, militarism—liberals internalized the idea that there was something inauthentic, if not evil, in the America character. Since then, liberalism has been wholly concerned with redeeming modern America from the sins of the past, and has derived its political legitimacy from the premise of a morally bankrupt America. The result has been a half-century of well-intentioned but ineffective social programs, such as Affirmative Action. Steele reveals that not only have these programs failed, but they have in almost every case actively harmed America's minorities and poor. Ultimately, Steele argues, post-60s liberalism has utterly failed to achieve its stated aim: true equality. Liberals, intending to atone for our past sins, have ironically perpetuated the exploitation of this country's least fortunate citizens. It therefore falls to the Right to defend the American dream. Only by reviving our founding principles of individual freedom and merit-based competition can the fraught legacy of American history be redeemed, and only through freedom can we ever hope to reach equality. Approaching political polarization from a wholly new perspective, Steele offers a rigorous critique of the failures of liberalism and a cogent argument for the relevance and power of conservatism.

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Customer Reviews

Steele is a favorite writer of mine, so I've been waiting for this book for some time. For those familiar with Steele, you know what to expect: a literary and theoretical reflection on the predicament of race in the United States. For better or worse - and sometimes both - Steele doesn't try to convince us as much with fact as by offering us an interpretation of the American psyche. This book, of course, is about more than the issue of race. Here, Steele tries to offer a framework for understanding the difference between the 'liberal' and 'conservative' mind. For my part, I think this is too lofty an ambition for his argument. But, like Steele's other works, it is challenging and thought provoking nonetheless. Steele's idea is that in the 1960's, many of the hypocrisies of the United States became laid bare: a society partly built on racism and sexism but professing to believe in equality of opportunity, that professed liberty for all but inserted itself in the affairs of other nations. In acknowledging these hypocrisies - and Steele thinks the acknowledgement was appropriate - belief in the United States and its values lost the moral authority it once had. To fill the void, that moral authority was claimed by those who challenged the values of the United States. Instead of making capitalism more just, overthrow it. Instead of civil rights movement's goal of integration into American (white) society, the Black Power movement would challenge whether that society was even worth joining. Steele does not suggest that America's loss of moral authority was wrong. But he does argue that it came with some very negative consequences, including the eschewing of freedom in favor of petitioning governments to create fairness and equity for us.

As a conservative libertarian (or vice versa) I have to give it to the liberals for having accomplished the extraordinary task of turning conservatism into a counterculture movement. This is just one of the many gems I gleaned from Shelby Steele's new and immensely important work: *Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country*. I've always known I was unequivocally right about Americans being better off with individual liberty, which is superior to group governmental dependence - modern liberalism, even in spite of the national hypocrisy of slavery. Still, it's a difficult issue to corral into a valid, intellectually sound context and defense. In *Shame*, Shelby Steele has done this. In fact, this book is written with a profound yet approachable genius that makes me feel good about myself for being able to recognize it. Although this book deserves more than a nutshell reduction, I hope I can do the gist of the basic ideas Steele conveyed justice - but no, not social justice. Steele explains the accomplishments of the 50s and

60s civil rights movement, which still clung to an American ideal, if not actualization, of liberty for all, which was the ultimate goalâachievable because, unlike anywhere else in human history, it had been written down in a nationâs founding documents. He defines, âLiberalism in the twenty-first century is, for the most part, a moral manipulation that exaggerates inequity and unfairness in American life in order to justify overreaching public policies and programs.â Steele writes that those disaffected, many of them young people, following the victory of the Civil Rights movement, could not see a place for them in the past or in the future. They needed to view America as âcharacterologicallyâflawed.

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