Shelby Steele: *White Guilt*. Harper Perennial (2006)
A summary of the book by Fred Costello, July 19, 2020

Shelby Steele, with a Ph.D. in English (1946-) was a black professor at San Jose State University until 1991 and is now the Robert J. and Marion E. Oster Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He is a firm proponent of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, "I have a dream",[1] especially that all "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

He is in firm agreement with Judge Clarence Thomas' dissenting opinion in the 2003 case of Grutter vs. Bollinger, which allowed preferential treatment of blacks in admitting students into the University of Michigan Law School.[2] Early in his dissent, Thomas wrote, "I believe blacks can achieve in every avenue of American life without the meddling of university administrators." Judge Thomas wrote (Page 26 of the dissent), these programs stamp minorities with a badge of inferiority and may cause them to develop dependencies or to adopt an attitude that they are entitled to preferences. He feared that Blacks would no longer work toward excellence. Steele and Thomas decry the condescending opinion of whites that lower standards must be used for blacks. Such an opinion sets the white person as implicitly claiming superiority simply on the basis of the color of their white skin.

Like MLK and Thomas, Steele wants blacks to work on improving their knowledge and thinking skills, competing on a level playing field, not on a field tilted in their favor. Steele writes approvingly that a black child who is having difficulty with dribbling a basketball will not blame discrimination but will work on developing his skill (66). Not so in school or work.

Starting in the 1960's, black leaders wanted control, not to a level playing field. Steele was inspired by Dick Gregory's inflammatory speech, which stirred emotions, calling for black activism, calling blacks to raise their consciousness. Steele wrote that the black leaders saw the weakness in the moral authority of whites[3], who had to admit that members of their race treated blacks inhumanly. Blacks exploited the guilt of whites[4], including blackmail, thereby gaining black power (Page 24 of the book). Texaco paid $750 million to the diversity industry after an executive was heard using a racist term that he heard in the company's diversity training program. Other companies similarly paid hundreds of millions of dollars to avoid being stigmatized as racist in the general white population, where white guilt also resided. White guilt is making black leaders wealthy. The black leaders depersonalized racism in the 1960's by introducing the term "systemic" racism, thereby relieving them of the need to prove widespread legal racism but enabling them to cite every specific racist offense as an example. Now, instead of a black person being responsible for his actions, the whites system was responsible (59).

Racial reform no longer pertains to equality of opportunities but pertains to equality of outcomes, independent of merit (61). The emphasis on results makes the white institution responsible for the black-white differences in the results (61). Black leaders play along (63). The blacks, including the black parents, are not responsible. The system is. The idea is that social justice procures an entirely better life

[1] https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf
[2] https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/pdf/02-241P.ZX1
[3] Whites come from Europe, where Christianity formed the culture. When we write "whites", we could write "Europeans."
[4] Why do whites so universally accept guilt for the black condition? Like my parents, many whites came to the U.S. well after the civil war, mine coming from Latin America.

for people apart from their own efforts (63).[5] This is an illusion. Currently, "blacks live in freedom and are surrounded by opportunity." Meanwhile, white guilt wants no obligation to minority development. Whites need only the display their sense of social justice to win moral authority. The greatest problem for blacks in America is the freedom they have (67), and the responsibility that goes with it. Whites get no credit when blacks independently develop themselves.

Stripped of responsibility, blacks base their identity on hostility toward whites and acceptance of victimhood, an identity that helps their self-esteem and intensifies white guilt. In the 1970's, when Steele was part of the militant black movement, the moral base of the whites was further eroded by the issues of the Vietnam war, women's rights, and capitalist destruction of the environment[6]. Young whites joined the attack on the adult whites (89). If you were not for the black movement, you were against blacks.

White guilt led to diversity and affirmative action -- white power's condescension toward the blacks. This outgrowth of white guilt requires diversity training of all employees, and their acquiescence. Whites now want to dissociate themselves from racism. They go to great lengths to show that they are not racist, with corporate executives give millions of dollars to black causes. Blacks willingly accept the handouts, implicitly accepting their own inferiority (134). The whites see themselves as virtuous in providing the handouts, being blind to their own motive: ridding themselves of the black problem. They distance themselves from blacks as human beings (140). In the schools (162), history, literature, and art extolled the blacks, replacing the classics[7]. The blacks, as victims, see themselves as owing nothing to the whites (139).

The wealthy black leaders now strive for political power. They no longer strive for compassionate liberalism (freedom). Whites now offer more handouts under the guise of reparations, tax money from people who never were racist.

Steele writes that moral "balancing" is needed, an explicit social morality. He does not subscribe to the idea that blacks are victims of systemic injustices. He does subscribe to Bill Cosby's admonition of the blacks: finish school, get a job, and stay married to the mother of your children.

Steele's book has alienated him from other blacks and the liberal left, but he enjoys not having to live a schizophrenic life of accepting handouts and thinking himself free and independent.

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[5] This is the very idea to which Steele and Judge Thomas objected.

[6] This was the age of the sexual revolution, when the youth wanted sexual "freedom" and so did many adults. Was white guilt about the blacks or just a manifestation of sexual guilt? Steele writes that the sexual revolution was masked by the cultural revolution.

[7] Beauty is deemed to be in the eye of the beholder. All cultures, religions, and moral codes are considered equally good.