

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

STOP FALLING FOR THE OKEYDOKE

How the Lie of "Race" Continues to Undermine Our Country

Stephen A. Tillett

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BOOK REVIEW

A reconsideration of the meaning of race and the corrosive role it has played in American politics.

Debut author Tillett begins his study by recounting some of the formative experiences that inspired him to be suspicious of racial division. The great-grandson of slaves, he grew up in a diverse neighborhood in Washington, D.C., and his first pastoral assignment was presiding over a largely white, Southern congregation with great success. The author investigated the nature of race, and he found compelling evidence that it has no scientific grounding—the genetic variation between people of different color is negligibly miniscule. Race, then, is nothing more than a social and political contrivance and, even worse, a mendacious instrument of class warfare. He observes, “The financial benefits to the moneyed interests from the contrived enmity between groups has worked to their advantage for generations and continues to roil our politics and our nation today.” Tillett contends that racial antagonisms were deliberately stirred to justify an oligarchic abuse of the working poor, pitting disenfranchised Caucasians against even less well-off African-Americans. The pervasive lie of race, and its use to keep the poor divided against themselves, is what the author calls “okeydoke,” a homespun term that generally covers the nonsensical. Instead, the author prefers “ethnicity,” which broadly covers the whole bag of genetic and cultural differences; over the term “racism” he prefers “ethnicism.” Ultimately, Tillett advocates for a grander conception of the unity of the human race, the only race there is, and discusses several political issues—voter fraud and food stamps, for example—along these lines. The author ably provides a brief introduction to an issue that’s been well-covered elsewhere—he liberally draws from, and quotes, the historian Howard Zinn and Martin Luther King Jr., as well as others. Readers will have to consult those references for lengthier and more rigorous treatments—there simply isn’t enough argument here to draw the conclusion that racial tension is reducible to socio-economic conflict, even accepting the scientific illegitimacy of race itself. Still, this is a thoughtful précis, proposed with emotional vigor and personal candor.

An intelligent discussion of race, though largely derivative.