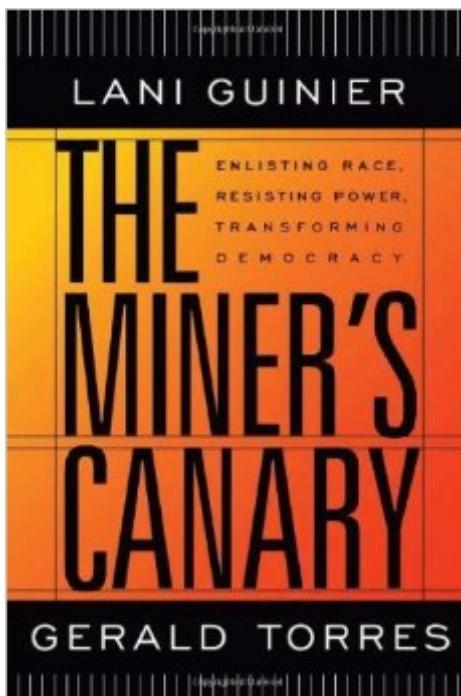


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The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy (The Nathan I. Huggins Lectures)



Synopsis

Like the canaries that alerted miners to a poisonous atmosphere, issues of race point to underlying problems in society that ultimately affect everyone, not just minorities. Addressing these issues is essential. Ignoring racial differences--race blindness--has failed. Focusing on individual achievement has diverted us from tackling pervasive inequalities. Now, in a powerful and challenging book, Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres propose a radical new way to confront race in the twenty-first century. Given the complex relationship between race and power in America, engaging race means engaging standard winner-take-all hierarchies of power as well. Terming their concept "political race," Guinier and Torres call for the building of grass-roots, cross-racial coalitions to remake those structures of power by fostering public participation in politics and reforming the process of democracy. Their illuminating and moving stories of political race in action include the coalition of Hispanic and black leaders who devised the Texas Ten Percent Plan to establish equitable state college admissions criteria, and the struggle of black workers in North Carolina for fair working conditions that drew on the strength and won the support of the entire local community. The aim of political race is not merely to remedy racial injustices, but to create truly participatory democracy, where people of all races feel empowered to effect changes that will improve conditions for everyone. In a book that is ultimately not only aspirational but inspirational, Guinier and Torres envision a social justice movement that could transform the nature of democracy in America.

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Customer Reviews

Because it's the best book about race relations in America since Ellison's masterpiece of fifty years ago. By "race relations" I mean blacks and whites, as Ellison would have meant the words. But The Miner's Canary is about much more, it's about all-minority-cultures and whites in America. And in direct opposition to the color-blind solution the Supreme Court has decided the Constitution requires, the book's authors esteem and celebrate and find strength, including political strength, in our separate cultural identities -- including the separate (non-oppressive) cultural identities of whites. When I put The Miner's Canary down, I wished I had read the Acknowledgments first, then the chapter "by" Torres. This is a difficult book, it has many authors, and the voice I identify as Ms. Guinier's seems sometimes to address junior high school students and other times to address law professors. So the book has many levels of analysis, and it treats its central topic -- political race -- from many angles. These are not shortcomings, but they add up to a very demanding book. The book's real-life examples, however, are all wonderful and all one -- compelling and utterly elucidating. And the long illustration of how Greek democracy in action would look if it followed American districting and apportionment rules is simply surpassing wonderful. Then there's the book's immediacy. The Nobel Prize winning econometrician Robert Fogel has emphasized the roles of technology and religious activism in America's movements for social justice, relegating progressivism to the status of an adjunct to the latter. The Miner's Canary, on the other hand, puts the struggle for social justice squarely within the politics of progressivism.

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