

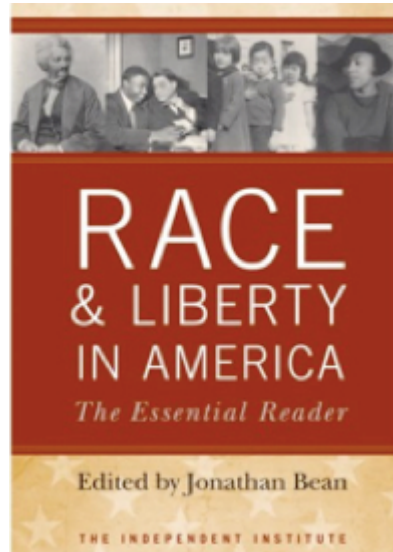


Written by [Patrick Krey](#) on November 9, 2009

## Erasing Racism in America

For far too long, those who oppose big-government solutions to racism have been slandered as racists. (Sadly, such attacks are similar to the claims that people who oppose civil-rights-violating national security measures like the Patriot Act are terrorist sympathizers.) Such slander, while entirely inaccurate, is effective in silencing any dissent on the subject of race and government.

So when it comes to the average history books that deal with the controversial subject of race in America, readers are typically led to believe that the only voices interested in combating government-sponsored racism were liberals or progressives and their even bigger government solutions. Not so, says Jonathan Bean, Research Fellow at the Independent Institute and professor of history at Southern Illinois University. In [Race & Liberty in America: The Essential Reader](#), Bean argues that it was classical liberals who were at the forefront of fighting for equal rights for America's oppressed minorities, and he backs it up by featuring some very compelling writings and speeches from prominent historical figures.



### An Intellectual Journey

So, what is a classical liberal? Bean writes, "Classical liberals espoused values shared by many other Americans: 'unalienable rights from God,' individual freedom from government control, the Constitution as a guarantor of freedom, color-blind law, and capitalism." Many modern-day libertarians and traditional conservatives also have a lot in common with classical liberals. The book is an effort to draw attention to "the invisible men and women of the long civil rights movement" who "rejected government meddling in race relations."

Bean takes the reader on a historical journey from the time of our nation's founding period up to present day by exploring original writings from important liberty-minded individuals. By writing a brief introduction to each document, Bean explains the historical setting as well as where the piece fits within the overall context of the book.

While most modern historians ignore any positive role Christianity played in history, *Race & Liberty* stands out in its impressive effort to highlight the role Christianity played not only in our nation's



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founding but also in helping to fight the pernicious evil of slavery. Starting with the Declaration of Independence, Bean notes how our nation was founded on the principles of God-given rights where God was mentioned “four times as the source of those ‘unalienable Rights’” ahow evangelical Christians like William Wilberforce were a critically important voice for the abolishment of slavery.

The book doesn’t just confine itself to domestic race relations but also delves into America’s foreign policy. Such writings are incredibly timely considering modern U.S. foreign policy. William Graham Sumner, a leading advocate of laissez-faire economics and fervent opponent of socialism, warned Americans to avoid Empire-building in 1899 after its war with Spain. His writings could very well speak to what the Obama administration is currently doing in Afghanistan and the greater Islamic world:

We assume that what we like and practice, and what we think better must come as a welcome blessing to Spanish-Americans and Philipinos. This is grossly and obviously untrue. They hate our ways. They are hostile to our ideas. Our religion, language, institutions and manners offend them. They like their own ways, and if we appear amongst them as rulers, then there will be social discord.... The most important thing we will inherit from the Spaniards will be suppressing rebellions.... The reason why liberty, of which Americans talk so much, is a good thing, is that it means leaving people to live out their own lives in their own ways, while we do the same.... I submit that it is a strange incongruity to utter grand platitudes about the blessings of liberty, etc., etc. which we are going to impart to these people, and to begin by refusing to extend the Constitution over them, and still more, by throwing the Constitution into the gutter here at home. If you take away the Constitution, what is American liberty and all the rest? Nothing but a lot of phrases.

### **Free Market as a Solution to Racism**

*Race & Liberty* also includes inspiring writings from prominent black figures throughout history who touted effective methods to combat racism that didn’t require the accumulation of more power in the state. These giants among men advocated a two-pronged approach involving self-help and a color-blind application of the law. Men like Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington “promoted the notion that markets were color-blind and capitalism was their best hope.”

Douglass wrote, “The lessons taught at this point by human experience is simply this, that the man who will get up will be helped up; and that the man who will not get up will be allowed to stay down.”

*Race & Liberty* directly attacks the argument that capitalism is inherently racist. Highlighting how businesses opposed state-mandated segregation policies on economic grounds, Bean features a letter from the owner of a streetcar company to a local municipality complaining that their racial segregation laws were bad for business because it resulted in them having disproportionately filled street cars, increased wait times and congestion. Indeed, Bean argues that the free market often worked in the favor of blacks. To back up his contention, Bean includes writings and interviews with S.B. Fuller, a self-made African American entrepreneur, who explained that discrimination is a universal trait not expressly limited to white people, but that it is forgotten when it becomes unprofitable. Fuller’s advice to minorities seeking equal rights was: “first, go to school and get a good education. It’s not up to the teacher to see he gets it. It’s up to the student.... Then, when he comes out of school, comes out with something to offer, a talent he can sell ... work. And not only that: He must work and he must save his money and he must pool his money. If he wants integration, he must hire white people just as he wants



white people to hire him.”

### **Colorblind Law**

*Race & Liberty* also passionately makes the case that big-government “solutions” to racism such as mandated quotas like affirmative action and urban renewal are not only contrary to the classical liberal principles of color-blind law and limited government but also detrimental toward truly helping minorities. Again, Bean utilizes writings and speeches from African-American intellectuals who go against the grain. Minds like black economist Walter Williams is quoted as saying that “the immorality of numbers-based privileges and benefits is readily realized when we recognize that government cannot give a special advantage to one person without simultaneously giving a special disadvantage to another.”

Another quote from Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas cuts right through the heart of the diversity-at-all-costs goal of affirmative action:

The Law School is not looking for those students who, despite a lower LSAT score or undergraduate grade point average, will succeed in the study of law. The Law School seeks only a façade — it is sufficient that the class looks right, even if it does not perform right.

Another refreshing characteristic from *Race & Liberty* was its fearlessness in challenging the perceived politically correct view of history. Bean openly acknowledges the fact that Abraham Lincoln was not the anti-slavery icon he is portrayed as by the cultists posing as historians who take every opportunity to fawn over “the great emancipator.” Bean writes about how Lincoln supported an amendment that would have inserted a right to own slaves within the Constitution as well as how Lincoln’s major goal was only to keep a unified, central government and not end slavery. Lincoln clearly stated, “If I could save the union without freeing any slave, I would do it.”

Furthermore, Bean goes after Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had a pathetic record on civil rights at home and even unconstitutionally interned Japanese Americans during WWII as a “wartime measure.” The following quote from Anti-New Dealer Congressman Hamilton Fish summed FDR up in a nutshell.

While President Franklin Roosevelt told the American people that they had to fight a war to protect democracy in Europe, he refused to support my efforts to extend the blessings of democracy to American blacks. Sadly, American blacks were learning what the people of Eastern Europe were to learn later: Roosevelt’s lofty promises about freedom and democracy were empty. He never had any intention of fulfilling those promises, because his interest was not in defending principles, but in political aggrandizement; and when it served his cause to say one thing and do another, that is precisely what he did.

### **Two Faults: Centralizing “Constitutionalism” and Open Borders**

The only two areas where this reviewer could find fault with the book is its questionable constitutionalism and its pro-immigration stance. In the book’s defense, Bean does acknowledge the opposing viewpoints on these issues and defends his decision to include the perspectives he did.

In the first area, the book includes writings of Lysander Spooner, who dabbled in some dubious constitutional arguments which coincidentally made whatever he liked constitutional and whatever he disliked unconstitutional. Spooner, while a brilliant mind and staunch advocate for liberty, incorrectly



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argued that the Constitution itself prohibited slavery years before the ratification of the 13th Amendment. Such a conclusion would surely have been a shock to both the drafters and ratifiers of the Founding period. Spooner, along with great minds like Frederick Douglass, espoused the libertarian interpretation of a living-breathing Constitution, which ignores any originalist constitutional understanding. It also rests on the dangerous notion that the central government has much more power than what was authorized at the ratification. As history has borne out, empowering the federal government with more power than it constitutionally has is detrimental to individual freedom over the long term. Instead, the book could have explored the writings of constitutionalists who used proper means to resist and fight slavery. For starters, many antislavery states nullified the Fugitive Slave Act that compelled the return of runaway slaves.

Secondly, the book repeatedly trumpets the classical liberal belief in a natural right to migration while dismissing opposing viewpoints as immigration-restrictionists and or nativists. While such notions sound good on paper or in times when government was much smaller, current events both in America and Western Europe show the perils of open borders combined with massive government entitlement programs and group-identity politics. An open-borders argument made sense in the late 1800s when America was truly the land of opportunity, but today such a position will only accelerate America's decline. Today's immigrants flooding into our nation consistently advocate for more government intervention at both the federal and state level. The most ironic pro-open borders argument featured by Bean actually makes the case against open-borders in modern-day America. Classical liberal Louis Marshall writes:

A number of fundamental principles were quite generally recognized and are now crystallized into our immigration legislation. These principles, to which no honest citizen can make the slightest objection, are that nobody shall be admitted as an immigrant or otherwise who is mentally, morally, or physically unfit, nobody likely to be a drag upon the country by becoming a public charge, nobody who would prove a source of danger to the country by his opposition to those moral concepts for which we stand.... Nor will we harbor those who are enemies of organized government ... no communists — nobody who believes in ... agitation for the destruction of constitutional government. None of these categories is to be admitted. Nobody will raise his voice more earnestly than I in opposition to the admission of any of these objectionable classes.

If that disclaimer is affixed to an open-borders argument, then I guess I'm open borders too. The aforementioned faults are minor and did not take away from my enjoyment of the book.

### **Ahead of Their Time**

Overall, *Race & Liberty* is an enlightening read that will leave the reader feeling both inspired and optimistic about the future. Many of today's proponents of individual rights and freedom find themselves scorned and mocked as fringe fanatics by "mainstream" voices. The writers featured in this book faced similar ridicule in their time for stating opinions not favored by the political elite but now they are widely recognized as enlightened visionaries. If those who are so active in today's freedom movement continue to passionately advocate for liberty, perhaps they will also someday be remembered as being ahead of their time.



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***[Race & Liberty in America: The Essential Reader](#)***, edited by Jonathan Bean, Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 2009, 331 pages, paperback.



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