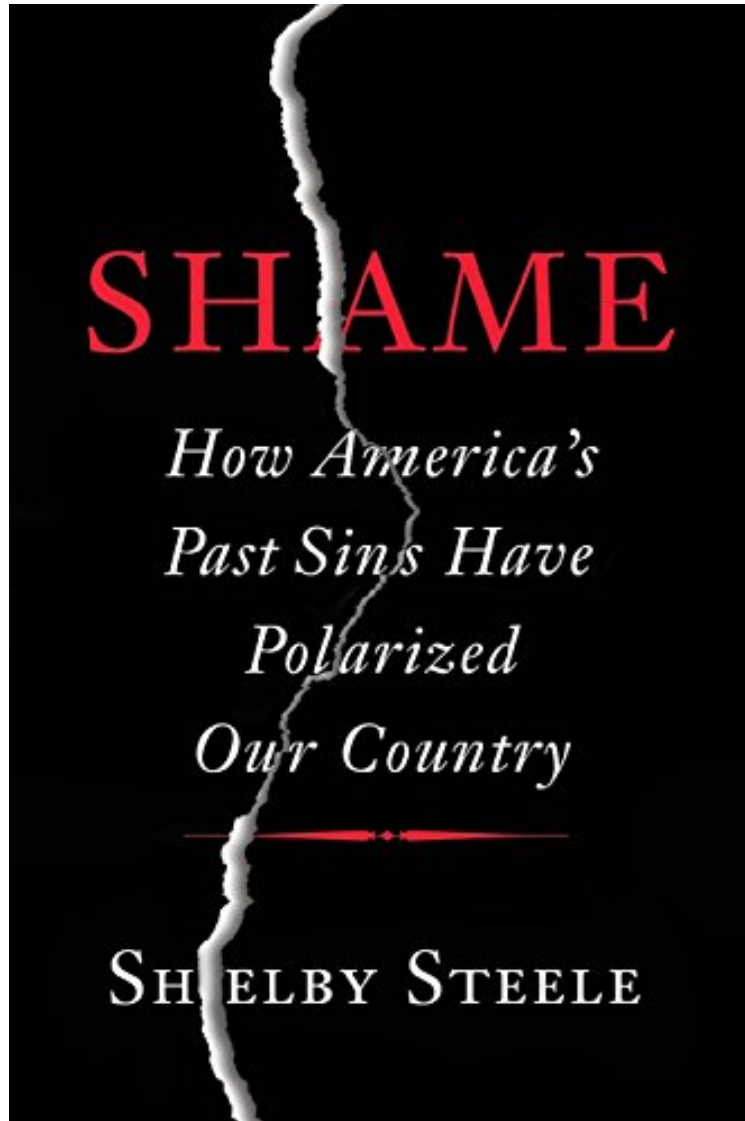


(Library ebook) Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country

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

Shelby Steele

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Shelby Steele : Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country:

74 of 77 people found the following review helpful. Steele's Interpretation of What Divides Us!By Kevin Currie-KnightSteele 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. Where Steele believes the proper reaction to racism and sexism was to allow oppressed groups freedom to work their way up, the new liberalism in some way chose to switch oppressors: instead of allowing blacks, women, gays, and other groups to be oppressed by discrimination, they would now be oppressed by governments who would insist that these groups couldn't do much without government help. And the tragic benefit of this new liberalism was that the former oppressors (whites, males, straights) could now atone for their sins by favoring policies like 'diversity' quotas and the like that wouldn't so much help these newly free groups, but would make everyone feel better about themselves. Two brief criticisms: first, I think Steele's thesis - that this can explain the core differences between liberals and conservatives - is probably too grand. It explains some differences, but not others. (Does it explain, for instance, why conservatives tend to be pro-life and liberals pro-choice, or the different stances on firearm regulation?) Second - and this is somewhat typical of Steele - he doesn't tend to seriously entertain counterarguments. Steele's belief in a laissez-faire conservatism - government will leave you alone, and that is enough - will be interpreted by some (generally on the left) as ignoring the reality of "structural racism." How, they will ask, do blacks and whites have equal opportunity when blacks get paid much less on average than whites, even for similar jobs, or when blacks are more likely to be arrested, injured, and even killed than whites by a difference of 8 to 1? I don't doubt that Steele could answer these questions, but he doesn't seem to seriously consider that they need addressing. All in all, though, Steele is a joy to read, and for my part, many of his interpretations of the American psyche make sense and ring true. If you haven't read him, you need to.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Why Shame is and isn't necessary in Black-White Relations
By MaryAnnAn intimate view of Mr. Steele's journey to how he chose conservatism. His cogent arguments as to why 'white guilt' is real and in certain cases well-founded, but is not helpful to black folks and can even be a hindrance to their personal and financial growth. A terrific book.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Inspiring hope
By Kristine H. Shelby Steele inspires hope that America still has the possibility of excellence through equal opportunity for all under the law. A must read for those who struggle to understand our current political polarization.

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.

New York Times Book Editor's Choice