

Books

Good news! It's not *racism*, it's 'rational discrimination'

By MATTHEW BUDMAN
Special to The Times

There's something distasteful about reviewing a book as unsavory and ill-intentioned as *The End of Racism*. No matter how vociferous the critic's cries of condemnation, some readers will be intrigued enough to lay down \$30 and prolong the book's stay in the spotlight.

But perhaps Dinesh D'Souza's muddled polemic demands more than a quick dismissal. While commentators across the political spectrum found it easy to reject *The Bell Curve's* rancid resurrection of extinct biological-predestination theories, many on the right will accept *The End of Racism*, with its 2,200 footnotes and this-is-the-final-word title.

Most important, it represents an important step backward in race thinking. Not long ago, neoconservative sociologists acknowledged that whites had spent three centuries digging a hole for African-Americans only to suggest that they should

*THE END OF RACISM:
Principles for a Multiracial Society*

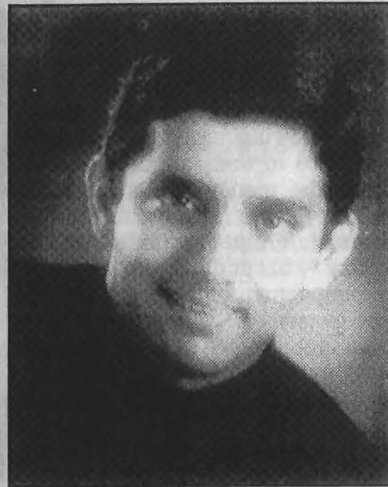
By Dinesh D'Souza
The Free Press, 724 pp., \$30

climb out without help. D'Souza takes this a step further. He isn't content to shift responsibility for racial hostility and urban despair onto the black underclass itself. Revising history furiously, he questions whether slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, and employment discrimination bear any responsibility for the state of black America. "What do Americans today owe blacks because of slavery?" he asks. "The answer is: probably nothing."

D'SOUZA WANTS to abolish not white racism but white guilt. If readers are to feel anything about race, it should be disdain for the liberal intellectuals who have insisted on treating blacks like people. Plus, of course, disdain for blacks and their "cultural deficiencies" — drugs, guns, illegitimacy, and so on. (D'Sou-

za's lengthy lecture on that topic is highlighted by the findings that Afrocentrists are nutty, that the NAACP is out of touch, and that rap music is crude. Stop the presses!)

African-American deficiencies are key to D'Souza's most revisionism about current-day racism, which, he says, takes the form of "rational discrimination." "Rational discrimination," he explains, "is based on accurate group generalizations that may nevertheless be unfair to particular members of a group." He argues that taxi drivers who will not stop for black men, store owners who refuse to hire blacks, and women who cross the street at the sight of a black man aren't racists but "amateur statisticians acting on impressionistic but not unreasonable generalizations. . . . In this context, a bigot is simply a sociologist without



Dinesh D'Souza

credentials." Got that, bigots? No need to give your prejudices a second thought.

In fact, traditional racism no longer exists, claims D'Souza, who calls for a repeal of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Dubbing institutional racism "a nonsense phrase," he argues that racism lives on only in our hearts — and that whites' innate antipathy toward African Americans has dissi-

pated. This assertion dissolves with one statistic D'Souza cites almost offhandedly: Nearly two-thirds of Americans have "problems" with intermarriage.

MANY OF D'Souza's arguments are equally problematic, particularly as he hedges his most controversial statements and buries his own central theses. Under cloying chapter titles and headings ("The Unbearable Whiteness of Being"), D'Souza's Swiss-cheese arguments flounder in a roiling sea of quotes and anecdotes, with fringe and mainstream figures cited interchangeably, as though Khalid Abdul Muhammad headed the Democratic Party.

One contorted chapter argues that (because a few Northern blacks owned slaves) the institution of slavery was purely economic and not at all racially charged; D'Souza's use of sources is so nakedly selective that virtually no acquaintance with history is necessary to brush off that line of reasoning.

D'Souza portrays Columbus as a humanitarian, slavery as benevolent, segregation as a system erected

to protect blacks. "What distinguished Western colonialism was neither occupation nor brutality but a countervailing philosophy of rights that is unique in human history," he writes. Given white America's beneficence, D'Souza wonders why blacks aren't more grateful. "[I]t seems puzzling that a group that is the unquestioned beneficiary of systematized preferences should be doing anything other than celebrating its racial good fortune," he muses.

His concluding policy proposals are familiar social-Darwinist roll-backs, with cursory solutions: "The black problem can be solved only through a program of cultural reconstruction in which society plays a supporting role but which is carried out primarily by African Americans themselves."

In other words: Whites — relax. Say what you want, think what you want, hire who you want. Blacks — you're on your own.

Matthew Budman, who lives in Highland Park, writes and edits for a Manhattan business monthly.