



Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America

By John McWhorter

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Berkeley linguistics professor John McWhorter, born at the dawn of the post-Civil Rights era, spent years trying to make sense of this question. Now he dares to say the unsayable: racism's ugliest legacy is the disease of defeatism that has infected black America. *Losing the Race* explores the three main components of this cultural virus: the cults of victimology, separatism, and antiintellectualism that are making blacks their own worst enemies in the struggle for success.

More angry than Stephen Carter, more pragmatic and compassionate than Shelby Steele, more forward-looking than Stanley Crouch, McWhorter represents an original and provocative point of view. With *Losing the Race*, a bold new voice rises among black intellectuals.

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Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America By John McWhorter Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #160494 in Books
- Published on: 2001-07-31
- Released on: 2001-07-31
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .73" w x 5.31" l, .56 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 320 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

For the past two decades, an academic cottage industry has developed to analyze--and some would say overemphasize--the social and educational problems of African Americans. Such writers as Dinesh D'Souza, Shelby Steele, Armstrong Williams, and Ken Hamblin have all contributed in this area; now add to that list John McWhorter, a Berkeley linguistics professor and the author of *Word on the Street*, an examination of Ebonics and Black English. The basic idea he presents in this occasionally insightful if flawed book is that African Americans are not advancing socially as a result of victimology, separatism, and anti-intellectualism.

According to the author, victimology "has become a keystone of cultural blackness to treat victimhood not as a problem to be solved but as an identity to be nurtured," while "separatism encourages black Americans to conceive of black people as an unofficial sovereign entity, within which the rules other Americans are expected to follow are suspended out of a belief that our victimhood renders us morally exempt from them." Anti-intellectualism is a belief that "school is a 'white' endeavor." McWhorter suggests that only blacks embrace such opinions, placing most of the blame on them while underemphasizing the institutional racism that facilitates such views. Needless to say, McWhorter has no love for the likes of Al Sharpton, Hazel Carby, June Jordan, or Patricia Williams and their ilk. His chapter on Ebonics, his specialty, is the most nuanced, though certainly not the final word on the matter. And though some readers will be turned off by his use of tired anti-affirmative-action, right-wing clichés, anyone interested in the education of African Americans in the post civil rights era will find *Losing the Race* a worthy read. --Eugene Holley Jr.

From Publishers Weekly

Are African-Americans using past racial injustices as an excuse for not working to take advantage of contemporary opportunities? McWhorter, a linguistics professor at the University of California, Berkeley, thinks he has the answers to this question and others and he points the finger directly at the black community. Starting with the premise that white racism is no longer the threat it once was, McWhorter singles out "the cult of victimology" and the glorification of white racism as a major cause for several social crises afflicting African-Americans. Offering little that has not been said previously by conservatives like Pat Buchanan and Shelby Steele, McWhorter uses a cookie-cutter approach to explain away recent race pressure points such as the arson directed against black churches, the high proportion of black inmates in America's prisons, the practice of racial profiling and police brutality. In each case, he finds fault with the African-American community's interpretation of these situations, accusing African-Americans of hypersensitivity to racial bias and a reluctance to relinquish the past. Victimology, as well as separatism, in his words, "gives failure, lack of effort and criminality a tacit stamp of approval." Most disturbing, his suggestion that a cultural trait drives the low scholastic performance of black youth borders on the views of those who consider heredity the cause of blacks' poor performance on standardized tests. Like many of the new black conservatives, McWhorter spends much time going after liberal columnists and social critics, attacking both their intent and message. Even his closing segment "How Can We Save the African-American Race?" sounds more like a well-worn campaign speech than a call to initiate a dialogue on race in the African-American community and the nation. (Aug.)

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From [Booklist](#)

McWhorter makes compelling arguments for the failure of African Americans to achieve academic success. He posits three causes of this failure, which he characterizes as victimology, separatism, and anti-

intellectualism. McWhorter's "cult of victimology" is the "transformation of victimhood from a problem to be solved into an identity in itself." Such action keeps the victims and others from acknowledging that progress has been made. The "cult of separatism" is the attempt to self-protect by only engaging in activities that are for blacks. The "cult of anti-intellectualism" is the attitude that any authentic black person would not desire intellectual pursuits but rather consider such efforts alien and suspicious. McWhorter stresses that his position about the challenges faced by African American students is based on cultural issues within the black community and not on economic factors. This book will surely enrage and shock many. A cogently written academic look at a very emotional and debatable topic. *Lillian Lewis*
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Users Review

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Freddy Lamberth:

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Blair Chappell:

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