

Loury, Glenn C. *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality with A New Preface*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2021, xxxiii + 228 pages.

First published two decades ago, the second paper edition of *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality with A New Preface*, by Economist Glenn Loury, is a timely reignition call for America to take on the unabating racial inequality—black inequality in particular—in American society. Through razor-sharp analysis, Loury turns the spotlight squarely on the disheartening reality of black American inequality. He crystalizes negative racial stigma as the ultimate culprit for the persisting black inequality in American society today. To fundamentally remove black inequality, Loury proposes that developmental policies and practices be in place to combat the barriers and stumbling blocks so black Americans have equal opportunities to achieve equality.

Through methodical dissection of how race, racism and racial discrimination have been debated and addressed in American society, Loury asserts that what perpetuates continued black inequality in America today is not so much “discrimination in contract” anymore but rather “discrimination in contact.” Structural reforms since the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s have resulted in an overhaul of policy changes that largely removed “discrimination in contract” against any racial groups in the American public arena. Such reform alone, however, has very limited effect on changing the stubbornly negative perceptions towards blacks as a group that was deeply rooted in the history of black slavery. It is this kind of more subtle “discrimination in contact” in the largely informal and personal arena in American society that continues to impede more significant progress towards racial equality for the blacks in America society today.

Built upon well-researched empirical and theoretical analysis of the limitations of the impacts from the structural and policy changes towards racial equality in America since more than half a century ago, Loury concludes that black Americans are held back and color based “racial stigma” is the root cause for the current state of stubborn black inequality in America. Began in

the subjugation of Africans to slavery in history, physical traits including skin color of black Americans are shrouded with concrete social meanings connoting to and manifested as a pervasive negative stigma against them in modern America. Socially constructed, often compounded by selective but rational affirmation, the unspoken but common negative stigma is widely applied to black Americans as a group affecting adversely in their socialization with the rest of America, and vice versa. In the more formal and public arena, black Americans are protected under the law, free from “discrimination in contract,” but as a group, black Americans are burdened with a negative stigma in the more informal and personal social networks, “discrimination in contact,” that continue to shun them from equal access to the necessary resources or pathways towards equality. Given that informal personal and social affiliations often provide access to critical information and resources that bear great potentials towards upward mobility, Loury argues that the lack of such access in contact leaves black Americans far behind in their progress to equality, and this is where policy-regulated formal transactions are toothless and ineffective in mediating black disadvantages as a group in modern American society.

The particularly traumatic historical experience imposed on black Americans casts a very long shadow that continues to deprive blacks from advancing towards racial equality in American society today. Black stigma, deeply rooted and largely intact in modern America, is an extremely powerful force to reckon with in America’s progress towards racial equality. Loury notes that black equality could not be realized until policymakers and American public come to a grip that “racial stigma” is the more salient barrier standing in the way of black Americans’ advance towards equality. Since black Americans as a group are negatively stigmatized based on their skin color, Loury strongly argues against “color-blindness” in policy designs and endorses affirmative action. He equates color-blindness for a color “raced group” to justice blind and moral indifference to the

real experience of that group, the reality of black Americans. In striving for racial equality in America today, Loury states the focal point should be hinged on finding solutions to tackle negative group stigma in contact so black Americans would have equal opportunities to advance, free of “discrimination in contact.”

Loury presents a powerful interdisciplinary analysis on the reality and severity of black inequality in American society. Citing easily accessible empirical data and theoretical analyses, Loury engages his readers with stimulating arguments on what works and what does not work in mediating black Americans’ march towards equality in America today. Loury emphasizes that black inequality is not a black problem, but a problem created in America, by America, and therefore it is America’s responsibility as a democratic institution to resolve. Loury’s rigorous exposition is extremely valuable to college students, intellectuals, social institutions, and policymakers alike in understanding the core of black inequality. It is a powerful mobilization call for America to take action in facilitating black equality.

Linda Wang, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Geography
University of South Carolina Aiken
Aiken, South Carolina