

## Book Review

Davis, Larry E. (2016). *Why are they angry with us? Essays on race*. Oxford University Press (formerly Lyceum Books, Inc.)

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This book is diminutive in both size and length, and yet, it is a very powerful and compelling reader for laypersons and scholars alike. The author, Larry E. Davis, MA, MSW, Ph.D., uses this collection of personal essays to answer a childhood question he asked himself while growing up as a black male and experiencing racism and prejudice at the end of the Jim Crow era. His question “*Why are they angry with us?*” was prompted by the fact that whites he saw and heard of, who had historically enslaved African Americans, were seemingly angry with African Americans, but the African Americans he saw weren’t angry with whites.

The book is readily accessible, written in plain prose, meant to reach an audience outside of the world of academe for whom Davis has been writing over his career. The essays chronicle his experiences starting with the history of his immediate family and then his own. With each essay, he is also chronicling our collective cultural racism and prejudices both as he remembers them and as history informs us. Each of the respective essays focuses on a different aspect of racism—but they are also his story and experiences, replete in very rich detail of the political and social milieus in which they occurred.

This alone would make this a very good book, and it is; but Davis adds another subtle academic layer. Though purported to have written for the layperson, Davis upfront tells us that with his training as a social worker and psychologist, he has discovered answers to his question. Those answers are provided in the book, with “a personal history of race with a social

science bent” (p. 2). That “social bent” is social science informed by solid theory.

Davis uses three social psychological theories throughout the essays to “make sense” of the world he has experienced as an African American male growing up and as a researcher of race. Using cognitive dissonance theory, relative deprivation, and internalized racism, Davis provides compelling explanations for racism, its perpetuation, and current issues for African Americans and African American communities.

Lastly, these rich essays with supporting theories also reference seminal and important works on race and race theory. Each essay has a concise reference section for readers who wish to learn more.

Lay persons and scholars not familiar with social psychological theories will find this book an intense and amazing read just for the value of seeing racism through the eyes of one who has experienced it, studied it, and can, with scientific objectivity, analyze it. For any student of race issues, this is not just a light read, but a fantastic starting point for discussion and exposure to the ideas of some of the leading researchers and theories used in such studies. Best of all, it is a personal and heartfelt story that makes the cost of racism palpable and yet is also a wonderful launching point for social workers and social scientists who are beginning the work of studying racism and race issues.