A preeminent sociologist of race explains a groundbreaking new framework for understanding racial inequality, challenging both conservative and liberal dogma. In this provocative contribution to the American discourse on race, the newest book of the Issues of Our Time series edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr., William Julius Wilson applies an exciting new analytic framework to three politically fraught social problems: the persistence of the inner-city ghetto, the plight of low-skilled black males, and the fragmentation of the African American family. Though the discussion of racial inequality is typically ideologically polarized—conservatives emphasize cultural factors like worldviews and behaviors while liberals emphasize institutional forces—Wilson dares to consider both institutional and cultural factors as causes of the persistence of racial inequality. He reaches the controversial conclusion that, while structural and cultural forces are inextricably linked, public policy can change the racial status quo only by reforming the institutions that reinforce it. This book will dramatically affect policy debates and challenge many of the policies advocated by today’s minority leaders.

My Personal Review:
In this short 155-page informative non-fiction academic novel, I feel I have been taken to a world completely alien, despite growing up in a low-income community myself. In truth, this world was alien to me because I made it alien. As a young man, I witnessed firsthand and recognized at an early age the self-destructive behavior amongst blacks within the black community. Not caring for academic progression, the tendency for imprudent behavior leading to criminal behavior, and women too often priding in their promiscuousness that always eventually lead to early pregnancy. I saw all of these things and decided I would not fall into the trap that cycled throughout my neighborhood. To do so, not only required physically removing myself from that environment (I switched to a magnet high school my junior year), but it also required that I removed myself mentally and emotionally, by claiming that these people were different from
myself, in so much that they intentionally not allow themselves to progress. Along with it went my empathy for the black person, and replaced with ignorant opinion and naïve reasons to why blacks were such seemingly failures.

This book has been a significantly eye-opening experience. It has allowed me to put the cultural behavioral I have witnessed throughout my life into a categorical mental classification of awareness within the larger intellectual genome of understanding. I know now that the current situation of blacks have been very much influenced by racial policies that were both explicit, i.e. Jim Crow, and implicit, i.e. reduction of federal financial support of areas of high black populations such as the inner city. Additionally, I've been able to draw parallels in the African American plight and that of other black nations, such as that of Haiti, my country of birth, and recognize the traces of similar structural deficiencies put in place by centuries of racism.

This book neither shies away from analysis of the critique that blacks and the behavioral response that have arisen are now the culprits for their stagnated position within society and those alone. The author is unable to agree with these sorts of arguments as they seem to be unsubstantiated through even the most biased of academic research. According to the author, the clearest contrarian piece of evidence against cultural argument was the economic boom of the early 1990s. The rise in productivity, and domestic capital accruement, saw unprecedented decrease in unemployment throughout the U.S.. If cultural arguments were true, then unemployment in low income black communities would have stayed constant, or at least would have experienced a change that was lower than the rest of nation, but this was not seen. Given the OPPORTUNITY, poor blacks changed behavior that was previously attributed to condemnation engrained and sourced from their "culture."

The author argues that America needs to change the language used during discussions of race and class. First the language needs to merge the rhetoric of both the right, whom tend to lean towards more of a cultural tone, and that of the left, whom tend to lean towards a restrictive structural tone, to properly appeal to a larger more section of Americans. Second, to face the structural issues facing low income blacks and other minorities and for such action to be truly effective, a problem must be executed with discretionary vocabulary, language, and tone that extols the virtues of America's individualistic pathology to its advantage, such as labeling and designing such programs as `opportunity enhancing' and `hand-up providing.'

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