



WE ARE ALL AMERICANS, PURE AND SIMPLE

Dorsey, Leroy G.

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This ambitious, well documented book written by Dorsey analyzes Theodore Roosevelt's use of public rhetoric to craft a particular version of Americanism, a version that despite the racism and xenophobia of the times included a way for non-whites and immigrants to participate. To be sure, the analysis shows Roosevelt's ethnocentricity and racist views, but it also shows his attempt to strike "a middle ground" between white Americans and "others" in creating the collective identity for all of them as "Americans, pure and simple." As such, Roosevelt culturally brokered the country akin to Anderson's "[imagined community](#)". He hoped that a united population would promote the greater good for the country and allow it to progress in the development of civilized life.

Throughout his analysis of Roosevelt's rhetoric, Dorsey looks for answers to questions about why people of ethnic minority groups and immigrants in the United States, including his father and family friend, endured the severe inequities that they did in order to live the American Dream. To find answers, Dorsey uses the introduction and first two chapters of the book to outline Roosevelt's notion of Americanism as centered in the "Frontier Myth," a mythology that served as the foundation of his political philosophy and became the backdrop for his fiction writing. A series of narrative histories, *The Winning of the West*, written by Roosevelt and published between 1885 and 1894 chronicle white settlers' move across and acquisition of the American West during the years 1763-1803. Dorsey explains that through these narratives Roosevelt created a persona of the settlers as heroic, mythic characters that possessed the three required characteristics of true Americanism: physical stamina and rugged individualism, the moral character to stand true to democratic principles, and the promotion of equality between all groups of people in the United States. In Roosevelt's version, individuals from non-white groups could earn their way into citizenship by possessing and demonstrating these "American" characteristics.

Despite the inclusive nature of his Frontier Myth, Roosevelt, like his contemporaries, held a deep conviction that white people were superior to people of all other races. In three separate chapters devoted to the plight of Native Americans, Blacks, and immigrants, Dorsey aptly, if not somewhat repetitively, identifies and deconstructs the myth and racism in Roosevelt's rhetoric as related to political, social, and legal occurrences between white people and each group. Included in each chapter are disturbing stories of the ill-treatment and inequality that existed between the white majority and "others." His rhetorical analysis exposes the myopia and paradox of Roosevelt's attempt at trying to create a middle ground between whites and other racial groups that he deemed philosophically and morally unequal.

At the beginning and end of the book, the Bush administration's handling of the Iraq War and other current events are used to discuss in part the difficulties encountered when trying to reconcile Roosevelt's racist convictions with his inclusive rhetoric. The paradoxes that emerged in Roosevelt's rhetoric still resonate with the state of race relations that exists in the country today. As stated by Barack Obama in a recent [speech](#) on race, "we're in a racial stalemate that we have been stuck in for years."

Dorsey disagrees with other historians who have dismissed Roosevelt's rhetoric as disingenuous, self-serving, and bombastic (p.3). Instead, like Roosevelt, Dorsey attempts to strike a middle ground of his own by not only writing this book, but also asking readers to consider the rhetoric as an important, informative public argument from which much can be learned. Despite his thorough analysis, Dorsey does not seem to find the answers to his questions about why minority groups and immigrants continue to persevere in the face of difficult odds in the United States. However, he does seem to appreciate the forthright nature of Roosevelt's rhetoric and uses it as a call for continued and open public argument that will help the country progress in the area of race relations. Dorsey claims that Roosevelt's ability to strike a middle ground between nativists, minorities, and immigrants in his times was an accomplishment that "was no small feat" (p. 7). I would claim the same of his book.