

*Enough: The Phony Leaders,
Dead-End Movements,
and Culture of Failure That Are
Undermining Black America -
and What We Can Do About It,*
by Juan Williams
(Crown, 256 pp., \$25)

The Souls of American Folk

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I doubt Juan Williams likes the company he seems to be keeping these days. His new book, *Enough*, appears to be selling well. But get on Amazon and look at its list of other books bought by the readers who have purchased *Enough*. Among the authors are Ann Coulter, Patrick Buchanan, and Shelby Steele - hardly his crowd.

Williams is a senior correspondent for NPR and a strong liberal voice on Fox News. And yet he's poured his heart and soul into delivering a heroic message that is deeply at odds with dug-in liberal orthodoxy. (Or rather, with the orthodoxy of the chattering classes; ordinary black folks are another story.) As Williams himself has said, "You become some sort of leper if you don't lock-step your opinions in line with white liberals. They run the programming of CBS, NBC, and ABC, and they don't want you to rock the boat of received opinion."

Enough is a brave and wonderful book. It is also rather unusual; in effect, Bill Cosby is the co-author. I cannot think of another work quite like it. Williams is Cosby's translator. As he acknowledges, his aim is to explain and defend The Cos, who gives speeches but does not write. Cosby is a beloved actor and comedian. But on May 17, 2004, in a speech to a glittering black-tie crowd celebrating the Golden Anniversary of *Brown v. Board*, he wasn't funny and endearing. He delivered remarks from which his old friends in the civil-rights community (who have been substantial beneficiaries of his philanthropic largesse) have yet to recover.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the lower-economic and lower-middle-economic people are not holding their end in this deal" - the deal being rights,

accompanied by responsibility. Too many young men are dropping out of school, fathering children from whom they "run away," and populating prisons. "We cannot blame white people," he went on; the problem is the underclass culture. "Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads. . . . These people are fighting hard to be ignorant."

It was a speech full of anger - and pain. The civil-rights community was not amused. Up on the podium after the speech, its representatives looked "stone-faced." University of Pennsylvania professor Michael Eric Dyson, in a fury shared by other black academics, decided to write an entire book titled, *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?* "In its views of the poor and its support of Cosby's sentiments, [it has] lost its mind," he concluded.

Dyson is right to say that many in the black middle class have long been disturbed by the social impropriety of the impoverished, and Cosby's speech did expose historic tensions. Richard Wright's *Native Son* began to be published in serialized form in a Harlem newspaper, but its depiction of the violence and sexuality of Bigger Thomas was deeply upsetting to the paper's audience, and the book was dropped like a hot potato. W. E. B. Du Bois famously talked of nurturing the black "talented tenth" but (although this is almost unknown) he also spoke of the "debauched tenth." Dyson writes that Cosby was repeating things that blacks had long said to each other, out of white earshot. But private talk is private. It has never inspired middle-class mobilization for cultural change - and that is clearly what Cosby wants.

And it's clearly what Juan Williams hopes for as well. Indeed, he describes Cosby's speech as setting "the agenda for civil rights in the twenty-first century." *Enough* is a powerful gloss on Cosby's views.

Here is the essence of the argument that Williams lays out. Once upon a time, the leading black spokesmen in America (Douglass, Washington, and Du Bois, for instance) believed in black self-determination. Part of the genius of black life in America, writes Williams, has come down "to our ability to make something out of nothing, 'a way out of no way.'" God helps those who help themselves. It is a "sin" to lose track of that truth.

Today, however, civil-rights leaders offer nothing but a "tired rant . . . about the power of white people." They depict blacks as "hapless victims waiting for . . . white guilt to bail them out" - "an inferior, weak people who are still flat on their backs, permanently defeated by the damage done by slavery several

generations ago." And yet to argue that today's poverty is the consequence of yesterday's slavery is to rob poor blacks of "all of their personal will, diminish their independence, and dismiss their intellect." And it is also to neglect the fact that "most black Americans do not live in poverty, are not in jail, and reign as the wealthiest black people in the world."

Why don't black leaders tell poor black families that they have the power to improve the education their kids are receiving? And why don't they, along with "black parents, black church people and schoolteachers, tell these black children to stop selling crack cocaine?" Instead, they make excuses for black criminals, which "amounts to a deal with the devil for black families and black neighborhoods." And they tolerate gangster rap as "authentically black," despite its "deluge of guns, half-naked women, and odes to quickie sex, interspersed with advertisements for alcohol."

Should blacks be telling their children that they are "weaker than any Bosnian refugee recently uprooted by genocide . . . any one of the 'Lost Boys of the Sudan,' thousands of miles from home and culture, but working to adjust in a land free of tyranny"? America is the land of opportunity, and yet too many blacks live "as if they were locked out from all America has to offer."

Civil-rights leaders, says Williams, imply that whites have all the power, and that government needs to increase social spending. And yet demanding "bigger budgets for programs that show no sign of working" is nothing but "a tired failed strategy" that "encourages patterns of dependence." The alternative: Tell parents they need to monitor the education of their children, oversee their homework, and make sure they are off to school in the morning, rested and ready to learn. And tell kids that the Charles Murray formula, first laid out in 1986, was right. The route out of poverty is simple: finish high school, take a job and hold on to it, marry when you have an education and a job, have children only after you are 21 and married.

Cosby broke a black code of near-silence in the public arena, and Williams has followed up with a passionate book. But the "phony leaders" of "dead-end movements" are not likely to heed their clarion call. Why should they? Their status as spokesmen for the alleged victims of persistent racism and their exploitation of boundless white guilt is their explicitly acknowledged ticket to survival. The agenda for reform that Cosby and Williams lay out is not new, but they are newcomers to the cause.

Maybe their voices will make a real difference. But it seems doubtful. Juan

Williams may think he and Cosby are uniquely positioned to reach an audience that reflexively rejects precisely their ideas when those ideas are articulated by black and white conservatives. But with their emphasis on American opportunity, personal responsibility, and the criminal negligence of today's civil-rights leaders, they have crossed the hard line that separates the Left and Right on issues of race. Like it or not, Williams has joined the "lepers." Welcome, Juan! I like your company.

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