
OTHER TITLES

Contemporary Affairs

THE END OF EQUALITY. By Mickey Kaus.
Basic. 271 pp. \$25

That in egalitarian America the richest five percent of society now own roughly two-fifths of the nation's wealth neither surprises nor upsets *New Republic* editor Kaus. Indeed, Kaus's book reads like a calming election-year sermon to his fellow liberals. Its moral is that liberals (by whom he means Democrats) have been exiled from the White House by their misguided commitment to welfare and income redistribution. Typically, liberals ignore the fact that economic inequality is as natural to capitalism as flies and ants are to a picnic. In place of *income* equality, Kaus prescribes *social* equality, which would restrict the spheres of life in which money matters and enlarge those in which it does not.

Kaus may be preaching to the converted. At their 1992 convention, Democrats kept sounding the refrain of how far their party had traveled from 1972 and George McGovern's vow to redistribute wealth. A decade ago, well before Reaganomics had run its course, political philosopher Michael Walzer suggested in *Spheres of Justice* (1983) that people with wealth or authority should not be able to translate such advantages into privileges that work to the detriment of less fortunate people in other sectors of society. Wealth should not translate into privileged access to medical care, for example, and if the wealthy can have their private garden parties, then the public parks should be safe and pleasant as well. Kaus has taken Walzer's idea and packaged it in specific proposals and a political agenda.

Kaus would introduce or reinforce institutions that establish social equality: better schools and public transportation, mandatory national service for the young, an electoral system that is publicly financed, a national public health system. His chief proposal, however, involves replacing welfare with guaranteed jobs. Every American over 18 could, as a fallback, obtain a useful public job, compensated at a wage slightly below the private-sector mini-

mum. The federal government would supplement all low-paid jobs with earned-income tax credits, to raise all employees and their families above the poverty line. Those critics who expect the end of the welfare state to result in huge savings may be shocked at the tab for Kaus's scheme: initially, \$66 to \$83 billion a year. (For purposes of comparison, America's current welfare system costs roughly \$23 billion, while George Bush's requested military budget this year is \$281 billion.) Ultimately, Kaus argues, the investment in a "work ethic state," where there would be a smaller underclass, less drug use, and less crime, would more than pay for itself.

For all of Kaus's discussion of a civic ethic and of a society scaled to human needs, his book is remarkably devoid of any testimony from real people. By keeping to the theoretical, Kaus scants the difficult social and institutional realities involved in getting Americans off welfare and food stamps and into meaningful jobs. Kaus presents a new vision of civic society, of an America animated by a more communal spirit, but he leaves the realization of this vision up to federal authorities, without adequately exploring the role that states, localities, and voluntary groups might play in bringing it to fruition.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. By Kwame Anthony Appiah. Oxford. 225 pp. \$29.95

In the film *Mississippi Masala* (1992), a Ugandan-born lawyer of Indian descent becomes furious when a black friend, urging him to flee Idi Amin's terror, quotes Kwame Nkrumah's saying, "Africa for the Africans!" Appiah, a professor of philosophy at Harvard, argues that pan-African slogans such as Nkrumah's encapsulate a most curious history of racism.

Appiah here investigates that convoluted history to learn how the *idea* of "African" came into being. As a cultural notion it was, in fact, created not in Africa but elsewhere. During the 19th century, European colonizers—as a way