

## Monochrome Life

Reviewed by Darryl Lorenzo Wellington

BETWEEN 2007 AND 2009, the young African-American political commentator Rich Benjamin spent much of his time living a suburban fantasy—posing as a home buyer researching high-end properties, living in fashionable condominiums and gated communities, and studying with professional trainers to sharpen his golf game. His foray into enclaves of wealth and comfort might seem a mere vacation if it weren't also a sociological study. "Statistics can tell you only so much," he explains at the outset. "Understanding the spirit of a people and the essence of a place requires firsthand experience."

The dwindling statistical dominance of whites in the country as a whole has been accompanied by a marked rise of segregated white enclaves; in these upscale communities, whites make up 85 percent or more of the residents. While traditional suburbs diversify and the poorest urban areas warehouse minorities, since 2000 Whitopias (i.e., white utopias) have posted at least six percent population growth, most from non-Hispanic whites. Culturally, they are conservative; politically, they are typically Republican. Often, they are designed by developers to cater to old-fashioned, Ozzie and Harriet values. The residents are neither blind to the homogeneity of their environs nor apologetic about it. "I don't like the use of the term white flight," says a resident of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. "It's sort of cultural flight."

Aside from Coeur d'Alene, Benjamin spent time in Forsyth, Georgia, and St. George, Utah, as well as a blue-state Whitoopia: the Carnegie Hill neighborhood of Manhattan. He says that he encountered no overt racial hostility in these places, and, while his very presence was an implicit critique of these

### SEARCHING FOR WHITOPIA:

An Improbable Journey to the Heart of White America.

By Rich Benjamin.  
Hyperion. 354 pp. \$24.99

communities, his judgments (arguably) err toward generosity.

He empathizes with Whitopians' fear of urban crime. He defends the principle of ethnic diversity, but commiserates with those who have abandoned it because they have seen "diversity done badly." He writes of bonding with his neighbors while playing golf, in rapturous prose that gently mocks the game's stereotypical associations: "On the resplendent green, I too escape my modest city abode, my work stress, my history, my identity, my skin. Whack!" He even puts the best face on a visit to a church that preaches racial purity, expressing mere annoyance rather than real rancor. Overall, Benjamin concludes, Whitopias are populated by decent and "delightful people" who have inoculated themselves against guilt or discomfort over yawning socioeconomic inequities.

The dark side of Whitopias is revealed less in interpersonal relations than in residents' peculiar obsessions, most notably with illegal immigrants. In St. George, Benjamin attends a meeting of a group that calls itself the Citizens Council on Illegal Immigration, at which a speaker presents a slide show of ominous images of wild-eyed, dark, Hispanic men. Benjamin observes that St. George's safety fixation—the maze of security systems installed in home after home, restrictive zoning laws, and fierce anti-immigration sentiment—smacks of fear beyond a rational relationship to the immediate threat. Zealotry, if not racism.

Benjamin concludes his book by attempting to make a broader argument about how to achieve racial harmony and eschew ethnic and class balkanization in the 21st century. Mapping a plan to achieve a post-racial America, he tosses off easy summary judgments. Inner-city blacks must "redouble their efforts to achieve the American dream," he declares, though the daily hardships of the poor have received scant attention in the

book. More than the absence of black and Latino perspectives, however, it's the lack of attention to working-class and poor whites that hampers his attempt to wade through a mire of diversity issues. Still, Benjamin's case against Whito-pias is clear: By tying power and privilege to racial identity, he suggests, they impoverish our understanding of one another and undercut collective commitment to a social contract. Fearsome institutions—though not populated with fearsome people.

DARRYL LORENZO WELLINGTON is a culture critic whose essays frequently appear in *Dissent*.

## HISTORY

### Britain's Big Year

Reviewed by Martin Walker

STEVE PINCUS HAS PRODUCED the most important new work of English history in many years. His revolutionary and persuasive analysis of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 overthrows the traditional Whig interpretation of steady progress toward representative and elected government through Parliament that Lord Macaulay proposed in the mid-1800s. Along with Macaulay's parallel narratives of the defeat of absolute monarchy, the flourishing of free institutions, and the triumph of commerce, this version has since become one of the founding myths of modern Britain—and also of the United States, whose Founding Fathers of 1776 saw themselves as defending the liberties secured in 1688.

Macaulay argued that the replacement of King James II, a Catholic who sought to be an absolute ruler, by his Protestant daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange, the leader of the Dutch Republic, was a classic exercise in English good sense and moderation. He saw the Glorious Revolution as a

**1688:**  
The First Modern  
Revolution.

By Steve Pincus.  
Yale Univ. Press.  
647 pp. \$40

calm, almost bloodless event, led by the traditional aristocracy and gentry asserting the authority of Parliament. Pincus, a Yale historian, shows that it was far bloodier than the myth allows, with riots and armed skirmishes breaking out across the country. One minor incident in Reading saw 60 royal troops killed, far more than the number of protesters who died in the famous Champs de Mars massacre in 1791, during the French Revolution.

Supported by the traditional ruling classes though the 1688 revolution may have been, it clearly involved so many of the common people that it came strikingly close to national democracy in action. Pincus cites local records of association, voluntary statements of loyalty, to show that more than 450,000 people publicly affirmed their loyalty to King William after

James sought to retake his throne with French and Irish troops in 1689 and an assassination plot against William was uncovered in 1696. James's hopes of support from British

loyalists proved highly and fatally exaggerated.

In the national mythology, 1688 marks a quintessentially English event, despite the arrival of a Dutch prince and his crushing victory in 1690 on the banks of Ireland's River Boyne over James's Franco-Irish army. Pincus demonstrates that the Glorious Revolution was intimately bound up with the grander politics of Europe, and that King James's attempt to copy the Catholic and absolute monarchy of France's King Louis XIV represented a triple threat to British interests. First, James's monarchy was Catholic, whereas Britain was largely Protestant. Second, it was pro-French, whereas Britain was largely pro-Dutch, for commercial reasons as much as for religious ones. Third, it was an autocracy, whereas Britain had been advancing down the path of limited monarchy

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 was far bloodier than the myth allows, with riots and armed skirmishes breaking out across Britain.