

Under the Affluence: Shaming the Poor, Praising the Rich and Sacrificing the Future of America (City Lights Open Media)

By Tim Wise



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"Tim Wise is one of the great public moralists in America today. In his bracing new book, *Under the Affluence*, he brilliantly engages the roots and ramifications of radical inequality in our nation, carefully detailing the heartless war against the poor and the swooning addiction to the rich that exposes the moral sickness at the heart of our culture. Wise's stirring analysis of our predicament is more than a disinterested social scientific treatise; this book is a valiant call to arms against the vicious practices that undermine the best of the American ideals we claim to cherish. *Under the Affluence* is vintage Tim Wise: smart, sophisticated, conscientious, and righteously indignant at the betrayal of millions of citizens upon whose backs the American Dream rests. This searing testimony for the most vulnerable in our nation is also a courageous cry for justice that we must all heed."—**Michael Eric Dyson**, author of *The Black Presidency: Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America*

Tim Wise is one of America's most prolific public intellectuals. His critically acclaimed books, high-profile media interviews, and year-round speaking schedule have established him as an invaluable voice in any discussion on issues of race and multicultural democracy.

In *Under the Affluence*, Wise discusses a related issue: economic inequality and the demonization of those in need. He reminds us that there was a time when the hardship of fellow Americans stirred feelings of sympathy, solidarity for struggling families, and support for policies and programs meant to alleviate poverty. Today, however, mainstream discourse blames people with low income for their own situation, and the notion of an intractable "culture of poverty" has pushed our country in an especially ugly direction.

Tim Wise argues that far from any culture of poverty, it is the culture of predatory affluence that deserves the blame for America's simmering economic and social crises. He documents the increasing contempt for the nation's poor, and reveals the forces at work to create and perpetuate it. With clarity, passion and eloquence, he demonstrates how America's myth of personal entitlement based on merit is inextricably linked to pernicious racial bigotry, and he points the way to greater compassion, fairness, and economic justice.

Tim Wise is the author of many books, including *Dear White America* and *Colorblind*.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Tim Wise is a truth-teller and long distance freedom-fighter. He is my vanilla brother whose fight against White Supremacy is exemplary and inspiring!"—Cornel West

"[Wise's] work is revolutionary, and those who react negatively are simply afraid of hearing the truth."—Robin D.G. Kelley, Professor of History, University of Southern California, author of *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*

"Tim Wise has produced an eloquent, meticulously researched book that could make economic inequality a central issue in the 2016 presidential election. The book I can best compare it to is Michael Harrington's *The Other America* which helped inspire 'The War On Poverty.' Written in passionate prose, invoking honored American traditions, it has the power to change minds and melt hearts. I look forward to sharing it with my students, and with anyone else concerned with justice and equity"—Mark Naison, Professor of African American Studies and History, Fordham University and author of *White Boy: A Memoir* and *Badass Teachers Unite!*

"America 'under the affluence' is a cruel and heartless place. By word and by deed, we turn against the poor and feast on a diet of resentment and myths. If anyone can unpack the racist and patriarchal lies that undergird our current culture of cruelty, Tim Wise can. In clear, simple language, product of a lifetime of research, he describes how we got here and how we might build a more compassionate place. We need his voice."—Laura Flanders, host of *GritTV with Laura Flanders*

"A single image—watching the Super Bowl under conditions like our distribution of wealth—is worth the price of *Under the Affluence*. Most of us are dying, crushed because we're stacked 50 in a seat, while the 1% ... But read it for yourself. Wise has spent many hours reading what the Right has written to dehumanize poor people, so you don't have to! He humanizes them back, using real evidence."—James Loewen, author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and *Sundown Towns*.

"Acclaimed inequality essayist and community activist Wise (*Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority*, 2012, etc.) reports on the damage being incurred in America whereby 'the have-nots and have-lessers are dehumanized while the elite are venerated.' In describing how modern society has become a 'culture of cruelty,' as past attempts to sympathize and support those less fortunate have collapsed beneath the weight of classism and racism, the author explores the framework and the consequences of the nation's economic crisis. He lucidly ponders its genesis as well as the ramifications of wealth inequality, including the rampant demonization of the poor and the valorization of the rich by way of what he refers to as 'Scroogism.' Wise's extensive experience as an anti-racism activist and a longtime member of the radical left greatly informs his text, which demonstrates, through facts and case histories, that America's enduring racial divide continues to be directly tied to its economic problems. His well-rounded scholarly discussion benefits from the varying intellectual perspectives he offers, including opinions on the damaging effects of blind corporate obeisance to the 'myth of meritocracy.' What is apparent, he believes, is the need for solutions to achieve the kind of 'culture of compassion' necessary for true redemption and a dismantling of social stratification. Wise recognizes that this achievement is a tall order to fill, particularly in the presence of the current elite economic oligarchy possessing the capital and the influence to trounce equalization efforts.

Sharp and provocative ... the book concludes with hope that his analysis and those like it will spur a counter-narrative outwardly challenging the false notion that both the wealthy and the poor 'deserve' their places within our culture's economic stratum. An impassioned, intellectual, and vigorously dense report on the repercussions of severe socioeconomic imbalance in the United States."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"*Under the Affluence* is an important source of data—bubbling over with hard, footnoted facts—to strengthen readers' resolve against the escalating inequalities in the United States ... the book is an essential compendium of numbers, one that will prove useful in strategizing to end inequality and arming readers with the facts they need to tackle these seemingly intractable problems. Overall, the book is an impassioned and heartfelt defense of the poor that is rooted in the idea that America can, as Wise says, 'crawl from under the affluence to a place more equitable.'"—Eleanor J. Bader, *RH Reality Check*

About the Author

Tim Wise: Constantly on tour, Tim Wise is one of the most prominent anti-racist essayists, educators and activists in the US. He is regularly interviewed by CNN, Tavis Smiley, Tom Joyner and Michael Eric Dyson. His essays are regularly published on Alternet, Counterpunch, Z-net, Black Commentator, the Black Agenda Report and the Daily Kos. His blog is widely followed at www.timwise.org

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