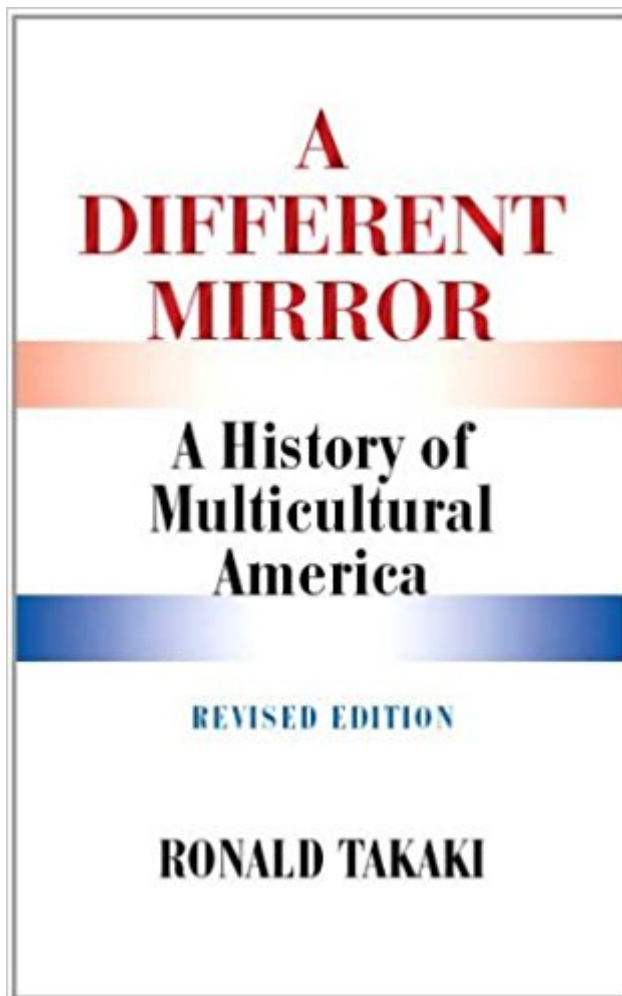


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# A Different Mirror



## Synopsis

Takaki traces the economic and political history of Indians, African Americans, Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese, Irish, and Jewish people in America, with considerable attention given to instances and consequences of racism. The narrative is laced with short quotations, cameos of personal experiences, and excerpts from folk music and literature. Well-known occurrences, such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, the Trail of Tears, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Japanese internment are included. Students may be surprised by some of the revelations, but will recognize a constant thread of rampant racism. The author concludes with a summary of today's changing economic climate and offers Rodney King's challenge to all of us to try to get along. Students will find this overview to be an accessible, cogent jumping-off place for American history and political science assignments, plus a guide to the myriad other sources identified in the notes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ronald Takaki is an Emeritus Professor at the University of California. He is a major writer in the field of Ethnic Studies. A Different Mirror is 445 pages of rather small text, so doing more than hinting at its contents is impossible. Before reading A Different Mirror I saw our

nation's history as the story of the advance of civilization.

"Civilization" being the version of civilization that was developed in England and passed on through our Declaration of Independence and Constitution and the culture of freedom surrounding it. Now I have an awareness of the equal contribution of other streams some already here, and some also from across the seas. And I am deeply aware of the suffering of these peoples in this process. Takaki starts with the Irish. The English began thumping on them first when as England and Ireland they were neighbors. With ample help from the English the Irish were impoverished. To escape starvation they boarded the boats, came over here, to do the work of the bestial, stupid, filthy underclass. From that point they built themselves into powerful, knowledgeable and wealthy members of the white system. From my childhood to my adulthood the Irish in my family did not stop being a competitive minority under-class until Jack Kennedy became president. On that day we arrived as members of the white power structure. While the Irish are described well in Takaki's history, their fellow whites less so., For instance the Swedes are served not at all, nor the Germans, nor the French, , and just a dab at the Italians This is not a complaint. Even a big book has limits. After the Irish story comes the tragic tale of the stealing of Indian land. The removal of whole native peoples en mass from the lands they had possessed for generations. This attempt at genocide was based on two very disputable "facts." First the Indians were ignorant savages, and second, they did not need the land since they were not farming it. Until the 1970s we made the practice of Native American religion a crime, destroying their culture . Takaki covers the story of the Blacks from slavery to Martin Luther King and close to today. No surprises there if you are following the copious coverage of that history in the media, but he squeezes a lot of African American history into these pages. I realized my own narrowness in thinking of racial history as being a Black and White story. Not at all. It is much broader and much worse than that. The battle of the Alamo looks much less heroic when I realize that it occurred well within the boundaries of Mexico. (A 2017 joke: The Mexicans will pay for a wall on the border if we give them back California.) The Mexicans did not have to migrate to the United States. We moved the lines, and then they were in the United States, but without property rights, in a foreign culture, vulnerable and victimized. The Chinese arrived to build the railroads from West to East, as the Irish were building them from East to West. Tough work. Single men came first and families later. The Chinese were being pressured by the spreading British Empire on their East to cross the seas and join and collide with the same culture in our West. The Japanese are followed from their arrival in fruitless pursuit of gold (hills of it they had heard) through World War Two where while young male Japanese Americans were grudgingly allowed to fight on the European front, their families were

interned in what can only be called prison camps to prevent any possible seditious activity. (None of which ever appeared.) In *Different Mirrors* I first discovered that President Roosevelt turned back to certain death in Germany a ship full of Jews trying to escape Hitler. Worse, he did it because the polls showed that ninety percent of United States citizens wanted him to do precisely that. What I gained from this book is a deep and specific sense of the terrible cost those other than the founders have paid for a seat at the American table. Does your picture of how we all got here need tuning as badly as mine? Ronald Takaki is a compelling storyteller. Because of that this is about as easy a lesson as anyone can make it.

I Read Ronald Takaki *A Different Mirror* for a graduate class in social work. This is an excellent historical studies of many of the multicultural in American that covers slavery, Native American removal from their land to the reservations and history, Irish immigrants as the lower white class, occupation of Mexico, Asians immigration to California and workforce, migrant workers, the story of the sweat shops and garment workers, the Chicano border crossing, Urban blacks, and Nazisms. The book is very descriptive of the struggles and hardships, and people who arrived in America with a dream, and the Native American loosing their way of life and home land This book is very insightful book and one worth keeping.

The book is written simply and to make an impact. Society, culture, ethnicity, and prejudice are all complicated subjects and Takaki weaves them together to explain our differences and provide some common ground. The book is mostly chronological, with particular topics (events or groups of people) separated into their own chapters or sections, so every once in awhile there is a bit of a time shift. I think for most readers Takaki reaches his goal of spreading a little of understanding, patience, and acceptance. America is a tough place, no matter your background, but it is far tougher for some.

Required reading for *Multicultural Perspectives* (along with *Kaleidoscope*), but this is one of those books I just HAD to keep. I wish that this information was taught in high school, though. It gives the REAL history of America, rather than the watered down, PC version that makes everything look rosy. I'm making my kids read it over the summer.

Ronald Takaki has given us a rare survey of American history through the lens of multicultural dynamics. Students get a well-documented narrative together with a passionate inquiry into the

evolution of America's minority cultures. The overarching purpose of the book is to understand, appreciate, and celebrate the rich social fabric of a nation that welcomed people from different shores unto itself. Good reading for anyone who wants an insight into the cultural layers that continue to define America, the haven of diversity and inclusiveness.

This book is an excellent source of information for people who want to round out their understanding of USA history with untold stories from the perspective of those who are seldom heard. Is it biased as other reviewers claim? Yes absolutely, but so is every other book written on American history since we and all these writers are humans and therefore inherently biased. This work essentially gives a third side to what is often presented as an equally biased two dimensional story with the Christian Anglo-European settlers as the completely untarnished heroes taking on savage natives and the paternalistic burden of caring for those so-called less civilized child-like people who are made to serve them. This book does not, in my opinion, take away from the bravery of these settlers and those among them who pushed west. It does provide, however, another important angle of insight into the human beings behind the caricatures. The only thing that I can think of that would have made this book even better is a more rounded presentation of all people characterized as the victims (They too certainly have more than one side). Overall, I believe the greatest value this book offers is a better understanding of the origins of certain unconscious biases held by all of us about race, religion, ethnicity and a host of other topics that still persist in our culture today.

While I enjoyed the book greatly, beware of what format you are buying! This hardback version is an older version of the book and I needed the newest edition which is the paperback copy. That is why the hardback version is cheaper. The book is a great read, but I wish it was more clear indicating what version it was.

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