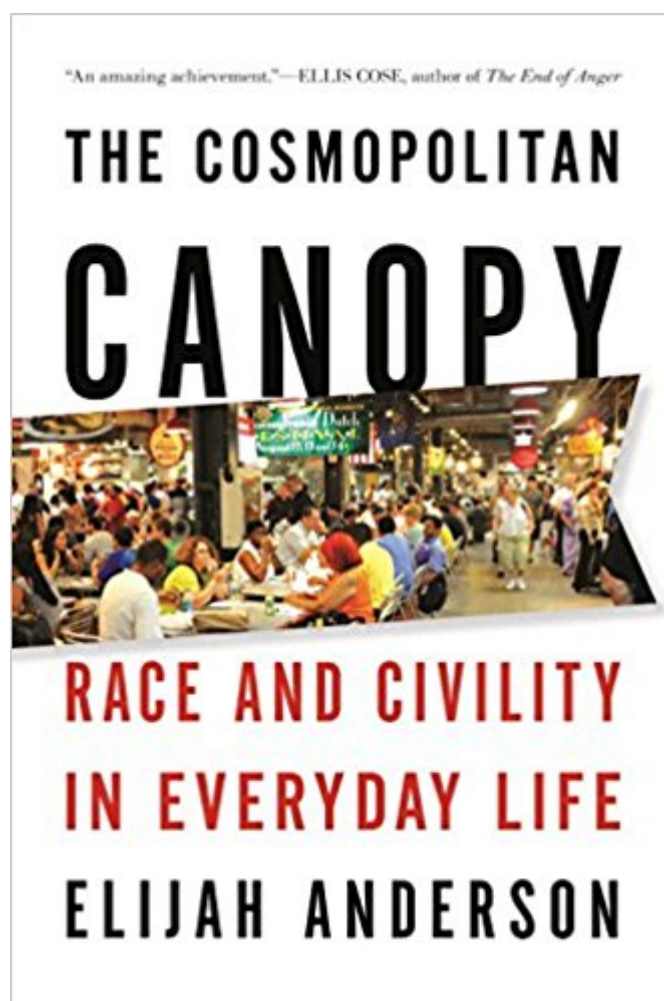


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The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race And Civility In Everyday Life



Synopsis

An acclaimed sociologist illuminates the public life of an American city, offering a major reinterpretation of the racial dynamics in America. Elijah Anderson, called "one of our best urban ethnographers" by the New York Times Book Review, introduces the concept of the "cosmopolitan canopy": the urban islands of civility amid segregated ghettos, suburbs, and ethnic enclaves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Yale sociology professor Anderson (*Code of the Street*) takes the reader on an ethnographic walking tour of Philadelphia to observe how city dwellers interact across racial lines. He attends particularly to the "cosmopolitan canopy"—public settings like parks, malls, town squares that maintain civil and comfortable interactions between diverse populations. Anderson moves then to those areas where the canopy breaks down (the workplace, public transportation). Anderson's nuanced treatment of "the social dynamics of racial inequality" and his precise observations (the politics of eye contact, for example), while rooted in scholarship, are uncommonly readable: snippets from his journals and sketches of neighborhood habits offer immediate pleasure, and the book is a people watcher's delight. And while Anderson doesn't gloss over how prevalent and pernicious racism remains in America—"There comes a time in the life of every African American, regardless of how high he or she has risen in society, when he or she is reminded of his or her place as a black man or woman"—his study allows a cautious optimism that "the canopy offers a taste of how inclusive and civil social relationships could become." (Mar.) (c)

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Cosmopolitan canopies are those spaces in urban environments that offer a break from the tensions of chafing racial and economic differences, a place for diverse peoples to assemble and rub elbows. Sociologist and folk ethnographer Anderson offers a rich narrative of such spaces in Philadelphia, including Reading Terminal Market and Rittenhouse Square. Anderson details the give-and-take of public interaction in urban settings, much of it dictated by race and class. He observes how close and far away people sit, whether they greet each other, how deep or long their interactions are, and whether they break or reinforce barriers. He also chronicles the daily shifting of space used by the homeless, workers, residents, and commuters as they encounter, interact, and evade.

Anderson's observations are keen but not distant as he offers journal pages and interviews, showing his own full engagement in interactions with a cross section of Philadelphians. Anderson also offers singular insight into the social machinations of blacks in professional versus social settings. Fascinating sociology and people-watching at its profound best. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Anderson addresses many of the issues that have plagued me as a city dweller pretty much all my life. How do we know whom to trust on the street? How can we tell who is safe and who isn't? How can we conduct ourselves to avoid giving offense? A lot of the criteria we use for these snap judgments can be called into question by carefully dissecting social interactions in a way that does not shame anyone for having basic fears or biases. Anderson brings a sociologist's powers of observation together with an engaging descriptive and narrative style that's not too full of jargon. So, can our social problems be solved through better design alone? A lot of new urbanists would have us think so. One of Anderson's main themes is the design public spaces that foster civility and a sense of shared ownership. He does this by examining spaces in his hometown of Philadelphia where this actually occurs and tries to figure out what makes these spaces work. The right space brings out the "cosmopolite" in everyone, whereas other spaces tend to reinforce membership in a particular group and distrust of outsiders.

A lot of smart people don't know much about ethnography - what it is, why it's conducted, or what it could be useful for. Cosmopolitan Canopy is a great example of how ethnography can be useful. Anderson explores how physical space, behavior, and race intermingle in open spaces in central Philadelphia - an indoor market, a mall, and a park. He argues that some urban spaces

create a 'cosmopolitan canopy' where people can (safely) act certain kinds of behaviors, focusing in particular on explorations of race. The book a rare combination of being well-written (and easy and fun to read) and thorough and insightful, and shows how ethnography can be a valuable tool in exploring the topic of race in contemporary America. This book belongs alongside Mitchell Duneier's classic *Slim's Table*, both for its exploration of race and as a first-rate example of how ethnography should be done.

Had to get this book for a sociology class but its very well written and I plan keeping after the class over. If you looking for a book to go with a social minorities class you really could not do better.

As one interested in racial justice for a lifetime, I greatly appreciated this approach. Somewhat of a new comer to the city of Philadelphia, I provided new insight into race relations, both historically and currently. Look forward to both meeting the author and reading more of his works.

Fantastic read. Well thought out and easy to read and understand. We are using it as a discussion forum at my church. Hopefully it helps us all to better understand the conflicts of our time and be better stewards for a future for all to mean all.

Of course this book is going to become a classic in the ethnographic literature. Anderson is amazingly perceptive.

Got for a college class, ended up being amazingly interesting. Elijah Anderson is the man.

This book covered a lot of personal interactions that takes place in an urban environment. It also highlighted the ongoing struggle of race relations as it relates to the rural deep south environment. I found it most enlightening.

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