

ADVICE FOR CONSCIENTIOUS ACTIVISTS

Living White

Writings on Race, 2000–2005

Robert S. Griffin

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Reviewed by Theodore O'Keefe

A book titled *Living White* and authored by a sympathetic observer of white American activism may give rise to many expectations, not all of them optimistic. Fortunately, author Robert Griffin provides no lesson plans for home schooling young Odinists, no fashion tips for wearing robes and armbands, and no pipe dreams for carving out a white “homeland” in Occupied America. His essays collected here are not only free of the posturing and bombast that such a title might telegraph from other authors, but offer solid reportage, analysis, and counsel for racially conscious American whites interested in effective thought and action on behalf of their beleaguered kind and country.

Griffin, a professor of education at the University of Vermont, is that rarity: a knowledgeable student of contemporary American white nationalism who is an emphatic and empathetic partisan of his people. He is the author of two valuable books on white America’s fledgling racial-nationalist movement, *The Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds*, based on interviews with the late William Pierce (reviewed by this writer in TOQ 2:4 [Winter 2001-2]), and *One Sheaf, One Vine*, which gives voice to ordinary European-Americans who have embraced racial consciousness in ways currently acceptable for nonwhites and for Jews in this country, but long since taboo for whites.

Griffin was largely content to let the earlier two books serve as a sounding board for his subjects’ racial concerns. In this one, Griffin brings well-honed critical skills (so often lacking on our side) to addressing questions of individual demeanor and conduct that the committed very often neglect: the search for

self-knowledge, the struggle for personal effectiveness, the resolve to act in the public arena, and the ability to communicate racial concerns to other whites. It is the author's conviction that all too many racially concerned whites are mere spectators, focused too much on the big racial picture and too little on their own roles. Griffin starts from other end, opening *Living White* with a call for readers to attend to the content and direction of their own lives, to live with integrity and personal effectiveness, and to make a better join of their private and public activities. Or, as put by Griffin, who writes with a directness and simplicity foreign to many professors and intellectuals:

Living White is about white people, and it is for white people. Its focus is on the personal, in contrast to the public, dimensions of the racial challenges that whites confront at this time in our history. It isn't about public policy or politics or organizational activity. It isn't about how the outside world is doing but rather how you and I are doing as individual white people. I hope this book encourages and supports you in living a more racially honorable life in the time you have remaining (1-2).

The score of essays included in *Living White* encompass the wide range of Griffin's observations of the racial right, observations sharpened by his learning in the psychology of education and by his comparative detachment as a latecomer to white racial politics. Griffin's talks with movement leaders and followers have left him acutely aware that Plato's dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living" often finds little echo among racial nationalists, and he knows that while the unending "self-criticism," psychobabble, and "consciousness raising" of 1960s New Left is not for our race, nevertheless the lefty insight that "the personal is political" is not without its truth.

So Griffin homes in on how white racial nationalists live their lives. In the title essay, "Living White" (originally published in this quarterly [2:4 (Winter 2001-2)]), he diagnoses their problems thus:

I think we are better at talking about how it all works than how our individual lives work. My worry is that without greater attention to matters related to what I am calling living white—specific and realistic personal goals and down-to-earth, practical energies and actions for achieving those goals—too many racially conscious white people will end up talkers rather than doers and feel okay about that... Too many will come to assume that circumstances in the world and in their own lives are bigger than they can do anything about and, as a consequence, live lives characterized more by coping and hiding out than honest self-expression. Too many will live with a significant discrepancy between what they know and value and the way they conduct their lives, and this will gnaw on them and, over time, take its personal toll on them. Too many will have lives that are more frustrating than gratifying—being "in the know" and "talking a good game" is a poor substitute for living with dignity (103).

In the same essay, Dr. Griffin prescribes the elements of a cure: first, renouncing passivity to embrace what he calls "the experienced realities of

life – health both physical and mental, personal strength, honor, love, family, friendship, home, vocation, accomplishment, pride and joy and sorrow, and mortality” (102). Next, he urges the everyday (but not ordinary) exercise of self-discipline, persistence, and purpose for instilling such practiced values as “racial identity and pride,” “racial commitment,” “racial responsibility,” “racial integrity,” “courage and toughness,” “physical and mental health,” “positive mental attitude,” “efficacy,” and “personal happiness,” supplying appropriate glosses that make these more than buzzwords.

This is not a “self-help” book, and Griffin doesn’t dangle before his readers a philosopher’s stone compounded from feel-good verbiage and guaranteed to transport readers effortlessly to a nirvana of “living white,” nor does he attempt to walk them in easy steps through the attainment of one personal virtue after another. Instead, he teaches by example in these essays, demonstrating how, without leaving their armchairs, white partisans can begin to read more closely and think more objectively than they do now, and then begin to act in ways that are effective.

This book’s best lessons in “living white” are exemplified in Griffin’s own experience in transforming himself, in his late fifties, from a professor of mildly conservative leanings to an outspoken and publicly effective white nationalist. While Griffin has revealed his inner life generously in *Living White*, the lessons to be learned here aren’t always explicit, so this book merits at least a little study and thought.

There seem to have been three major parts to Griffin’s coming to live the sort of life he urges for other whites. First of all, Griffin has been able to view external reality with both considerable acuity and admirable objectivity. He maintains a remarkably businesslike attitude toward the problems that face white nationalists. While it is very difficult for most of us to consider coolly the indifference or hostility of most whites to prowhite stances, Griffin observes, matter of factly:

Since I have been writing about race and have become somewhat of a public figure in this area, I have found it increasingly remarkable that advocates for white people, and even people who simply speak of whites without denigrating them, are viewed by other whites as illicit, and even more, scary. It would be one thing if non-whites were put in a dither by the expression of white racial concern or advocacy. What fascinates me is how white people have been conditioned to reject out of hand, and even attack, anyone among them who says, let’s talk about how white people are doing. How this state of affairs came to be is one of the major stories of our time, I believe.(9)

This sort of sang-froid pervades the outlook of *Living White*. The author is clear-headed in the face of several efforts to smother his book on William Pierce, which became an Internet bestseller after being rejected by fifteen publishing houses. Griffin observes at his most vexed only that: “My experience with the *Fame* book and subsequent experiences have brought home to me that certain

arguments are not reflected in the mainstream public discourse" (26). Likewise with his plainspoken recognition that, as with American biologist and eugenicist David Starr Jordan, whose life he treats in *Living White*, any aspect of American history that serves to depict group loyalties among whites positively has been effectively sent down the memory hole: "Those who tell the story of America to you and your children, and to me – the scholars and publishing houses and teachers and journalists and politicians and movie makers – have concluded, so it appears that we...don't need to know about Jordan, or perhaps, that it would be better for them that we don't know about him" (76).

In his reviews of academic attempts by Carol Swain and George Fredrickson to dismiss white claims to a positive collective identity, Griffin writes with more asperity than elsewhere in *Living White*, but his harshness toward both their smug, unreflective treatments is merited. His sympathetic take on two extreme white nationalist agitators – William Pierce and George Lincoln Rockwell – is more nuanced. Griffin's admiration for Pierce, a fellow professor whose systematic racial radicalism and monk-like dedication has much impressed him, does not prevent him from considering some of Pierce's possible shortcomings, although readers will have to turn to Griffin's *Fame* book to learn of his fairly explicit dismissal of the prospects of Pierce's organization, the National Alliance – with or without its leader. More interesting is Griffin's take on Rockwell, who attracted Pierce and various other activists of value by his forthright stance on race and the Jewish question, but whose Hollywood Nazi party was more of an inspiration to Mel Brooks than to Middle America. As the author reminds, Rockwell's assassination by one of his own riff-raff was almost inevitable. Yet Griffin shows great character in reminding white nationalists of Rockwell's courage, creativity, and racial devotion: one marker of whites' subservience and of the freedom of blacks, Jews, and other minorities is the ability of the latter to address the careers of their own extremist activists without genuflecting to totem or taboo.

The same objectivity enables Griffin's withering insight into the hidden (from themselves, that is) weaknesses of white nationalists. He is one of a few sympathetic observers to fault the moralizing whereby nationalists prefer being righteously indignant at our antagonists to doing something – anything! – that will effectively advance white interests, and thus he urges more concern – much more concern – about the practicalities of reacquiring power rather than enhanced diligence in recording and circulating news of antiwhite outrages (159–160). Griffin stresses the need to speak openly about the role of Jews in such areas as encouraging multiculturalism and open borders (for non-Jewish countries), while avoiding obsession with Jews and other ethnic competitors.

Besides being uncommonly objective, Robert Griffin is unusually thoughtful, and much of his thought has been devoted to gaining knowledge of himself. To his frank but empathetic discussion of how white people can and should live lives worthy of the best in their genes, Griffin brings a unique and self-

revelatory voice: honest, confessional, probing, and analytical. The reader of these essays will learn much about from whom and from where Robert Griffin springs; of his work, his pastimes, his disappointments, his limitations, his achievements, and his dreams.

Griffin provides effective vignettes that unsentimentally yet pungently reveal how even his youthful passion, sports, brought the young Griffin up hard against the boundaries of class in America, and how by getting to know his Southern relatives he was disabused of the subtle Yankee bigotry he had absorbed growing up in the North. Griffin's espousal of white nationalism, to which he came late in his life, is clearly in fulfillment of his own roots, life, and values. What changed, one senses in reading these articles, is not so much who Griffin is as the quality of information available to him to chart our society's increasingly antiwhite course. Despite his schooling in these matters by William Pierce, the author has strong libertarian leanings and steers clear of the sort of verbal pugnacity on race that almost invariably puts off whites, for better or worse the least ethnocentric and most tolerant of the major races.

This self-knowledge, and his observation and experience of life, make Griffin a sympathetic listener and a sound adviser on the challenges of living white in today's America. His essay on how to educate one's children to live honorable white lives is notable for his grasp of the essential issues: too many white parents (and not just nationalists) still believe that it suffices to remove their offspring from minority milieus, neglecting the tentacles of the education industry and the entertainment media. He is particularly good on the loss of community and on considerations of how to rebuild it, in writing free of both lamentation and cheery assurance of easy restorations. One example of Griffin's ability to bring common sense to topics that most racials manage to make threatening: his sensible appreciation of the sort practical eugenics implicit in the communal life of whites until a century or so ago, when most had fair knowledge of not only their prospective mate but an ample range of that mate's relatives across two or more generations. A far cry from the Brave New World imaginings of some eugenicists or the deracinated urban pairings of today's (perfectly named) "singles"!

Griffin's facing up to the weaknesses of body and soul that afflict all humans has made him more, not less, able to take intelligent and effective action on behalf of his white nation. Clearly a professor who was drawn to, not driven from, William Pierce, after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing — an act widely claimed to have been inspired by Pierce's *Turner Diaries* — is not timorous, but Griffin's account of his terror, several years after meeting Pierce, after his first interview as a "racist" by a newspaper in Vermont ("I immediately went home and ate junk food and read sports magazines and didn't answer the phone, my long-standing strategy for coping threat and fear") succeeds at being funny, reassuring, and inspiring, as the author demonstrates how he went on to deal firmly and capably with media.

In just a few years Robert Griffin has emerged as an author, analyst, and public spokesman for white Americans, despite his very public status in the fishbowl of campus life at a state university. The fact that he is a tenured professor has not preserved him from wounds to the ego and the heart, wounds which he wears openly and bravely. The deafness which afflicted Griffin suddenly after he had completed his second book on white nationalism has been if anything a goad to his work and action: It lead him to write, here, "While – for me – there is still time, in my life, I want, day to day, hour to hour, in my own unique way, to live as an honorable white man," reminding that, as George Eliot wrote, "It's never too late to be what you might have been."

Living White, a collection of essays and commentary, is rather larger than the sum of its parts. Where many such books seem, paradoxically, to aspire to an identity that is neither the author's nor our race's, this one speaks in a voice that is uniquely Robert Griffin's but suffused with the humane wisdom of the best of our people's preceptors. Everyone interested in understanding the better angels of our psychic struggle for collective preservation, as well as every partisan of white nationalism, ought to read it.

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