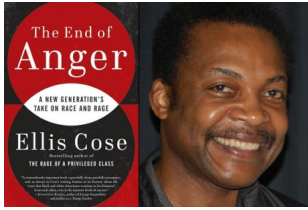


A Conversation With Best Selling Author: Ellis Cose

Written by Reniqua Allen/Uptown Magazine
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When *Newsweek* contributing editor Ellis Cose released his ground-breaking book, *The Rage of A Privileged Class: Why Are Middle-Class Blacks Angry*, in 1993, it shocked many Americans to know that upwardly mobile African Americans felt frustrated, dissatisfied and well, outright angry with the system that had provided them with post graduate degrees, big houses and cars, and entrance into the middle class. Over fifteen years later, Cose believes that racial progress has led blacks away from anger toward a new attitude—optimism. In his new book, *The End of Anger: A New Generation's Take on Race and Rage*, Cose surmises that [blacks](#), particularly those from the younger generation have shed some of their previous ideas about race, and replaced anger with optimism. Reniqua Allen for UPTOWN Magazine recently talked to Cose to figure out how racial attitudes are changing in America.

RENIQUA ALLEN TALKS TO ELLIS COSE:

RA: Report after report has come out showing that black America is not exactly thriving. We've been hit the hardest by the recession, education rates are declining, incarceration rates are still high and those in the middle class can barely hold on. Why are we still

optimistic?

EC: I think despite the fact that we as African Americans are really catching hell in this current recession, a lot of folks are saying hey, something very fundamental has changed about what it means to be black in America, and that gives people a certain kind of hope. When I wrote *Rage of a Privileged Class*, what I heard over and over, is that it doesn't matter what school I go to no matter how hard I work, no matter how diligently I work, no matter how skilled I am, I'm never going to get past this glass ceiling. We fast-forward fifteen years; we have not a huge number, but some blacks whom have risen to the ultimate top of the pyramid in corporate America. Then of course there was the huge event of the Obama candidacy and the Obama presidency. If you came up in this country twenty years ago, one thing that you knew if you knew nothing else, was that a black person could not become president. I don't think anger has disappeared. I think there are any number of people who are still angry at the circumstances. I don't think it is at the same visceral level as it was a while ago.

RA: Is there a danger in this hope and optimism?

EC: I think there is a danger in being overly optimistic, but I think there is also a danger in being overly pessimistic. I think the challenge for the generation coming up is to balance that. I think for this generation coming up it makes a lot of sense to say I don't see a glass ceiling. And since they don't see a glass ceiling it means that they can basically shoot for whatever they think they can achieve. Some of them are going to fall short, and many of them are going to look back and say race had something to do with why I fell short. I think we're a society in the process of figuring out how we deal with that and I think as African Americans we're working out how the lessons of the past generations apply to current generations.

RA: What does age have to do with someone's thoughts on race?

EC: As I began to go through the data and to compare different groups, one thing that stood out to me is that people under forty and people over forty came to certain issues in a very different way. The older generation basically is much likely to say 'yes, there was a glass ceiling', 'no, I'm not seen in the same way as my white peers,' 'yes, I have been a victim of discrimination,' 'yes, it has affected how I've been able to do in the workplace.' The younger generation is much less likely to say yes to all of those questions. But, when I looked at questions that say 'do you face discrimination in the world,' in terms of police following you

around, not being able to get a taxi, shop keepers not treating you with respect etcetera, etcetera, their answers are identical to the older generation. So you have a generation that on one hand is saying, yes there still is racism, still discrimination out there, but on the other hand, in terms of what it means for me as an African American in the workplace, I think I can deal with it, I think I can overcome whatever my parents may have perceived as a glass ceiling.

RA: So no one's saying race is irrelevant?

EC: I have yet to meet the African American person that says we're in a post racial society. Certainly not the respondents in my interviews and I'm not saying it. What I am saying is that for this generation, race is being lived differently in some fundamental ways than for the generation that preceded it.

RA: Recently a cable news host referred to the President as "chugging a few forties" when he was drinking a sixteen ounce Guinness beer at an Irish pub. These kinds of comments are not an anomaly. The media and other political organizations, like the Tea Party, seem to be increasingly playing on racial stereotypes and using inflammatory racial rhetoric. Has rage moved from the black community to the white?

EC: I think a lot of folks who are white are very unsettled by what seems to be emerging as the new American reality. There are a lot of white folks who look around and say 'my God, we got a black President, we got a black person as Attorney General, we got all of these Latinos coming over the border, this is not the America I bargained to be a part of.' And many are very nervous about that. And many of them are very angry about that. But that's not that surprising, there are lots of white folks who've always gotten angry when there's progress in the African American community, because they perceive it as a direct threat to them in some way.

RA: Though you talk about blacks, you make it clear that this isn't a story just about black America's attitudes evolving, but whites as well.

EC: In many ways, I call the third generation [those currently under forty] the no big deal of whites. They recognize that race is a reality but many have close and authentic friendship with blacks and that's no big deal to them. If you're of a certain generation and went into the workplace and came across a guy who had it in his head that his idea of blacks is [someone

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known as] 'Nigger Gene'; that's a very different experience you're going to have than someone who just accepts the reality that you might be just as smart as he is.

RA: Still, even in a city like New York, you see blacks self-segregating socially, despite these interracial work relations. Why?

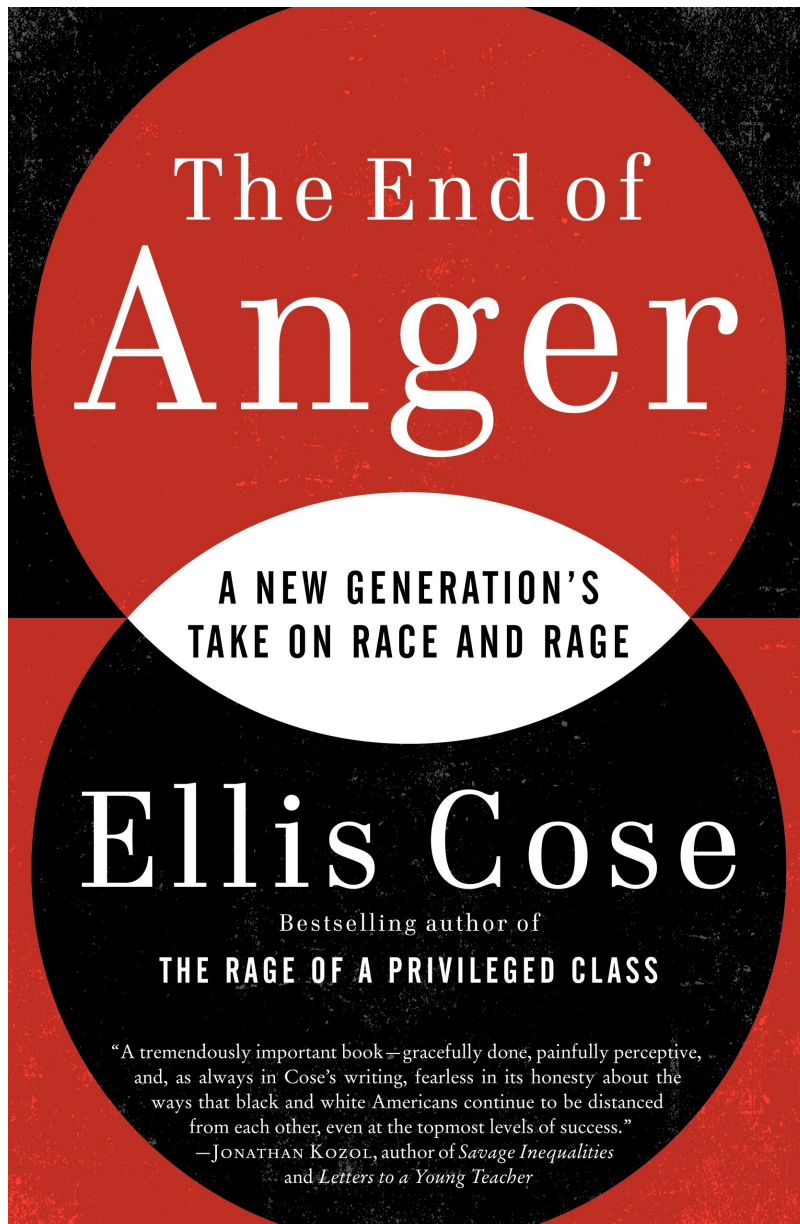
EC: I think you see a more complex world now. I wouldn't exactly call it self-segregation. There are many blacks who most of their friends are black or maybe all of their friends are black, and in some cases maybe it is conscious self-segregation and in other cases it is just a question of hanging out with people they know they're comfortable with. You can go to other places in the city and see a very interracial crowd interacting with one another. Society doesn't change all at one time and we still in many ways we're very segregated.

RA: If rage defined a generation of blacks in the 1990s, and optimism defines these early millennia, what do you think is the word that will define the next generation?

EC: I wish I were wise enough to know. I think a lot of it is going to depend clearly on where we move as a society. I think the trends that we see in terms of interracial relationships are going to continue, which is to say I think we're going to become a society that's more open to opportunity for folks sort of irrespective of color. We're struggling at the same time; we're becoming a society that is in some ways less economically diverse. We are becoming a society where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer; that has racial implications and racial overtones and where that will lead us as a society, unless we figure out how to deal with that, is worrisome.

*Ellis Cose's newest work **The End of Anger: A New Generation's Take on Race and Rage** (Ecco, a division of HarperCollins) is on sale since June 1, 2011 for \$24.99.*

This interview is a courtesy of www.uptownmagazine.com (June 1, 2011)



The book is available on www.amazon.com , .ca or www.barnesandnoble.com .

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcgZqA3NIHU>

About the author of this interview: ■ ■ ■ **Mrs. ■ Reniqua Allen** is a talented journalist who is a Ph.D candidate at Rutgers University (Newark, NJ). The focus of her thesis is: African-American middle class and popular culture post-1945 and post

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. She writes about many themes such as politics and culture with a focus on women's issues, teens, and race. Her work has been published in CosmoGirl!, Black Enterprise Magazine, Colorlines, USARiseUp Magazine, Uptown Magazine, Upscale and The NJ Bergen Record. Other clients include: Teen Vogue (writer/reporter), Firelight Media (field producer), Black America Web (blogger), CQ-Roll Call (legislative book researcher) and Brooklyn Independent Television (producer/writer). She was an archival producer for the movie

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