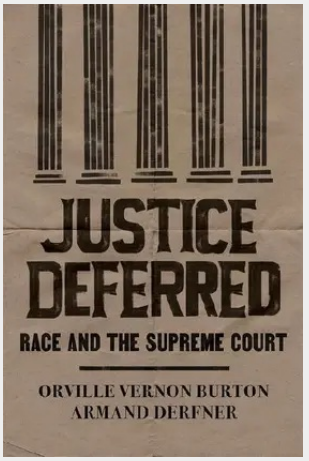
Burton / Derfner

Justice Deferred

Race and the Supreme Court



34,50 €
34,50 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

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In the first comprehensive accounting of the US Supreme Court's race-related jurisprudence, a distinguished historian and renowned civil rights lawyer scrutinize a legacy too often blighted by racial injustice. The Supreme Court is usually seen as protector of our liberties: it ended segregation, was a guarantor of fair trials, and safeguarded free speech and the vote. But this narrative derives mostly from a short period, from the 1930s to the early 1970s. Before then, the Court spent a century largely ignoring or suppressing basic rights, while the fifty years since 1970 have witnessed a mostly accelerating retreat from racial justice. From the Cherokee Trail of Tears to *Brown v. Board of Education* to the dismantling of the Voting Rights Act, historian Orville Vernon Burton and civil rights lawyer Armand Derfner shine a powerful light on the Court's race record—a legacy at times uplifting, but more often distressing and sometimes disgraceful. For nearly a century, the Court ensured that the nineteenth-century Reconstruction Amendments would not truly free and enfranchise African Americans. And the twenty-first century has seen a steady erosion of commitments to enforcing hard-won rights. *Justice Deferred* is the first book that comprehensively charts the Court's race jurisprudence. Addressing nearly two hundred cases involving America's racial minorities, the authors probe the parties involved, the justices' reasoning, and the impact of individual rulings. We learn of heroes such as Thurgood Marshall; villains, including Roger Taney; and enigmas like Oliver Wendell Holmes and Hugo Black. Much of the fragility of civil rights in America is due to the Supreme Court, but as this sweeping history also reminds us, the justices still have the power to make good on the country's promise of equal rights for all.

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Artikelnummer: 9780674975644
Medium: Buch
ISBN: 978-0-674-97564-4
Verlag: Harvard University Press
Erscheinungstermin: 31.05.2021
Sprache(n): Englisch
Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2021
Produktform: Gebunden
Gewicht: 862 g
Seiten: 464
Format (B x H): 160 x 239 mm

Kundenservice Verlag Dr. Otto Schmidt KG
Neumannstraße 10, 40235 Düsseldorf | kundenservice@otto-schmidt.de | 0221-93738-997 (Inland)