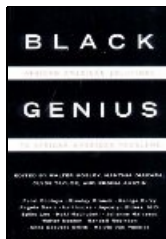


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**Book Review**  
**Black Genius**  
*African American Solutions to African American Problems*  
by [Walter Mosley](#), Editor

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer  
Posted: February 27, 2006

*Black Genius* is a collection of speeches and essays by African Americans that addresses problems and opportunities in the black community. The thirteen contributors are an impressive bunch: Walter Mosley, Spike Lee, Haki Madhubuti, George Curry, Melvin van Peebles, bell hooks, Julianne Malveaux, Dr. Joycelyn Elders, Angela Davis, Farai Chideya, Stanley Crouch, Anna Deavere Smith, and Randall Robinson.

The book's title presents "genius" in a somewhat unfamiliar way — a way that some of the book's contributors admit struck them as elitist until they understood it better. Like Basil Davidson's book *The African Genius*, it refers not to extraordinary individuals or extraordinary mental abilities, but rather to the collective spirit and vitality of a people, the thing that makes them unique.

Some of the contributors have fresher or more practical suggestions than others, but nearly all have good stories and pungent opinions to relate. Angela Davis argues for the abolition of the "prison-industrial complex." Farai Chideya points out that 60% of the images of African Americans in the news media are negative, and urges us to hold the media to a higher standard. Spike Lee describes the good luck, resourcefulness, and self-sacrifice it took to get his film career underway. When successful people talk, he says, "they never really tell you about the nights they had to go without food in their stomachs, and what else they had to do without."


Haki Madhubuti argues for an "African-centered education" that would do for black children what the Nation of Islam did for Malcolm X: not radicalize them, he says, but "normalize" them by exposing them to knowledge of their own roots and culture. Melvin van Peebles describes his amazing career making films, trading stocks, and following other pursuits. Though blacks may have to work "five to eight zillion times harder than the white man," he says, their money will grow just as the white man's does — and in certain areas, like investing, no one needs to know you're black.

Though one or two of the pieces seem a little obvious in 2006 — like the one about the importance of getting on the Internet — it's remarkable how readable and relevant this book remains. If anything, the stumbling blocks that the authors identified during the Clinton administration have only been exacerbated under the reign of Bush the Lesser, and the search for solutions is even more critical.

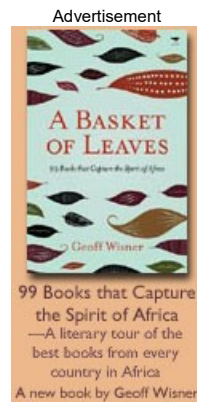
**About the Reviewer**

*Geoff Wisner* is a freelance writer and staff member of Indigocafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at [www.geoffwisner.com](http://www.geoffwisner.com).



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—Mahatma Gandhi