

Sonali Krishnan-Deem

10 May 2020

GLST 179

Dr. White

Winners Take All Book Review

In *Winners Take All*, Anand Giridharadas explains that the elites of the world have a secret agenda of sorts – and it only involves them staying on top. In the beginning, he says that corporate elites have “redefined social progress to suit their own interests.” This means that the rich people of the world are twisting the ways that people think about how to do good in the world. This sparked my interest, as I have always looked for ways to improve either my community or others. Neoliberalism is the key to the elites holding the power, and honestly it doesn’t sound all that bad at first. It allows the individual to pursue personal goals in a free market with minimal regulation. This is great for big companies who are trying to change the world for the better, but it places a lot of emphasis on competition. I recently watched a documentary about Bill Gates, and this idea reminds me of it in many ways. He is trying to change the world by using the skills he has. He has worked to create clean energy, eradicate polio, and make it easier for people to find clean water if they need it. All of these ideas, however, were born out of a sort of competition. There were many other people who are actively trying to solve these problems too, but Bill Gates (as he is already a “winner”) has more resources and so it is then easier for him to make his world changing ideas happen. The point that Giridharadas is trying to make is that these rich people are not our friends. They may want to make the world a better place, but they also want to profit off of the way they do it.

Part of the title of this book is *The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. Elites are doing what they can to stay on top – a key part of capitalism – and that means employing a strategy that makes everyone think they are philanthropists even when their motives are more self-serving. Giridharadas gives a good example of this when he explains the elite reliance on thought leaders. A thought leader is someone who targets a specific area of focus that provides the illusion of change, all the while ignoring the actual root of the issue. Elites will use these thought leaders to trick people into a superficial solution that doesn’t fix the issue, but the general public gives kudos to the elite for acknowledging the issue in the first place. As Giridharadas says, it is all part of a façade.

Another key point that Giridharadas makes is that many of these elites will take a business approach to changing the world, and that doesn’t always apply. Take Bill Gates, for example. In his efforts to try and eradicate polio, he didn’t take into account the other worldly events that could happen. He gathered volunteers and employees, gave them tools and projects just like any other job, and sent them into the areas that needed the most help. By doing this, he managed to help a lot of different people, but then volunteers were being attacked and killed in

the field by different terrorist groups. Gates had used a business approach in terms of recruiting volunteers and supplying them with what they needed, but did not account for the other issues that may have risen in the meantime.

Another interesting point that Giridharadas made was that wealthy people use philanthropy to hide injustices at the root of their wealth. The example he used shocked me. The Sackler family, worth about \$13 billion, developed the drug Oxycontin. It is a highly addictive opioid and has caused many drug issues in the years since they created it. This family became incredibly wealthy, then made many public donations to museums in England and the United States. They were investigated because the public began to suspect that they were partially responsible for the opioid crisis, found guilty, and had to pay a fine that didn't even dent their fortune. The museums they had donated to kept the buildings, rooms, and donations, and the Sackler family remains rich to this day, despite the incredibly negative impact they had on the world. Many wealthy elites have these similar tactics. What comes to my mind is the amount of celebrities that make donations and speak out against injustice in an attempt to right their past wrongs. While this can be inspirational, notable, and admirable, I feel like we (as the general population) never truly know if there was a lesson learned or if the elites just keep their thoughts more privately than they had before.