

## Are We Greater than the Sum of Us?

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In this special issue of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Scholarship* *A Time for Reckoning: Reflections and Analyses for "The Sum of Us"*, eight contributors consider, grapple with, debate, and reflect upon Heather McGhee's 2021 book, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*. In this book, McGhee travels across the country, engaging in multiple deeply personal interactions and conversations with individuals and communities who have suffered as a result of economic and social policies and programs that bring to question the zero-sum paradigm. Her analysis uncovers a recurrent theme across some of the most harmful public issues - the detrimental and costly impact of racism. Through vivid and varied examples, including stories and research about mortgage rates, environmental justice, health care, unions, public swimming pools, and student debt, she repeatedly demonstrates how racism not only affects African Americans and people of Color, but it has incurred a cost for whites as well. But the stories of public and governmental malfunction and moral deterioration do not cease there. Her journey also includes stories of racial collaboration and resulting public benefits, something McGhee refers to as the Solidarity Dividend.

Through cultural, psychological, historical, and socio-political lenses, the authors in this special issue contemplate and analyze how McGhee's work impacts their creative works, community projects, and research. The essays span different settings - from the Arizona-Mexico border, to the US prison system - to different opinions and emotional responses. Some are inspired and hopeful after reading McGhee's book, while others are more skeptical about the innovation of the work and cautious about the potential for tangible systemic change. These essays provide multiple frameworks for reviewing her work and raise important questions to consider as we attempt to reckon with racism's enduring legacy in America. In *The Border is Their Public Swimming Pool*, professor Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales expands upon one of the main stories at the center of the book - the fall of the public swimming pool- to analyze immigration policies at the US-Mexico border. Negrón-Gonzales met with a group of white Arizonans living near the border of Mexico to discuss their anti-immigrant views. She found that the Arizonans were so "invested in white supremacy that they subscribe to an anti-immigrant politic that does not serve them." This essay illuminates the public's shared investment in maintaining white supremacy by underscoring its costs for not

only migrants living at the US-Mexico border, but for whites living near the border as well.

In *Own Goal Politics in the United States*, professor Keally McBride examines and unpacks the idea that merely understanding how counterproductive racial political perspectives and beliefs are in the US will not necessarily promote shifts in how people act and behave in society. Using her expertise in political thought, McBride discusses how the need for power may in fact outweigh the desire for equality and freedom. In a different essay, *Dismantling the Zero-Sum Game to Co-Create a New Community with Solidarity Dividends and No Prisons*, professor Daniela Dominguez has an optimistic approach to McGhee's work. She connects McGhee's ideas about zero-sum thinking to the prison system. Dominguez provides a thorough and hopeful analysis of how McGhee's work may support those pushing for prison abolition and liberation to understand and dismantle the ways in which carceral spaces reinforce the oppressive capitalist, racist, and colonial structures.

Professor Marthinus JC van Loggerenberg uses his unique perspective as a South African residing in the US to analyze McGhee's work in, *Reflecting on Heather McGhee's The Sum of Us through a South African Lens*. In this essay, he scrutinizes three post-Apartheid realizations as they connect to racist US structures. These include the idea of being "born free", the importance of the African concept of Ubuntu ("I am because we are"), and the value of respect in tackling racism. He furthers his argument by exploring ideas around "shared narratives, reconciliation, mutual understanding, human value and freedom as something to be strived for" especially in the context of taking apart systemic racism to support future generations. Professor Courtney Masterson analyzes McGhee's work in the business school setting. In her essay, *It's Time to Dismantle the Zero-Sum Systems in Business Schools*, Masterson highlights how business school administrators and faculty have reinforced social and economic inequality by endorsing zero-sum ideologies across the multiple levels of the organization.

Moving from South Africa to business schools to the mental health care system, the essay, *The Tension of Accessible Services and a Living Wage*, by professor Lisa De La Rue, considers how mental health care may be examined through the lens of McGhee's arguments. De La Rue contends that US society has ignored the need for, and significance of, comprehensive mental health care. Currently public perceptions often view mental health concerns as an illness or personal deficit that only impacts a tiny portion of the population. According to McGhee, when society perceives specific

individuals as weak or inferior, access and availability of services are reduced and even eliminated. As suggested by McGhee, inadequate mental health care hurts all of us, not just those who are most marginalized. In *"Traveling Up and Down": Reading The Sum of Us* by professor Kimberly Rae Connor, Connor draws strong connections between McGhee's work and *The Narrative of the Life of Sojourner Truth*. She analyzes the two works in terms of their approach to composition, the acknowledgement of diversity as a "superpower", and inspiration.

The final essay by professor James Taylor, raises many questions about the familiarity of McGhee's work as well as its reception in the public. In his powerful essay, *The Dilemma of The Sum of Us*, Taylor ponders why McGhee's work is so widely embraced and critically acclaimed when there have been many researchers and writers who have shared similar arguments before. His analysis covers works by Gunnar Myrdal among numerous others and he explores how mainstream writers often succeed through their "intellectual appeals to white liberal sentimentality".

In reading these contributions, our reactions to the book continue to shift and adapt from hopeful to cynical, from optimistic to frustrated, always wondering if the book goes far enough. It is fascinating to witness the far range of reactions this book elicits from its readers. The societal shortfalls that surround us are clearly illustrated and the arguments and evidence of the harm of structural racism are powerfully depicted. But we are still left to wonder if the collective can ever come around to McGhee's case that we are greater than the sum of us. We live in a time where hope seems naive and solutions are distant - are we capable of believing in the potential that McGhee wants us to be?