

PLACE *not* RACE

A New Vision of
Opportunity in America

Sheryll Cashin

"Place, Not Race is a courageous and deeply insightful contribution to our racial justice discourse, offering a perspective that is both desperately needed and long overdue."
—MICHELLE ALEXANDER, author of *The New Jim Crow*

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From a nationally recognized expert, a fresh and original argument for bettering affirmative action

Race-based affirmative action had been declining as a factor in university admissions even before the recent spate of related cases arrived at the Supreme Court. Since Ward Connerly kickstarted a state-by-state political mobilization against affirmative action in the mid-1990s, the percentage of four-year public colleges that consider racial or ethnic status in admissions has fallen from 60 percent to 35 percent. Only 45 percent of private colleges still explicitly consider race, with elite schools more likely to do so, although they too have retreated.

For law professor and civil rights activist Sheryll Cashin, this isn't entirely bad news, because as she argues, affirmative action as currently practiced does little to help disadvantaged people. The truly disadvantaged—black and brown children trapped in high-poverty environs—are not getting the quality schooling they need in part because backlash and wedge politics undermine any possibility for common-sense public policies. Using place instead of race in diversity programming, she writes, will better amend the structural disadvantages endured by many children of color, while enhancing the possibility that we might one day move past the racial resentment that affirmative action engenders.

In *Place, Not Race*, Cashin reimagines affirmative action and champions place-based policies, arguing that college applicants who have thrived despite exposure to neighborhood or school poverty are deserving of special consideration. Those blessed to have come of age in poverty-free havens are not. Sixty years since the historic decision, we're undoubtedly far from meeting the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*, but Cashin offers a new framework for true inclusion for the millions of children who live separate and unequal lives. Her proposals include making standardized tests optional, replacing merit-based financial aid with need-based financial aid, and recruiting high-achieving students from overlooked places, among other steps that encourage cross-racial alliances and social mobility.

A call for action toward the long overdue promise of equality, *Place, Not Race* persuasively shows how the social costs of racial preferences actually outweigh any of the marginal benefits when effective race-neutral alternatives are available.

Place, Not Race: A New Vision of Opportunity in America Details

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From Reader Review Place, Not Race: A New Vision of Opportunity in America for online ebook

Ariel says

"Feel white people's pain for a minute."

Cashin tackles the topic of affirmative action and race politics with a humor that makes it seem easy, though it is certainly not. Her proposition to replace race-centered affirmative action (though not go race-blind) with a positive application bump for those in low-wealth families, low-income neighborhoods, or poor schools, is a decidedly controversial one. Ultimately, I think she makes a compelling argument for how this would improve socioeconomic and racial diversity at institutions, as well as begin to heal the racial resentments and political partisanship on the rise in the U.S.

Diane Hernandez says

This is an important work that needs to be read and discussed. It makes a good point that it is almost racist to assume that all African-Americans need affirmative action and that no Caucasians do. I just wish that the book had suggested some metrics to operationalize the concept of using "place" (socioeconomic level) within affirmative action. The book only mentions losing standardized tests like the SAT or ACT as part of college entrance weighting in favor of using grades. However, I'm not convinced that using grades from poorly funded inner city schools is fair either.

I received this book in a Librarything giveaway but that has not impacted my review.

Clancy Coonradt says

This is a wonderfully refreshing approach to the problem of inequality. The author does a great job identifying race as a secondary concern to the issue of education, and ultimately success in life. The opinion that the environment of the youth has more impact on the success rates of less 'affluent' children than does their skin color, truly speaks to the obvious selective process of emerging from a low-income environment and gaining access to first rate public schools and colleges. This is truly an eye opening book, that should be read and recommended to anyone considering a school for their child.

Sheryl says

I won a copy of Place, Not Race by Sheryll Cashin through LibraryThing's Early Reader giveaway program in exchange for a review.

Cashin reboots the debate about affirmative action in America in the 21st century by reframing the issue of affirmative action to focus more on socioeconomic factors rather than race. The present-day conditions in the US are making race as the de facto determinate of college selection a little murkier.

The author presents cogent arguments and assembles compelling evidence about different aspects of the issue. She also blends personal anecdotes and interviews to give the data more context.

At the outset, it appeared that the author was giving more ammunition to those who are already involved in the debate. There were references to Ward Connelly, without explaining much background about him. However, this assumption was unfounded. The information in this pithy book is accessible to the general public to inform them and have them participate in the discussion about college selection and the role of affirmative action.

My concern is that even if colleges start targeting top students in under-resourced high schools, are the students still adequately prepared for the demands of college? They may be bright and motivated, but having a gap in education is a large hurdle to overcome. This question is an aspect that should be considered in college recruitment.

Overall, it is a worthwhile read and contains information that those in university leadership should digest and consider. The points would also appeal to policymakers on both sides of the aisle. It is also recommended for the general public.

Kony says

This book, though well written, hasn't altered my views on the merits and pitfalls of race-based affirmative action. But it's sharpened the questions I have. Three in particular:

- (1) It's well and good to make top-flight schools accessible and diverse, but why not more concern about the community colleges and state schools where ~95%* of students go? What about expanding upward mobility pathways that *don't* pass through the Ivy League?
- (2) It may be strategic to decouple affirmative action from arguments about anti-black racism, since such arguments can alienate non-black allies and fail to help poor whites. But what's to be done about implicit biases, which shape a person's opportunities well beyond admission to college? Implicit bias trainings can help. But we can't advocate for such measures without discussing race.
- (3) Where are the Asian Americans in this discussion??? We're a diverse group. Many of us are not highly privileged; many of us face racism and other disadvantages. Our lives and voices matter too.

The book is overall well crafted, but some parts are more engaging and persuasive than others. The author is at her best when she stops blazing through statistics and starts homing in on what happens on the ground -- in specific households, neighborhoods, schools, and admissions offices.

--

* made-up stat, but not necessarily untrue.

Kevin English says

Cashin argues that we have entered an era where coalitions and alliances can be built around place and not race. Looking at the structural disadvantages that middle and working class families face, she puts forth a critique of existing affirmative action policies and provides ways that we might move forward toward equity.

Rama says

A clear discussion of the nature of affirmative action in higher education in America.

This is a very well discussed book about the structural barriers to accessing higher opportunities in colleges and universities not only by racial minorities but also economically challenged Caucasians. The affirmative action does not necessarily mean African Americans, but it also includes other races, who were not given opportunities in a political and economic system that is rigged in favor of those who are economically well-off, says Georgetown University Law Professor Sheryll Cashin. Professor Cashin is an expert in this field and has researched and published widely in academic journals. The performance on the SAT scores mirrors family income because the system is skewed against poor people of all color. Access to a good public school depends on your neighborhood. This provides clear and unchallenged opportunities to the upper class citizens of the country.

The racial diversity is important for the nation. The armed forces are racially diverse and they put their lives online everyday so that the rest of us can have freedom and live in peace. Nobody is voicing their protest of highly visible African Americans in the Army, Navy or Air force, then why would it become a problem if they are in living our neighborhoods or in schools and colleges. Racial diversity in the society must be an inclusive policy; it should not be a reverse discrimination or denial of fairness. The author discusses many cases in states of California, Texas, Michigan and other states that are working in a fair manner. She makes some of the strongest points for acceptable social, economic and political policies that focus on inclusion.

Andrew says

This book was thought-provoking and challenged some of my own beliefs. I am interested in digging into some of the source books / articles to learn more about this particular issue.

Michael Lewyn says

In this short book, Cashin argues that race-based affirmative action in colleges and universities is inadequate for two reasons: first, the rise of the black middle class and of middle-class immigration from Africa means that race is no longer an effective proxy for social disadvantage. Second, race-based affirmative action stirs up white resentment, which in the long run impedes the development of civil rights law.

As an alternative, she proposes affirmative action based on place- that is, an attempt to recruit hard-working students from poor neighborhoods, whether they are working-class whites or working-class minorities. She suggests that students in working-class schools suffer from low expectations and economic hardship, regardless of their race.

I'm not sure she has a clear idea of how to implement this concept. She endorses Texas "Ten Percent plan"

(guaranteeing a place somewhere in the public university system for everyone in the top 10 percent of their high school class, regardless of which school they attended). But this proposal isn't really feasible for private colleges, or for individual colleges within a state university system. More plausibly, she suggests that admissions officers consider residence in some vague way, but doesn't really tell them how to ascertain whether someone grew up in a low-income area.

Socraticgadfly says

Sheryll Cashin writes a solid book on something I, and certain other liberal-minded people, have been saying for some time.

It's time to move affirmative-action programs beyond race and on to socioeconomic class instead.

She cites two main reasons:

1. A shifting, usually eroding, legal landscape for race-based affirmative action in the federal court system.
2. White "resentment," which is not always racist per se, over seeing black benefits from affirmative action.

Cashin focuses her eyes on collegiate admissions as being a good place to level the playing field.

I agree, but think she's too optimistic, not just optimistic. This will cost most colleges some serious money. With status holding flat or cutting their support to public colleges and universities, and higher education in both the public and private sector, in general, doubling down on neoliberal-driving academia as Big Business ideas, I think Cashin's a bit naive about the reality of this all happening.

And, that still leaves de facto residential segregation by class, even more than race, and its effects on K-12 schooling, all standing in place.

That said, Cashin does note the degree of class division here in the US, greater than in Europe.

Jessica says

I won my copy from Goodreads Giveaways!

Although *Place, Not Race: A New Vision of Opportunity in America* looks like a thin little book, it is deep in content and thought. Every sentence of Sheryll Cashin's is carefully crafted and thought out and must be equally digested by the reader. So forewarning readers: this is no beach reader or lazy, rainy Sunday relaxation. This is a thought provoking, heartfelt social commentary offering solutions to very real problems present in our society. About a third of the way through I began to feel like I was reading a PhD student's thesis paper and was then never able to fully relax. But I was dogged about finishing because America's education system has serious deficiencies that Cashin shines a bright light on.

As a single, child-free, professional woman of color, I was very familiar with many of the struggles Cashin cited. I was also extremely familiar with many of the prejudices that must be overcome in order to achieve educational success, and the "zero tolerance" policy there frequently is for error in today's society for people

of color's mistakes in the professional realm. And I too fought back with the same solution; you just work all the harder because no one is going to give you any slack and any success you achieve is often going to be derided as being gained through a handout. So all you can do is work harder.

I greatly admire Cashin's dogged optimism in the face of an education system that clearly "hoards opportunities" for the wealthy and well connected, and her ability to not only identify problems, but to also proffer real world progressive solutions. Many schools may point to budgets, scores, and performance reviews, but Cashin blows excuses out of the water with a pragmatic voice that refuses to take no for an answer. In her own way, she reminds me of a honey badger digging through a mound of ferocious bees (comparable to angry administrators) who would like to keep the status quo or pretend there are no problems. But Cashin knows there is sweetness to be found when people work together and although her voice can be a bit dry, if not in the realm of the academia, her points are still heartfelt and with the schoolchildren who are eager to learn and just as deserving as those born to a life of prep schools, music lessons and art programs.

I would recommend *Place, Not Race: A New Vision of Opportunity in America* to those who want to learn about a growing divide in America's elementary and high school education system. And I would especially recommend Cashin's work to those who are interested in educating themselves on education issues and continuing a dialogue of ways they can be improved.

Happy Reading!

Jordan Michaels says

I'm afraid I could not even work my way past the dry, griping, racially focused introduction. I felt offended that only the term White was used to identify Caucasian or those of European descent. While there were at least three terms to identify African Americans. I also felt a bit perplexed that Hispanics were left out, unless they are lumped in with Latinos the way Jamaicans and such are lumped in with "Blacks" or African Americans. Why do we need these identifiers anyway? Through these we segregate our great nation and make it weaker. I felt perplexed at the use of such extravagant words that slowed down the reading flow and made it choppy at best. I scanned threw the rest of the book only to realize the entire thing seems to be an attempt to make the author sound learned and she came across a little uppity and very racially oriented. I especially hated the term Race Traitor. I'm sorry, to me there is only one race. The Human race. Why can't anyone else see that?

Earl says

To say that this book is a must read for anyone concerned with the future of higher education and the role of diversity and equity in achieving any associated goals is an understatement. The key is not whether one agrees with Cashin or not but that she has taken many of the research results which are usually discussed in either a vacuum or applied to a narrow aspect of the higher education/affirmative action debates and brought them together in a coherent argument. Rather than pick apart results by ignoring (intentionally or through ignorance) the many facets of the big picture, Cashin allows the results to speak to other results and as she puts the pieces together they begin to form a much better picture than the one we currently have.

She does not simply discuss ideas as theory, though that is certainly included, as it should be, but she also

illustrates successes and failures with real examples. Additionally, and in many ways most importantly, Cashin discusses examples of policy that utilize place rather than race in varying ways as productive first steps and as evidence that using this criteria will pass the visual diversity test while also reclaiming the posited goals of helping those from disadvantaged environments. These will include students of every race and ethnic background, thus minimizing the fear that only one race is being helped.

Clearly written and argued, this would be a great read for policymakers as well as administrators and parents with an interest in both their own child's education and the future of higher education and of the country itself.

Reviewed from a copy made available by the publisher via LibraryThing.

Jennifer Collins says

Cashin makes a smart argument for re-vamping affirmative action in a way that would take into account a student's background as a whole instead of focusing on race, with particular attention to students' access to education, opportunities, and family income. This is something I'd absolutely recommend to any readers interested in socio-political concerns, education, or the state of the US. Certainly, parents of children who'll be going to college in the US should be aware of the issues discussed here and take a look at Cashin's work. On the whole, it's thought-provoking and carefully researched, and well worth the time for any reader who takes an interest.

David says

When a liberal, African American, female law professor from a prestigious university (Georgetown) writes an entire, thoughtful book AGAINST affirmative action, it's worth paying attention to. It's also a clear signal that, regardless of how the U.S. Supreme Court rules on any given lawsuit, the argument for preferences based solely on race is a losing one.

Below are the prescriptions Professor Cashin suggests in lieu of race-based affirmative action (citations in parenthesis):

Given our nation's failure to live up to Brown, we have an obligation to acknowledge and ameliorate the injustice and damage of segregation—a moral imperative more important than diversity itself. Class based affirmative action plans are insufficient to this task. Mere consideration of income differences among college applications would not adequately reflect the structure of geographic disadvantage in the United States. Reforms to the admission process should be designed to mitigate the inequality in the K-12 pipeline and to help create the social cohesion needed to improve the pipeline. (84)

In addition to an explicit use of place in any diversity calculus, I would consider a number of reforms aimed at reviving social mobility and the social contract in the United States. (85)

I would jettison the phrase affirmative action I prefer “diversity practice” because it conveys acceptance of the fact of a diverse society and the need, through daily effort, to create practices and structures that are

truly inclusive. (85)

Colleges and employers should be forthright about how and why they value diversity, what diversity means to them, and the (fair) practices they undertake to achieve it. (85)

Institutions and employers should define merit in terms that are directly tied to advancing their mission ... Universities must be willing to rethink ill defined, exclusionary concepts of “merit.” In my field of legal education, for example, among select law faculties the ability to publish theoretical articles in elite law journals is more valued than the ability to teach students how to practice law in the real world. (85) (emphasis in original)

An institution truly committed to diversity and universal access to opportunity would make the SAT and ACT optional or not use it at all. (86)

It would not give special consideration to race, ethnicity, or legacy status. (86)

All applicants would be invited to submit an optional statement on what disadvantages they have had to overcome. All forms of disadvantage would be considered, but extra weight would be given to structural disadvantages like living in a high poverty neighborhood, attending a high poverty school, or low household wealth. (86)

Admissions office staff should be expanded in order to ensure that every applicant receives careful, holistic consideration of their individual application. (86)

Financial aid should be based solely upon demonstrated financial need. (86)

If universities are unwilling to rethink conventional practices or reexamine what really counts as merit, as Professor Guinier has suggested, an experimental lottery for some of the places in an entering class would be preferable to the current certainty of class advantage. (86)
