



"I'm Not a Racist, but . . ." *The Moral Quandary of Race*. Lawrence Blum. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. 259 pp.

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In *"I'm Not a Racist, but . . .": The Moral Quandary of Race*, Blum scrutinizes the moral and ethical dimensions of the debate on the topic of race. His principal argument is that the debate has become polarized, that everything that happens in the racial arena is labeled as "racism," and that this reduces the term's power to evoke proper moral outrage. Blum sets out to clarify definitions and types of racism, the varieties of "racial ills" or symptoms of racism, the distinction between racial discrimination and color blindness, and the evolution of racial ideology in American society. He begins with a brief historical sketch of the origins of the term *racism* (pp. 3-8), then tackles the core meanings of *racism* under the categories of personal-, social-, and institutional types of racism. He postulates that all forms of racism can be related to one of two general paradigms, namely "inferiorization" and "antipathy/prejudice" (pp. 10-13), both illustrated in the opening chapters. Blum argues that the terms *racism* and *racist* have been "conceptually inflated and morally overloaded" (p.18), that racial acts are prompted by unadulterated racism in some cases, but in other cases by motives that are not necessarily racist-hence the title of the book. He dares to ask questions such as: "Why is racism a moral evil?" "Can blacks be racist?" and "Do races exist?"

Blum's success in answering these questions is arguable, but he attempts to explain how prejudice and power operate as racism, how reactive racism occurs in response to racism, and how scientific research has been misused to demonstrate the existence of races. As Blum attempts to dissect the concept of racism by enumerating "symptoms" of racism or racial ills, he experiences some conceptual difficulties (chapter 3), and he sounds apologetic in some examples when he explains that bigoted actions (such as using racial epithets, or committing a racist act) do not necessarily make a person a racist. Here, Blum's words might enflame emotions in readers, in either direction. In the concluding chapters, Blum turns his attention to broad social processes at work in the production of racialized groups and social constructions. He suggests that racialization as a process is best understood in the context of "panethnicity," grouping disparate ethnocultural groups under an umbrella identity such as "Hispanic/Latino," "Native American," and "Asian American." He argues that we would benefit from viewing ourselves and society in terms of panethnicity and collective identity, rather than in terms of racial identity. Blum concludes with the nagging question of whether



we should "give up on race" (p. 169), closing with the argument that "although achieving racial justice is an urgent goal, ridding ourselves of false and divisive racial thinking-abandoning race-is a worthy aim in its own right" (p. 177).

Blum restricts his focus to American society for the most part, and this narrows the potential value of the argument and of the book as a whole. International origins and elements of racism are given only brief treatment in the opening chapter. Blum also focuses largely on the black/white dimensions of racism, making rather sparse reference to other groups in American society. The historical overview (largely in chapters 6 and 7) interrupted the flow of Blum's argument across chapters, and would have been more useful as an introduction. His concluding thoughts on the ideal of superceding race would have been better served if juxtaposed with the obvious counterargument that we might never be able to move beyond race, that re-racialization is perhaps as likely as de-racialization.

Despite these weaknesses, Blum's overall contribution is to illustrate the complexity of defining and conceptualizing "race" and "racism." Blum addresses a familiar range of questions in the racism debate as he attempts to deconstruct "race" and "racism," to scrutinize the moral and ethical threads that demand careful thought rather than mere attention to slogans. Blum successfully demonstrates that in confronting the "moral quandary of race" there are no easy or simple answers. Consequently, the book's chief value might be as a springboard for confronting the thorny questions associated with race.

The book is likely to interest anyone interested in the history of race and racism in the United States. It would be useful for researchers as they examine their own data and experiences that pertain to the question of race in fields such as anthropology, education, sociocultural studies, multiculturalism, and American sociocultural and political history. It has modest value as a bibliographic resource but the detailed endnotes are worth attention. Because of its predominantly American focus its usefulness to international scholars would be limited to insight into the American context. For teaching, this could be a valuable supplementary text in graduate courses in anthropology, postcolonial studies, African American studies, race and race relations, and cross cultural or multicultural studies, sociology, and political philosophy. I have used the book provocatively in a doctoral level educational foundations course on postcolonialism and cultural politics: Blum's arguments evoked vehement reactions in my students (from agreement, to outrage and indignation). Overall, any researcher, teacher, or student concerned with matters of race will find Blum a valuable read, an exhortation to reflect on one's inner feelings about race and racism as well as on one's position on the issues in society at large.



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