

Kathryn Butler

Today I will be reviewing highlights from the book, *The Sum of Us*. The author, Heather McGhee, is an economist who attended Yale and UC Berkeley Law School with the goal to get in a position to change public policy. She works in think tanks that review problems with the American economy and researches solutions. This book came out of her research on racism, White supremacy, and the US economy.

Her premise is that racism hurts everyone financially and that racism is at the core of many issues this country faces. She found that many people believe that the economy is a zero-sum game, meaning that progress for Black people and POC comes only at the expense of white people...that a dollar in someone else's pocket is a dollar less in mine. This book gives examples of this thinking and it shows that the numbers don't add up.

The US has a clear class and race hierarchy, a system that creates a deep racial division. No one wants to be in the lowest tier, so instead of fostering cooperation among those groups struggling at the bottom racism fosters hate and competition. A white supremacist, one who is uneducated and unemployed with no prospects for advancement can still say with satisfaction, "At least I'm not Black."

Racism guides policy and economic decisions-- this racial divide keeps people voting against their own best interests. As recently as 2017, a Mississippi factory was voting on becoming unionized. The decision seemed to be clear because with a union, they would be able to negotiate better pay and benefits. But, when they discovered that Black people would also

receive the increased benefits, the union was voted down... So, no one gained.

One story in this book shows how racism causes everyone to lose: the story of swimming pools. In 1956, the NAACP sued the city of Baltimore to allow Black children into the public swimming pools. It won on appeal. But then what happened was that instead of sharing the pools, white adults policed the public pools using intimidation and violence to maintain segregation.

Public pools which were open only to White people, were challenged throughout the country. .and it became apparent that the word “public” did not mean “of the people” but instead meant “of white people.” Instead of complying with desegregation rulings, towns sold their pools to members-only clubs for a \$1, or simply closed the pools.

In 1959, Montgomery Alabama Parks Department had a zoo, a community center, dozens of small parks and a large swimming pool (described as the jewel in the crown.) When a federal court deemed the town’s segregated recreation facilities were unconstitutional, the Montgomery Council immediately met and eliminated the Parks Department. The community center and town parks were padlocked, and the zoo animals were sold off. The beautiful pool was filled in with dirt, and grass was planted on top. It was ten years before the Parks Department was reestablished, but they never built another pool.

McGhee covers many stories of how racism has hobbled our monetary growth as a country, and how it’s behind the crisis in healthcare, infrastructure, and so many other issues our country is seemingly unable to resolve.

The essence of this book could be:

It costs so much to stay divided, and

An injury to one is an injury to all.

Introduction

With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, there came an increased urgency to understand systemic racism. Our group came together to learn and to understand at a deeper level just what that means.

We made the group a safe place for exploration where we supported each other as we moved back and forth through various strong emotions, including some guilt, some frustration, many aha moments, recognition of white privilege, and grief.

I'm Kathryn Butler and we are the KUUF Social Justice Book Group. In our exploration of racism in its many forms, we share articles, videos, watch documentaries, but mostly we read books and talk about them, chapter by chapter... and for just over two years, we've been meeting weekly.

Today we're offering an overview of some of the books. With the exception of Heather Cox Richardson, all of the authors are Black. Due to time limitations, we will share only a tiny peek -the highlights- of some of the books we've read. Should you want to explore further, we've included a book and author list as an insert into today bulletin.