BOOK REVIEW

The Raceless Antiracist:
Why Ending Race is the Future of Antiracism

By Sheena Michele Mason
Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2024, 255 pages

In *The Raceless Antiracist,* Sheena Michele Mason, Professor of English at the State University of New York, argues cogently that "'race' doesn't exist outside of our belief in it and the practice of racialization" (70). Therefore, "ending racism will require ending the belief in what people call 'race' and the practice of assigning 'races' to the human species" (xix). The inseparable link between race and racism motivates Mason's neologism, "race/ism" (see ch. 1; e.g., 10).

I emphatically agree with Mason's general thesis: race is fiction taken as fact, and it harms all (10). She argues her case well in various ways and is rhetorically persuasive, though occasionally repetitive. Regarding her neologism "race/ism," Mason successfully demonstrates how racialization and racism perpetuate one another. Chapters 1–6 are the most compelling, outlining Mason's philosophy of race and her problems with the concept. Emerging from Mason's literary studies background, Chapters 7–10 engage key works of fiction and poetry to explore racialization. This review focuses on the former chapters.

In Chapter 1, Mason explains how racism emerges when one group assigns a racial identity to another with hopes of marginalizing or dominating them (28). However, the imprecise category of race obscures the source of and solution to sociological problems. For instance, many wrongly encode poverty as a "black" problem, thereby ignoring the non-black impoverished (34–44).

Here, I would have appreciated a more detailed analysis of racialization in America. Mason repeatedly posits that "Racialization is a stamp that *a ruling class…practices* to dehumanize and dominate other groups" (37, emphasis mine). Additionally, she links together a bundle of social pathologies: "chattel enslavement, segregation, Jim Crow, redlining, mass incarceration, massacres, the burning down of towns, prejudices in hiring practices, the loss of opportunity and income across generations" (39). Given this book's engaging eclecticism, Mason might have included a chapter demonstrating how the so-called ruling class facilitates these social pathologies to their benefit. Of course, race is also constructed, taught, and

transmitted, but her mentions of the "ruling class" and "elites" feel distant in this otherwise earthy, no-nonsense book.

Mason explains in Chapter 2 how race/ism requires that we see everyone as insiders or outsiders while compelling people to conform to stereotypes. And though race/ism is ubiquitous, "context dictates how we get racialized." In South Africa, for instance, Tyla Seethal is racialized as "colored," meaning "of multiple races," but is deemed "black" when traveling the United States (61). As the saying goes, racism is the same everywhere but not everywhere the same. In Chapter 3, Mason dismantles the biological case for race. Race does not emerge from DNA but from social construction—full stop.

Even more incisively, Mason calls for more precise language in Chapter 4. When people say *race*, they mean culture, ethnicity, social class, and/or economic class (97–98). These categories offer more specificity when discussing complex social issues that are typically reduced to race. For instance, referencing a recent newspaper headline entitled "Race Plays Big Role in Whether Kids Learn to Swim," Mason suggests that by blaming race, the article undermines possible solutions to disparate swimming attainment between people groups (98). In response, Mason offers potential socio-economic reasons why swimming attainment is deficient in "black" communities, though, strangely, Mason ignores culture as a possible reason. Regardless, her replacement of *race* with culture, ethnicity, social class, and/or economic class provides a new set of analytical tools providing more precision. Additionally, Mason offers an interesting understanding of MLK Jr.'s position on race, believing MLK desired a raceless society rather than just a colorblind one (90). If true, Mason's thesis would be all the stronger for it, but Mason does not go into detail despite mentioning how many of MLK's contemporaries understood him this way. I was eager to learn more, but was disappointed when more never came.

Chapter 5, "Twilight," blames divisions and inequality not on race but on "economic class, social class, ethnicity, culture, and race/ism," recalling Mason's desire for more precise language (102). She problematizes the concept of race as a stable, meaningful category by referring to blacks who "pass" as white. Mason imagines how a "raceless" future would consist of people, not white people and black people (106). Given the current American political landscape, Mason's work will appeal to and frustrate all, regardless of creed or affiliation. She will please conservatives bothered by identity politics with her desire to eliminate the concept of "race" and conversations around it. Nevertheless, she will frustrate those same conservatives with her constant references to "whiteness" and "white privilege" (e.g., 105). Progressives will be pleased by her references to oppression and race/ism, but Mason will likely irritate them by suggesting that a love for one's "blackness" wrongly and harmfully unites one's value to the illusion of race (15–18, 34, 114).

Mason's maverick analyses undermine long-held assumptions and unearth new issues. She dismisses the myth of police hunting down so-called blacks (124–126) and posits that "elites" perpetuate racism for selfish motives (120). She criticizes both mild stereotyping and overt racism, looking to eliminate both since both stem from racialization (115, 117). Similarly, Mason finds problems with humanists and colorblind antiracists because they still uphold race as a legitimate category, wrongly believing the category of race can be reformed or salvaged (e.g., 43, 89-91).

As evidenced by Rev. Dr. Starlette Thomas' Foreword*, The Raceless Antiracist* has much to say regarding Christianity, even if indirectly. Mason calls humanity to something more, something more akin to the Christian vision of a single human race made in the image of God. More precisely, by celebrating human dignity, Mason's approach offers some novel sociological and philosophical credence to Christian theology eager to transcend race. Mason insists that "the normative standpoint for all humans is and should be racelessness (human), not 'whiteness' or any other racialization" (103). Appealing to both the head and the heart, Mason urges people to see others and themselves as more than mere avatars of their supposed race.

Simultaneously and ironically, Mason may problematize well-intentioned Christian theology eager to celebrate Christianity's *racial* diversity. This good intention reifies racial discourse, but again, in Mason's ideal world, white people and black people, for instance, would no longer exist, only people would (106). Overall, Mason's work offers helpful language and schematizing that can aid Christian communities looking to share the universal message of hope that Christianity offers, a message that transcends the false category of race and is not confined to ethnicity, culture, or socioeconomics.

Finally, Mason's "Together Wayfinder," a framework for understanding and pursuing Mason's raceless antiracist position, offers practical steps for those looking to shape social interactions (and policy?) and eliminate race as a meaningful category. It serves well the Christian pursuit of social justice, an impulse too often believed to compete with Christianity's moral imperatives. In summary, Mason's book envisions a more fraternal world and helps us imagine what that world might look like. Mason's *The Raceless Antiracist* and "Togetherness Wayfinder" offer helpful ways that Christians and non-Christians alike can improve their social contexts by eliminating the problematic category of race that constrains and restricts all people unnecessarily.

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