

[Free pdf] Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society

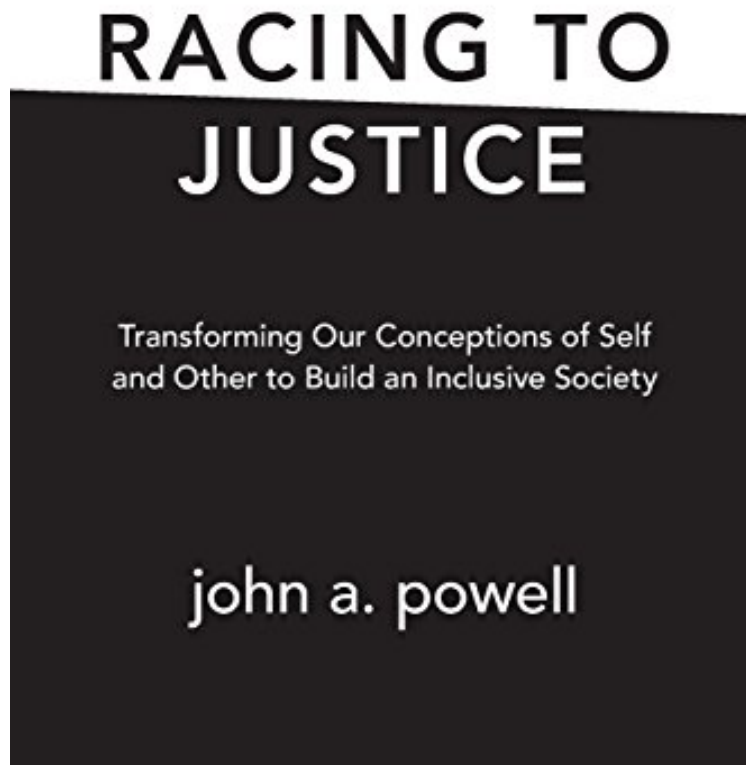
Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society

john a. powell

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"Essential reading for everyone implicated by race in America—and that means everyone."

— Deepak Bhargava, Center for Community Change



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john a. powell : Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Cutting of Edge, Nuanced, IlluminatingBy Nathan Hunt“Race operates as a verb before assuming significance as a noun” (53). Powell’s central thesis is that we have been “racing”

society, and that the verb-operation of race can and will continue even if we never talk about the noun "race." Post-racial, colorblind rhetoric does not work because it fails to undo the unconscious and systemic components of the white racial hierarchy. Race has been "raced" into our culture and only through direct and explicit engagement can a more just society be approached. In terms of policy reform, Powell advocates for "targeted universalism" (24ff). Such an approach sets universal goal of enfranchisement for all peoples while recognizing the particularities of our situatedness. Unless whiteness as the governing power structure is intentionally dismantled, Powell explains, inequitable social arrangements will continue reconstituting themselves. What is needed today, and what has been sorely lacking in racial discourse up to this point, are robust examinations of whiteness. Unless we can draw out the many layers of its totalizing character, we will continually discover that as soon as we have dismantled one structural manifestation it has shape-shifted into a fresh evil. The best example Powell provides is the distinction between North and South/pre- and post-Civil Rights forms of racism. The South's Jim Crow apartheid system was the prime target (alongside universal suffrage) of civil rights reform. This was not, however, the way whiteness had "raced" the North where segregation of metropolitan space through redlining, blockbusting and other tactics was the central tool. As Jim Crow was repealed, the Northern strategy slipped in on its heels (147ff). In the spirit of redirecting the social construction of race in America, Powell offers a slew of penetrating insights into the nature of whiteness: whiteness as anxiety and fear, as isolation, as a property interest, and even as "emptiness" because it is unconstitutable without a discriminatory relation to the non-white other. A beautiful moment of exposure comes through his use of a quote from James Baldwin, "As long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you" (150). Whiteness, as it functions in America, is not an ontological fact for anyone. Painful though it may initially be, there is hope for those who identify as "white" to discover that the implicit meanings under this term need not possess any descriptive power over us. The reconstructive fight for Powell lies at two levels: 1) rooting out our unconscious biases, and 2) transformations in our political economy. For him, this is fundamentally spiritual work for it involves both redemptive suffering and profound relational work that must be guided by love. If there is a lack, it is that his book does not dig back far enough into the substrates of Western civilization to uncover the root causes of racism. For that, I recommend Willie James Jennings's brilliant text **The Christian Imagination.** But no book can do everything, and Powell is excellent at what he does. Powell named the most difficult aspect of anti-racist work for me as a white man in a more honest and accurate way than I have ever heard: "Beyond these distortions, however, lies a more fundamental fear: self-annihilation. For in the context of this society's unwillingness to come to terms with its racial organization, to ask people to give up whiteness is to ask them to give up their sense of self. We cannot expect people to expose themselves to ontological death or worse. Instead, we must provide space--institutional space, political space, social space, and conceptual space--for the emergence of new relationships and a new way of being that exists beyond isolation and separation" (xviii). Being able to name the pain whites experience--without comparing or equating it to pain of people of color--is a healthy and constructive step toward progress, something I needed fresh permission to own. Powell helped renew my soul, deepen my resolve, and clarify my mission. Read his book and be empowered for love's public performance: justice.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Pretty amazing
By Joe Schroer
I really enjoy how Mr. Powell sets a deliberate and clear framework, which is consistent throughout the book. I thought that the connections he was making between concepts were important connections to make and for white and black to get a hold of as secularism and our new America color-blindness flourishes. He invokes a slew of important authors repeatedly, but I was most interested in the civil rights era roots of his argument for the connections between spirituality (self) and social justice (society/other). He did not ostensibly mention mindfulness as a method for cultivating social justice, but the body of work lays a seedbed for others to cultivate. In other words, the book helped me bridge a gap between my own contemplative practices and how it can strengthen my interactions with others for the purpose of social justice, and I believe it can do the same for other readers; perhaps like yourself.

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful.
A new twist on an old problem
By Inclusionist
Professor Powell's book is jammed with facts and wisdom. He combines law, sociology, history, and psychology into a well written text that shows how white privilege is unhealthy for both whites and non-whites. Anyone involved in mixed racial marriages, friendships, clients, or work place, this is an essential read. For all others, it is a must read. The origin of racism as well as numerous racial myths are discussed and why America must embrace inclusion if it wants to flourish. Larry Papier

Renowned social justice advocate John A. Powell persuasively argues that we have not achieved a post-racial society and that there is much work to do to redeem the American promise of inclusive democracy. Culled from a decade of writing about social justice and spirituality, these meditations on race, identity, and social policy provide an outline for laying claim to our shared humanity and a way toward healing ourselves and securing our future. *Racing to Justice* challenges us to replace attitudes and institutions that promote and perpetuate social suffering with those that foster relationships and a way of being that transcends disconnection and separation.

"Powell sets forth a powerful argument that at the heart of our currently unequal society lies a truncated conception of the atomized, individualized self [and] that until we expand our sense of self, we will be unable to create a racially

egalitarian and democratic society to which many progressives aspire.... Abrilliantly original and provocative challenge to the current social order." --Michael Omi, University of California, Berkeley--Michael Omi, University of California, Berkeley

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A book that will provoke readers to rethink prevailing notions of race, racial identity, and racism... [and] what prevailing law does and does not consider in tackling persistent forms of racial inequality.--Rachel D. Godsil, Seton Hall University School of Law

Infused by moral urgency, intellectual precision, sweeping command of history and of critical race theory, and an unequalled ability to situate race in concrete places, these linked essays take us into the mind of one of our greatest legal and social thinkers. They navigate tensions between law and justice with consummate skill and great passion.--David Roediger, coauthor of *The Production of Difference*

john a. powell is among the most original and important thinkers writing about politics, race and social change in America. He is a genuine genius whose work has been indispensable to thousands of activists and scholars. Finally, his critical work is gathered together in one place. If we succeed in changing in America--and we must do so--it will be in no small part because we have engaged deeply with the ideas, analysis and heart in this book. *Racing to Justice* is essential reading for everyone implicated by race in America--and that means everyone.--Deepak Bhargava, Center for Community Change

Juxtaposing race, spirituality, self, and social justice, john powell reveals the poverty in contemporary policy debates and crafts a road map for building true democratic community. Read this book and tell a friend.--Stephanie M. Wildman, Center for Social Justice and Public Service, Santa Clara University School of Law

Few scholars today explore racial (in)justice with as much depth and clarity, and with such fresh insight, as john powell. In these enlightening essays, powell challenges those of us who consider ourselves relatively evolved on issues of race and social justice to think far more critically about the basic assumptions and paradigms that frame our perspectives, animate our scholarship, and drive our advocacy. The central question he poses--"Can we stop focusing simply on transactional moves that we see as winnable and start working for the transformation of institutions that perpetuate suffering?"--is, perhaps, the most important and pressing question for racial justice advocates today.--Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

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About the Author: John A. Powell is Director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California, Berkeley, where he holds the Robert D. Haas Chancellor's Chair in Equity and Inclusion. He is author (with Gavin Kearney and Vina Kay) of *In Pursuit of a Dream Deferred*, and (with Laughlin McDonald) of *The Rights of Racial Minorities: The Basic ACLU Guide to Racial Minority Rights*.