

## **THE FAILURES OF INTEGRATION: HOW RACE AND CLASS ARE UNDERMINING THE AMERICAN DREAM**

SHERYLL CASHIN  
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*Reviewed by Joel Wichtman*

In *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream*, Cashin exposes a segregated America with respect to the real estate market. Understandably, the author's concerns pertaining to racial segregation go far beyond real estate. The underlying message is that even though people tend to say they are for integration their behaviors do not necessarily support these claims. The book is divided into three main parts: facts about the failures of integration, the cost of our failures—a separate and unequal society—and our future. Cashin sets the stage by offering information on current real estate trends highlighting the fact that Blacks have limited choices when it comes to home buying and the quality of living conditions.

Throughout the book, Cashin consistently refers to different race groups using the words Black people and White people. Cashin's use of these words to describe the groups of concern does a terrible disservice to people of color. In this day and age, we are constantly reminded of our responsibility to refer to one another with a sense of humanity. Using the words Black people/White people places an emphasis on the color of the skin and devalues who the people are. "People of color" or "people who are Black/White" would have been a better choice of words.

Through research and personal experience in metropolitan areas across the US, Cashin identifies several factors that influence people who are Blacks' achievement of the American dream. The first factor is related to comfort level. Because of the history of discrimination and the hostility against them, people who are Black consider primarily Black neighborhoods more attractive than primarily White neighborhoods. Money is another limitation keeping people who are Black from movement out of the urban areas. The cost of real estate is significantly higher in the predominantly White

suburban areas. Another limitation governing one's decision is referred to as the Black middle-class dilemma. People who are Black that have the monetary capabilities of getting out of the predominantly Black neighborhood are confronted with future uncertainty. Affluent of color people seek solitude and opportunity in White suburban neighborhoods; however, the influx of Black residents only leads to decreased property values and the fleeing of people who are White.

In addition to the pitfalls people who are Black face, Cashin offers five major assumptions about suburban life: (a) I can escape neighborhoods of poverty, particularly Black ones; (b) My children will be able to attend good public schools. They will be prepared, may be even well prepared for college; (c) My neighborhood will be free of crime; (d) My property taxes will be manageable, and I will receive better government resources at lower cost than I would in the city; (e) I will be able to buy all of the things I want and need with stores located near where I live. I will have a wide range of options for eating out near where I live.

Black families face a major problem when it comes to the purchase of real estate. They can either move to neighborhoods that are in correlation to Cashin's assumptions, thus becoming property rich and cash poor. Or they can move to areas that are more integrated, yet find a significant drop in the targeted assumptions. This problem becomes a direct result of the inability of minority families to get ahead.

Cashin acknowledges that segregation is sometimes a matter of choice. People tend to surround themselves with people who are like them socially, economically, and racially.

The author also refers to the costs of maintaining this separatist behavior taken on by the White population. These "costs" are centered on the financial expenses incurred in remaining separated from other races, particularly Blacks. Cashin illustrates her point describing White neighborhoods, armed with beautiful parks and centrally located with respect to the arts, consumerism, and reputable public schools. Cashin goes on to say that people who are White contribute to the separatists' beliefs without understanding the consequences of these actions. Not only are these ideas rooted in reality but they are presented in a manner that requires the reader to do a self-evaluation, leading to the realization that everyone is fueling the separatist fire.

Cashin presents frustration concerning the disparity in academic achievement of poor minority students. Because of the status of these schools, the students are not able to develop the skills they need to be successful in the world. This, in turn, leads to a high incidence of unemployment and widespread degradation within the neighborhoods they call home. Furthermore, Cashin believes that poor minority students are in dire need of

strong public schools in order to avoid the downward spiral this culture faces. Cashin then attempts to create an awareness of a movement in different parts of the country to level the playing field when it comes to funding public education. This comes as a result of legal action which mandates that wealthier districts share governmental funding with poorer districts. In a disheartening response to this litigation, wealthier districts are fighting these decisions, thus reaffirming the fact that wealthier districts keep getting better and poorer districts keep getting worse.

One alternative mentioned in the text referred to sending children in poor, urban areas to private/parochial schools where academic achievement increases in comparison to the neighboring public school. By receiving an education in the Catholic schools the poor are given the power to improve their situation; however, this does not come without a cost. By providing this opportunity, families subject themselves to great financial strain. Providing a Catholic school education is not cheap and therefore it often makes this alternative impossible. Furthermore, the fact that Catholic schools continue to close in urban areas stymies any chance the poor may have in putting an end to this vicious cycle.

Near the conclusion of this book the author recalls the unforgettable attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, and describes a time when the American people seemed to put aside their differences pertaining to race, and come together as a nation. The author's message is clear: "America has to get beyond fear of black people and fear of difference to begin to order itself in a way that is consistent with its ideals" (p. 332). While the intention of this message is clear and well-received it leaves the reader questioning just what those ideals have become.

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