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Rachel McCarthy
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Burke Tackles Modern Racism in Book

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Fighting against racism requires more than simply ignoring race, as Associate Professor and Chair of Sociology and Anthropology Meghan Burke explores in her new book *Colorblind Racism*, now [available in print and e-book formats](#).

In what many scholars and sociologists consider to be a “post-racial” age, Burke argues that the well-intentioned trend of “colorblindness,” or disregarding the importance of an individual’s race, does not in fact lead to racial equality. Rather, by downplaying the harmful impact that both overt and subtle racism has on racial minorities, colorblindness only masks the prejudices that are still present in America today.

“It takes an ‘anything but racism’ approach to understanding these realities—thus the colorblindness, and as such limits our ability to effectively name practices that perpetuate inequality or act to change them—thus racism,” Burke told Midwest Sociology in a [2018 interview](#).

Burke became interested in the dynamics of white identity in graduate school, particularly the ways that some white individuals make pointed efforts to downplay the significance of their whiteness, a conscious effort to distance themselves from a racial identity that has perpetuated racism for centuries.

“These were committed anti-racists, who seemingly couldn’t grapple with the realities of a white racial identity and practices that could perpetuate racism in their own lives,” she told Midwest Sociology. “I found myself thinking about how these practices might show up in spaces where there was an even more obvious influence over racial outcomes—in organizations or institutions that influence the lives of people of color and continue to confer advantages to whites.”

Drawing upon various approaches and case studies, Burke outlines how colorblindness has evolved throughout the history of racial discrimination, and to what extent systemic colorblindness is present in our everyday lives, both institutionally and throughout modern culture.



Colorblind Racism by Meghan Burke



Meghan Burke

“We must remain grounded in concrete social practices and begin our investigations there, rather than with the theories or frames that we suspect we will affirm,” Burke explained when describing her method of analyzing colorblindness and racism to Midwest Sociology. “Refusing to do so will cause us to miss key insights that can help us understand the complexity of modern racism—and it is only from that vantage point that we can consider meaningful resistance to any form of racism that expresses itself in these concrete settings.”

Burke hopes that her insights will lead to concrete solutions in changing colorblindness, and that readers, regardless of whether they find themselves practicing colorblindness, will feel a responsibility to address quiet forms of racism in their own lives.

“I firmly believe that humanizing rather than demonizing these dynamics—all while retaining a sharp critique of racism and other intersecting inequalities—best helps us to work in our spheres of influence to try to get closer to the ideal of a society where race truly does not matter for issues of access and well-being.”

Burke also analyzes a pinpointed aspect of colorblindness in “Sympathetic Racism: Color-Blind Racism’s Liberal Flair in Three Chicago Neighborhoods,” a featured article in [Challenging the Status Quo: Diversity, Democracy, and Equality in the 21st Century](#), edited by Sharon Collins and David G. Embrick.

By Rachel McCarthy '21