Should Race Matter?

Unusual Answers to the Usual Questions

In this book, philosopher David Boonin attempts to answer the moral questions raised by five important and widely contested racial practices: slave reparations, affirmative action, hate speech restrictions, hate crime laws, and racial profiling. Arguing from premises that virtually everyone on both sides of the debates over these issues already accepts, Boonin arrives at an unusual and unorthodox set of conclusions, one that is neither liberal nor conservative, color conscious nor color blind. Defended with the rigor that has characterized his previous work but written in a more widely accessible style, this provocative and important new book is sure to spark controversy and should be of interest to philosophers, legal theorists, and anyone interested in trying to resolve the debate over these important and divisive issues.

David Boonin is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Colorado. He is the author of the book *Thomas Hobbes and the Science of Moral Virtue* (1994) and the prize-winning books *A Defense of Abortion* (2002) and *The Problem of Punishment* (2008), all of which were published by Cambridge. He is also the author of a number of articles on issues in applied ethics and the co-editor of the popular applied ethics textbook *What's Wrong?* (2009).

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For my parents, my wife, and my children

Contents

Preface

Several years ago, a student suggested that our department introduce a course focusing on applied ethics issues that involve race. This struck me as a good idea. I wondered how much work would be involved if I wanted to put such a course together myself, and so I started to make a list of all of the issues I had covered, in well over a decade of teaching a variety of applied ethics courses, that were strongly connected to race. It didn't take long for me to realize that there weren't any. That's when I decided to write this book.

I decided to write this book because I wanted to be able to teach a course on applied ethics and race and because I knew that committing myself to a new book project on the subject would motivate me to do the research necessary to get such a course up and running. I began by looking into the popular and the academic literature on a number of issues that my teaching had previously ignored and ended up deciding to focus on five controversies that struck me as particularly important: the debates over slave reparations, affirmative action, hate speech restrictions, hate crime laws, and racial profiling. With the help of a teaching reduction that was funded by a course development grant from the Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement at the University of Colorado, I then began to put together a series of documents that would serve both as tentative lecture notes and as preliminary chapter drafts. Although the grant was awarded to help me develop the course and not the book, I would like to express my gratitude here for the support that the grant indirectly provided as my various ideas for the book began to take shape through the process of creating the course.

I set out to write a book that, like the course that I wanted to teach, would consider nonacademic as well as academic writings. And I hoped that, as a result, it would be of interest to both nonacademic and academic readers. Because of this, I made an attempt to solicit feedback from members of both potential audiences as I began to work on the manuscript itself. Of the nonacademic readers who gave me feedback, I would especially like to thank Irving Kagan, Dan Urist, Andy Strom, and Kurt Nordback for their detailed and often challenging comments, and Robert Astle, for helping me figure out the best way to present and

find a readership for the final product. Of the academic philosophers who commented on parts or all of the manuscript, I would like to thank Mike Huemer, Dan Korman, Hugh LaFollette, Graeme Forbes, Brad Monton, Chris Heathwood, and, especially, Eric Chwang, Michael Levin, Stephen Kershnar, and Lionel McPherson. I learned a great deal from their responses and have done my best to address them here.

My greatest debt, however, is to two sets of students whose critical feedback was indispensible in writing and revising this book. The first is the set of undergraduates who took the course once I began to offer it. Their detailed questions forced me to make countless clarifications in the way that I presented the material, and their enthusiastic contributions to class discussion gave me an opportunity to test out many of the arguments and objections that eventually made their way into the manuscript.

The second is the reading group that a number of graduate students participated in as the project was nearing its end. These students all dedicated a good part of one summer to reading the entire manuscript in detail and to meeting weekly to discuss it and to provide me with detailed questions, comments, and concerns. For all the help and encouragement that this provided, I would like to thank Cory Aragon and Barrett Emerick for organizing the group and all of their fellow participants: Michaela McSweeney, Duncan Purves, Jennifer Kling, Scott Wisor, Emma Kobil, Amber Arnold, Jason Hanna, and Amandine Catala, who also served as a research assistant on the project.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their love and support throughout my work on this project and in everything else. This book is for them.