DISCUSSION GUIDE

ZERO-SUM THEORY: Many white Americans view race as a zero-sum game: There's an us and a them, and what's good for them is bad for us. This rationale animates our public policies even today, when those who benefit from our country's drastic economic inequality sell the zero-sum story to block public support for any collective action that benefits us all, from universal healthcare to living wages.

1. Discuss Heather McGhee's definition of zero-sum theory. Why is this a harmful—and false—way of looking at race and public policy?

2. How does McGhee's background in economics influence her thinking about matters of race? How does she use this to show us a new way into, and out of, a centuries-long problem?

3. McGhee uses the example of public pools to illustrate how racism caused people to destroy something that could have benefited us all. Can you identify other "pools"—public goods that you see America going without—and how do you now think differently about the role racism might have played in this dynamic?

4. Why would laborers like the white auto workers McGhee describes refuse to unionize? How does this enhance your understanding of the "mystery" of people who vote against their own interests?

5. Let's talk about the way McGhee's metaphor of "the drained pool" has led to the student debt crisis—and how it is influencing generations of Black and white college graduates.

6. What role did racism play in the housing crisis that led to the Great Recession? How could the subprime mortgage crisis and ensuing financial collapse have been stopped?

7. McGhee writes that white people are the most segregated people in America. What are some of the costs of continuing to segregate like this? What are the benefits of integration—both culturally *and* economically?

8. McGhee coined the phrase "The Solidarity Dividend" to describe Americans reaching across racial lines to work together for the common good—and securing better lives for us all. Discuss some of the examples she shares where such solidarity has been achieved.

9. What's one thing you can do this week to work toward solidarity?

10. McGhee shares a memory of white classmates proudly stating that they are fiscally conservative and socially liberal but challenges the morality of fiscal conservatism when we can afford to eliminate poverty. Do you agree with McGhee? Why or why not? How can you best explain this concept to peers or family members who might also think of themselves as "fiscally conservative but socially liberal"?

11. What are some ways white people can work to challenge zero-sum thinking?

Praise for **THE SUM OF US**

"*The Sum of Us* is a powerhouse of a book about the deep, enduring, cross-cultural, multi-generational, and real-life cost of racist policy-making in the United States. . . . This is a book for every American, and I am grateful for McGhee's research, her humanity, and her never-more-important teachings."

—ELIZABETH GILBERT, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

"In this critical moment where we have fallen so far apart, *The Sum of Us* is a book we all need. . . . This book provides an important and necessary piece of the equation—not just how racism hurts Black people and people of color, but white people too. *The Sum of Us* is a must-read for everyone who wants to understand how we got here, but more importantly, where we can go from here—and how we get there, together."

—ALICIA GARZA, author of *The Purpose of Power* and cofounder of Black Lives Matter

"If everyone in America read this book, we'd be not only be a more just country, but a more powerful, successful, and loving one. . . . A vital, urgent, stirring, beautifully written book that offers a compassionate road map out of our present troubled moment."

—GEORGE SAUNDERS, #1 *New York Times* bestselling and Booker Prize–winning author of *Lincoln in the Bardo*

"Racism sits at the heart of America, and McGhee shows its effects on the very people who cleave to it. *The Sum of Us* removes the cloak from this land of so-called innocents and brilliantly offers a path forward for the nation. This book is for all of us standing in the breach, working toward social change. With care and unflinching honesty, McGhee has written an extraordinary book for these difficult days."

—EDDIE S. GLAUDE JR., *New York Times* bestselling author of *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*

"What would it be like to live in an America where we embraced diversity as our superpower? Heather McGhee's *The Sum of Us* challenges readers to imagine a country where we are more than the sum of our disparate parts. . . . Hopeful, inspiring, and timely, *The Sum of Us* makes the case for the radical notion that 'we the people' means all of us."

—CÉCILE RICHARDS, cofounder, Supermajority, and former president, Planned Parenthood

"Heather McGhee is one of the wisest, most penetrating, most brilliant minds to set herself to the Big Problem of American democracy: how we share this country in a way that works for all of us."

—CHRIS HAYES, *New York Times* bestselling author and Emmy Award–winning news anchor